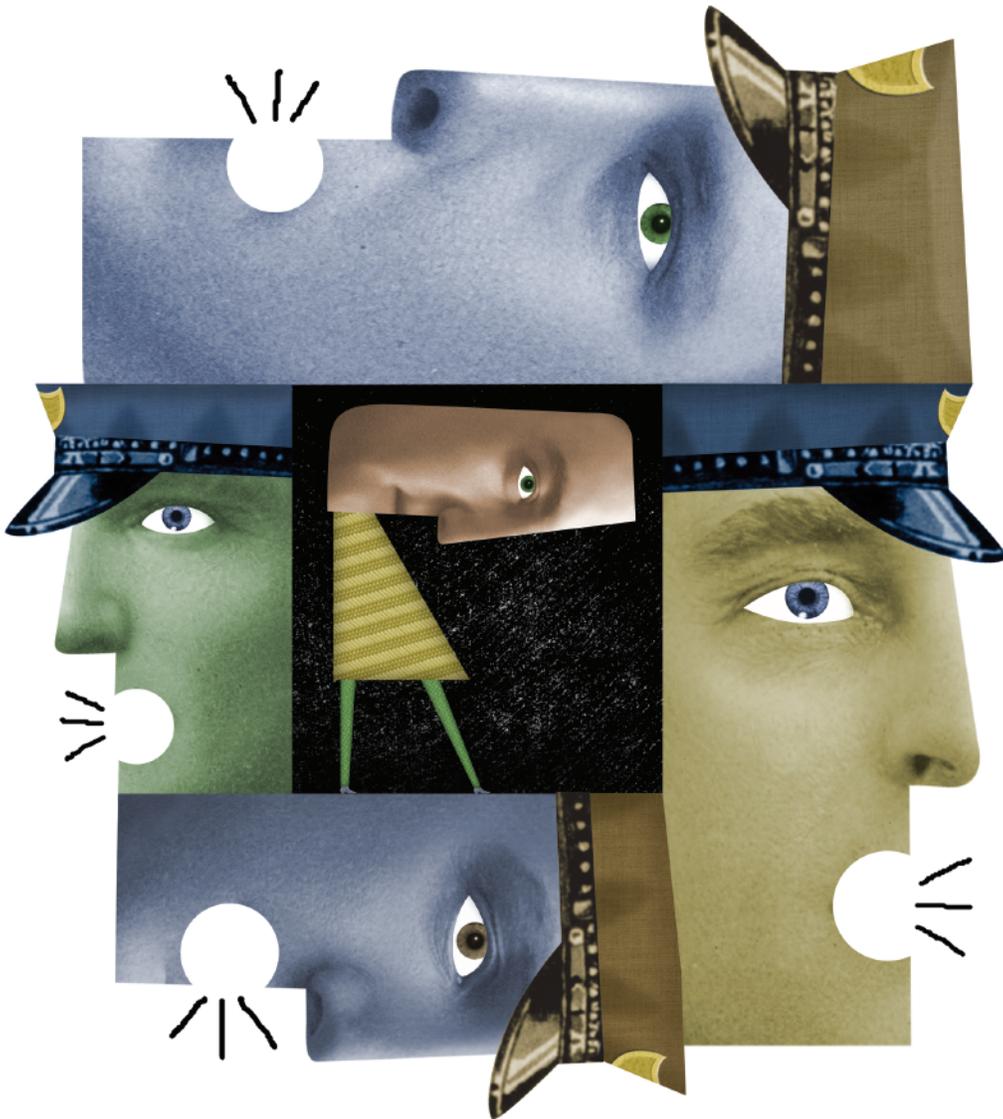


# Layers of Meaning

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND  
LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES  
IN ARIZONA



December 2005

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FOR PUBLIC POLICY  
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY



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**LAYERS OF MEANING:**  
**Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona**

Prepared for  
**Governor's Commission to Prevent Violence Against Women**  
**Arizona Department of Public Safety**  
**Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training Board**

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*Layers of Meaning: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona* is not the first study Morrison Institute for Public Policy has done on this issue. *Hitting Home: Voices of Domestic Violence*, which was conceived and led by Judy Vandegrift, was published in 1997. We remember her with this publication.

# Layers of Meaning:

## Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

# Layers of Meaning:

## Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Domestic violence is a major social problem throughout Arizona, and a major daily challenge for law enforcement officers. Every day in Arizona, domestic violence injures victims, damages property, destroys families, breeds further crime and anti-social behavior, and perpetuates itself in younger generations. Like most states, Arizona has “criminalized” domestic violence (DV) by adopting laws and policies that bolster law enforcement officers’ arrest powers and *require* them to arrest suspects under certain circumstances. Most Arizona officers recognize the seriousness of domestic violence, and agree that it is best handled by police intervention — having largely shed past “traditional” attitudes that discounted the importance of family violence. However, these street-level police officers and sheriff’s deputies also have a discouraging tale to tell: In candid comments from across the state, they report that they are skeptical of the ability of Arizona’s “pro-arrest” policy to reduce domestic violence, frustrated by a perceived lack of follow-up from prosecutors, and often at odds with victims whose predicaments they may not fully understand.

### Statewide Results

*Layers of Meaning: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona* solicited the views of active-duty officers throughout Arizona; a total of 777 patrol-level officers and other ranks completed confidential two-page questionnaires; in addition, 31 individual hour-long interviews were conducted with detectives, supervisors, and other domestic violence experts throughout the state. Results of a literature review and input from a variety of domestic violence advocates, law enforcement professionals, and criminal justice scholars were used to develop the interview questions and the survey.

The study’s major findings include:

- **Officers Consider Domestic Violence a Major Problem** — The vast majority of Arizona officers consider domestic violence to be a serious, underreported problem that generates other crime and violence and contributes to a variety of costly issues for employers, policy makers, and residents. In the survey, 80% of officers agreed that “Domestic violence is a significant problem in the community I serve.”

- **Officers View Domestic Violence as a “Real Crime”** — Nearly all officers accept the view of domestic violence as a “real crime” that warrants police intervention. Only 6% of officers agreed that “DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police.”
- **Officers Consider Arrest Alone of Limited Value in Reducing Domestic Violence** — Across the state, officers show mixed support for Arizona’s “pro-arrest” policy as being effective in reducing domestic violence. There is not a consensus among officers that arresting batterers is an effective deterrent in most cases. In the survey, 58% agreed that “Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents.”
- **Officers Often Struggle to Understand Victims’ Actions and Attitudes** — Many officers hold ambivalent views about domestic violence victims’ actions and attitudes, sympathizing with their plight yet questioning their behavior and outlooks. Many officers may not completely understand the challenges victims face. Fully 72% of officers agreed that “Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don’t,” and only 20% agreed that “Most DV victims are receptive to interventions by law enforcement.”
- **Officers Feel Too Few Cases Are Prosecuted** — Officers recognize the burdens faced by overworked prosecutors, yet voice frustration with what they perceive to be a lack of follow-up by prosecutors. Officers feel that this lessens the impact of arrest, discourages victims, emboldens batterers, and spreads cynicism among officers themselves. Only 14% agreed that “In my experience, prosecutors usually follow up effectively on DV arrests.”
- **Officers Want More Discretion in DV Cases** — Most officers want more discretion and fewer guidelines from supervisors about how to handle domestic violence calls. Only 2% agreed “I need stricter guidelines from supervisors on how to deal with DV calls;” 48% agreed with “I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls.”
- Officers are split over whether more training is needed. Approximately a third (35%) agreed that “More training would help me sort out what happens at DV scenes.”

## Good News and a Wake Up Call

These findings suggest that the years of effort to promote recognition of domestic violence as a serious criminal matter have paid off. At the same time, however, officers’ frustration seems to reflect a criminal justice system caught in a downward spiral of expectation, action, and outcome. Based on their experience with uncooperative victims and overburdened prosecutors,

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### LAYERS OF MEANING:

**“Preventing domestic violence is prevention of crime, all the way around.”**

— Female Region 4 detective

**“[Domestic violence] invades a life, and we’re finding that it’s so much more far-reaching than just the domestic violence act itself. It’s a life.”**

— Female Region 2 detective

many officers end up resigned to the conclusion that intervening at a domestic violence scene will at best protect the victim for that one night. Over time, this pessimism may further erode officers’ appreciation of victims’ needs, rendering officers less sympathetic and less meticulous in gathering the evidence necessary for effective prosecution. As a result, prosecutors reject cases they say are ill-prepared; victims lose faith in the system, and some stop calling 911.

Based on this study, officers take domestic violence seriously, and want to do their part. But they also feel caught between a number of conflicting forces and isolated in their efforts. As a result, they fear they may not be doing their best to ensure victim safety and offender accountability.

## **Next Steps Suggested by This Research**

*Layers of Meaning’s* findings — based on the experience of officers and their supervisors — suggest some vital next steps in Arizona’s efforts to reduce and prevent domestic violence.

- **Promote Domestic Violence Training for Officers.**
- **Strengthen Community Efforts to Prevent Domestic Violence.**
- **Strengthen Arizona’s Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence.**
- **Map Key Domestic Violence Decision Points.**
- **Review How Prosecution Functions as Part of the Overall System.**

Some 20 years since Arizona introduced a “pro-arrest” policy, it is a given that domestic violence is a serious crime demanding police intervention. Arizona’s police officers and sheriff’s deputies form the state’s front line in responding to and reducing domestic violence. But it is an assignment impossible to do alone. Community institutions, criminal justice institutions, residents, and policy makers have important parts to play. All Arizonans can help to ensure that “first responder” does not mean “only responder.”

# Layers of Meaning:

## Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona

Domestic violence is a major social problem throughout Arizona, and a major daily challenge for law enforcement officers. In Phoenix, for example, it ranked as the second most common call to police in 2004. Unfortunately, every day in Arizona, domestic violence injures victims, damages property, destroys families, breeds further crime and anti-social behavior, and perpetuates itself in younger generations. Like most states, Arizona has “criminalized” domestic violence (DV) by adopting laws and policies that bolster law enforcement officers’ arrest powers and *require* them to arrest suspects under certain circumstances. Most Arizona officers recognize the seriousness of domestic violence and agree that it is best handled by police intervention — having largely shed past “traditional” attitudes that discounted the importance of family violence. However, these street-level police officers and sheriff’s deputies also have a discouraging tale to tell. In candid comments from across Arizona, they report that they are skeptical of the value of Arizona’s pro-arrest policy, deeply frustrated by what they consider to be a lack of follow-up from prosecutors, and often at odds with victims whom they sometimes perceive as ungrateful and unreliable. It is difficult to imagine a more troubling message from a more authoritative source.

The on-scene officer is often the first (and perhaps only) justice system representative encountered by a victim; as such, the officer functions as a gatekeeper to the system’s services and requirements. At the same time, officers are required to:

- operate within a comprehensive set of definitive guidelines
- gather and record sufficient evidence at the scene to enable prosecution even without victim cooperation
- serve as *de facto* counselors for traumatized victims and their families

For these reasons, it is important to examine how officers feel about domestic violence, what they consider to be their appropriate roles in responding to incidents, how well they think current policies fit with the situations they encounter on the job, and how they believe policies and practices could be improved. These are issues about which differing and sometimes sharply clashing views are held by researchers, law enforcement officials, prosecutors, domestic violence advocates, victims, victims’ rights advocates, and others. It is important to note that this study does not champion any particular view or presume to identify any “right” answers. Instead, it seeks to report and analyze the experiences and opinions of a key

constituency — police officers and deputies with frontline or supervisory responsibility for domestic violence law enforcement — as a contribution to the ongoing policy debate about how to reduce and prevent domestic violence.

This project was commissioned by the Governor’s Commission to Prevent Violence Against Women, the Arizona Department of Public Safety, and the Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training Board (AZPOST) to gather insights on potential improvements in training and policies.

## Police and Domestic Violence Issues

### The National Picture

The past 30 years have witnessed dramatic changes in American society’s official attitudes towards domestic violence, and in the expectations placed upon the law enforcement officials who deal with it (see: Carlson, Worden et al. 2000; Hirschel and Dawson 2000; Robinson 2000; Miller 2001). Long considered a private family matter, since the 1970s domestic violence has been seen as a crime. Police officers — historically trained to consider domestic violence a “disturbance call” that necessitated merely the restoration of order — were now instructed to approach such calls as criminal

**Table 1: Domestic Violence Has Been Criminalized by Policy Changes**

Summary of Changes in Police Agency Approaches to Domestic Violence Over Time

Pre-Policy Change	Post-Policy Change
Domestic violence is a family matter.	Domestic violence is a crime.
Domestic violence is best handled by the parties themselves or by social service agencies.	Police agencies have a responsibility to handle domestic violence calls.
Domestic violence calls do not constitute “real” police work.	Police work includes fighting domestic violence in the community.
Mediation/separation are the preferred police methods for handling domestic violence calls.	Mediation/separation are not appropriate police responses to domestic violence.
Making arrests in cases of domestic violence is a waste of an officer’s time.	Making arrests in cases of domestic violence is part of an officer’s police duty.
Arrest is to be used only as a last resort in cases of domestic violence.	Arrest is the preferred police response in cases of domestic violence.
Arrest will increase the likelihood of future violence occurring.	Arrest will decrease the likelihood of future violence occurring.
Victims are untrustworthy and probably did something to instigate or deserve the abuse.	Statements made by victims provide sufficient probable cause for arrest.
If the victim is intoxicated, uncooperative, or probably won’t prosecute his or her case, then an arrest should not be made.	When probable cause exists, arrest should always be made, regardless of the victim’s characteristics or disposition.

Source: A. L. Robinson, “The Effect of a Domestic Policy Change on Police Officers’ Schemata,” *Criminal Justice Behavior*, 2000.

### LAYERS OF MEANING:

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA

**“Long considered a private family matter, since the 1970s domestic violence has been seen as a crime.”**

matters that required formal enforcement of the law. Since the 1980s, more and more state statutes and agency policies have directed that this enforcement include an on-scene misdemeanor arrest *without a warrant*. In 1984, for example, the U.S. Attorney General’s Task Force on Family Violence recommended that, “family violence should be recognized and responded to as a criminal activity,” and law enforcement agencies should, “establish arrest as the *preferred response* in cases of family violence.” In 1994, the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) further promoted legal interventions in cases of domestic violence, explicitly encouraging state and local governments, “to treat domestic violence as a serious violation of criminal law,” and providing federal grants to, among other things, “implement mandatory arrest or pro-arrest programs and policies in police departments” (Glazer, Glock et al. 1997).

The reasons behind this fundamental change include: 1) the women’s movement, which called attention to the prevalence of domestic violence, the inadequacy of law enforcement responses, and the plight of battered women; 2) decisions by more domestic violence victims to sue police agencies for failing to provide equal protection under the law; 3) the impact of research in the 1980s that suggested that arrest of suspected offenders would better deter them from further battering; 4) the national move towards more punitive measures in dealing with social problems such as child abuse and child support.

A great deal of research in the 1980s and 1990s studied the effectiveness of arrest, as opposed to mediation, as a deterrent to more domestic violence. The most influential efforts were known as the National Institute of Justice’s (NIJ) Spouse Assault Replication Program (SARP). The nationwide effort included field experiments by six police departments and research teams between 1981 and 1991. The first of these, in Minneapolis, found that arresting batterers reduced the rate of subsequent offenses against the same victim by half in a six-month period (Sherman and Berk 1984). Hailed as proof of the value of pro-arrest policies, the widely published findings influenced many agencies — as well as the U.S. Attorney General’s task force noted above — to adopt pro-arrest policies.

However, later replications of the Minneapolis experiment in other cities found inconsistent effects of arrest on subsequent intimate partner violence. In most cases, arrest was found to be no more effective as a deterrent than other interventions, such as mediation and counseling (Miller 2001). Researchers also urged caution in generalizing from one place to another because of the varying models and measures used across the sites. By 1998, in fact, the National Academy of Sciences report, *Violence in Families*, concluded that, “arrest in all misdemeanor cases will not on average

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### **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

produce a discernable effect on recidivism” (National Academy of Science 1998). Still further analysis of the SARP results in 2001 by NIJ and the Centers for Disease Control found, “good evidence of a consistent and direct, though modest, deterrent effect of arrest on aggression by males against their female intimate partners.” (Maxwell, Graner et al. 2001). Deterrence is an important goal of pro-arrest policies, but not the only one. Providing “just desserts” to offenders, and demonstrating to children and other witnesses that domestic violence is indeed a serious crime with serious consequences for offenders, are also common goals (Maxwell, Graner et al. 2001).

The efficacy of arrest remains a topic of some debate. As Angela M. Moore Parmley, acting chief of the Violence and Victimization Research Division of the National Institute of Justice, wrote:

Sadly, with all the money that has been invested in criminal justice to control violence against women, we know very little about the impact of these investments... We have no evidence to date that VAWA has led to a decrease in the overall levels of violence against women (Parmley 2004).

But it is safe to say that domestic violence has been criminalized in the United States in law, policy, and public opinion. As a result, research has shifted to examining how such laws and policies are being carried out, including whether:

- Police are arresting the right people. Susan Miller, author of *The Paradox of Women Arrested for Domestic Violence* (Miller 2001), and others warn that pro-arrest policies have driven up the frequency of “dual arrests” — in which the batterer and the supposed victim are both arrested — even though little evidence supports an increase in women’s culpability.
- Police are arresting enough people. NIJ reports have questioned why the rates of arrest of domestic violence suspects have not increased more than they have, given the prevalence of pro-arrest policies and the persistent ranking of domestic violence as among agencies’ most frequent violence calls.
- Suspects arrested for and even convicted of domestic violence are being held accountable. Experts and advocates alike have noted inconsistencies in follow-up from prosecutors and decisions by judges.

Thus, questions remain about how thoroughly police agencies have embraced the sweeping changes in domestic violence policy and implemented them in their everyday actions. For example, research such as the NIJ report, *Violence Against Women: Synthesis of Research for Law*

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

*Enforcement Officials* (Hirschel and Dawson 2000), indicates that some agencies have been slow to fully implement pro-arrest policies, and that some officers remain reluctant to accept criminalization, due in part to personal attitudes concerning women and domestic violence, officers' negative perception of the utility of police involvement in domestic violence cases, and their skepticism about follow-up from prosecutors and judges (Hirschel and Dawson 2000).

## **The Situation in Arizona**

Domestic violence research in Arizona has tended to parallel national studies and findings. For example, Kathleen Ferraro at Northern Arizona University

observed Phoenix police officers shortly after the start of the department's presumptive arrest policy in 1984 and found that many officers ignored the policy and failed to make arrests, due to what Ferraro termed legal, ideological, practical, and political factors (Ferraro 1989). In 1999, a telephone survey of Maricopa County women found a majority citing domestic violence as the most pressing of five issues "facing women in Arizona;" about one-third of respondents reported having witnessed abuse or experienced it at some time in their lives, and 16% acknowledged that they currently were in an abusive relationship (Wirthlin Worldwide 1999). Of those in abusive relationships, most said they had no plans to leave, due primarily to finances, beliefs they could fix the relationship, and concerns about their children. Also in 1999, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency examined Arizona law enforcement policies, practices, attitudes, and training on violence against women (National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Mesa Community College 1999). The findings most relevant to this study from focus groups with 35 officers from five agencies showed:

While some [officers] see a rise in the number of [domestic violence] calls, they do not equate this with a rise in the violence. Repeat calls are an issue for some, but, they also recognize that not being called back to an earlier scene does not mean that the violence has ended. Few know of 'success stories'... All feel that their impact is limited when victims do not cooperate... Most importantly, throughout the [focus group] sessions, they spoke to the need for coordination between agencies (National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Mesa Community College 1999: 80).

### **Arizona's Domestic Violence Statutes**

Domestic violence is not categorized as a separate crime by Arizona law (with the exception of aggravated domestic violence, which can be charged when a suspect commits multiple domestic violence crimes). Instead, the phrase refers to any of nearly two dozen crimes when committed between individuals who are or were related by "blood, marriage or household residency," or have a child in common. Arizona Revised Statutes 13-3601 cites 21 crimes as potential incidences of domestic violence, notably including endangerment, threatening or intimidating, simple or aggravated assault, custodial interference, criminal trespass, criminal damage, disorderly conduct, harassment, and stalking. The majority of domestic violence cases processed by the Arizona justice system involve misdemeanor assault, which is categorized as a minor crime that typically is punishable by a maximum of one year or less in jail. In practice, most suspects are taken to jail upon arrest and are released on bond within a day; their cases may be declined by prosecutors or later settled by plea bargains in which offenders pay fines and/or restitution and attend counseling on domestic violence issues.

The Arizona Department of Public Safety collects data on domestic violence-related arrests and dispositions. The Governor's Office for Children, Youth and Families compiles statistics from law enforcement agencies on domestic violence calls. However, Arizona lacks a comprehensive system for tracking the incidence and resolution of domestic violence offenses from the initial 911 call through the final disposition of the case.

## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

## **A Knowledge Gap About Officers**

However, in Arizona and elsewhere more research has focused on the incidence of domestic violence, the efficacy of arrest, and the experiences of victims, than on the attitudes and perceptions of law enforcement officers. Indeed, even fewer studies have sought to record officers' opinions in their own words (Johnson 2004). Those projects that have reported police attitudes and opinions have been limited by small study populations, making it difficult to draw broad conclusions. This lack of input from officers constitutes a significant research deficit, given that: 1) Changes in domestic violence laws and policies have been dramatic and widespread; 2) The changes have been codified in law and policy in a relatively short time; 3) The changes reduce discretion typically valued by police officers; and 4) The pro-arrest movement has forced significant change upon police agencies, which can be resistant to change.

National researchers have noted this knowledge gap. For example, Peter G. Sinden and B. Joyce Stephens wrote in 1999 that, "... absent from the literature are studies which analyze police descriptions of their perceptions of domestic violence events which have been obtained through extensive interviews with officers" (Sinden and Stephens 1999: 313). In 2004, Johnson reported in *The Police Journal* that the situation remained the same:

The police officer's voice on these matters has generally been absent from the literature, which has focused primarily on observational studies and official data. The literature is filled with the reasoned assumptions of researchers and observers, but little direct input from the officers themselves. It is essential that we understand how actual police officers perceive their job and its difficulties in order that we can find ways of improving their lives and their ability to respond effectively to incidents of domestic violence (Johnson 2004: 217).

This study addresses these research deficits by directly soliciting the views of a large number of active-duty officers, male and female, in urban and rural areas of Arizona and, whenever possible, using their exact words and comments. The majority of participants in the research for *Layers of Meaning: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona* were police officers and sheriff's deputies who respond to domestic violence calls. A few patrol supervisors (mostly sergeants) also took part because of their frequent role as advisors to officers at domestic violence scenes and their general role as trainers and conduits of formal and informal agency policies. A total of 777 officers completed anonymous two-page questionnaires containing 32 close-ended items, two open-ended items requesting general comments, and demographic questions (see survey in Appendix). In addition, 31 individual hour-long interviews were conducted. Surveys and interviews

**“This study addresses these research deficits by directly soliciting the views of a large number of active-duty officers, male and female, in urban and rural areas of Arizona and, whenever possible, using their exact words and comments.”**

were done in five regions as shown in Figure 1. See Appendix for more details of participation.

### **Domestic Violence in Arizona Law**

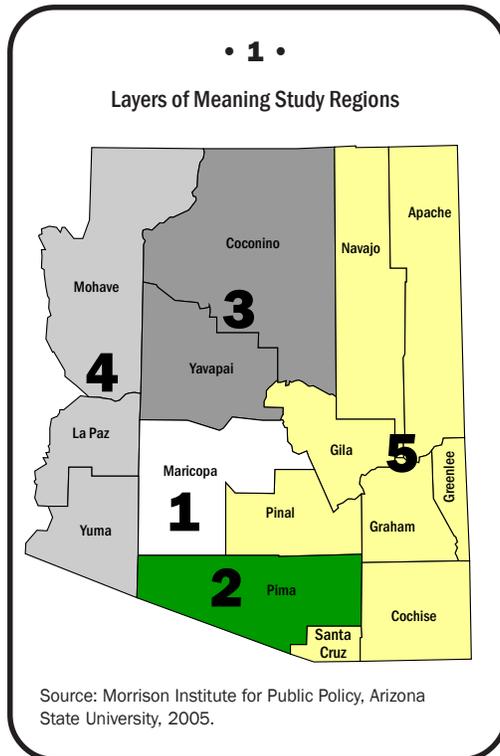
The domestic violence arrest laws that exist today in nearly all states are variously referred to as “mandatory arrest” laws, pro-arrest laws, or “presumptive arrest” laws. The Arizona Legislature created the state’s first domestic violence laws in 1980, which have been amended many times since. The key change from the past is that, under certain circumstances, officers are required to make an arrest even if their own judgment at the scene directs otherwise and even if the victim does not desire it. This is the case in Arizona. For most domestic violence-designated crimes – such as disorderly conduct or criminal damage – ARS 13-3601 holds that an officer with probable cause “*may*” make a misdemeanor or felony arrest, with or without a warrant, and with or without having witnessed the crime. However, in a case of, “infliction of physical injury or involving the discharge, use or threatening exhibition of a deadly weapon or dangerous instrument,” an Arizona peace officer “*must*” make an arrest. This provision does contain a caveat, allowing the officer to forego arrest if he or she, “has reasonable grounds to believe that the circumstances at the time are such that the victim will be protected from further injury.”

How these statutes are put into practice varies somewhat across Arizona law enforcement agencies, depending on such factors as resource and workload pressures and legal interpretations by police executives and legal advisors and by prosecutors; this is true, for example, concerning officers’ readiness to make arrests for lesser offenses such as trespass, criminal damage, and disorderly conduct. However, all agencies contacted in this study reported that they follow pro-arrest provisions concerning at least assaults and weapon displays. Most agencies also said that officers are instructed to err on the side of arrest when in doubt.

### **How Police in Arizona Become Involved in Domestic Violence Cases**

While specific response procedures vary across agencies, law enforcement intervention at domestic violence scenes usually starts with a 911 call. The call typically comes from the victim, a family member, or a neighbor.

The call is answered by an agency dispatcher, who plays a key role by determining the seriousness of the call and assigning it an appropriate priority. Calls reporting a crime in progress receive the highest priority, while those describing an assault or other crime that’s already occurred and/or whose perpetrator has left are treated less urgently. Given their perception of



## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

the dangerousness of domestic violence calls, most agencies prefer to have at least two officers respond to the scene, and may have the first arriving officer wait for backup before proceeding. After surveying the scene and interviewing participants, officers who conclude that the legal standard of “probable cause” for arrest has been met may or must (see above) arrest the suspect and immediately take him or her to jail.

Officers are usually expected to comfort the victim, arrange for medical assistance if necessary, provide victim’s rights information and alert the victim to other services such as emergency shelters and family advocacy centers. Some agencies have victims’ advocates or counselors available to respond to the scene. If officers do not find enough evidence to constitute “probable cause,” they will not make an arrest, but may still write a report on the incident for review by detectives and, perhaps, prosecutors. They might also urge the parties to separate. If a suspect flees before officers arrive — a common occurrence — the officers will send a report on the incident to the detective bureau, if the agency has one, or make efforts themselves to locate the suspect in coming days, as time permits.

### **Calls, Arrests, and Convictions for Domestic Violence in Arizona**

Estimates show approximately 110,000 domestic violence calls for service to police each year in Arizona,<sup>1</sup> and about 24,000 domestic violence arrests each year. The Phoenix Police Department may account for half of the calls. For January 2000-August 2005, the Phoenix PD reported a total of 306,206 DV calls for service, an average annual rate of 54,036.<sup>2</sup> Seventy percent of arrests for domestic violence are in Maricopa and Pima counties because of the presence of major urban areas, Greater Phoenix and Tucson (Table 2).

Table 3 shows domestic violence convictions during the same period. The results are similar to the distribution of arrests, except for Mohave, La Paz, and Yuma counties. This area (Region 4) accounts for a relatively high percentage of the state’s convictions for domestic violence (21.1%) compared to its percentage of arrests (11.4%).

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1. There is no state-wide collection of domestic violence calls to police; this estimate comes from a 2002 survey of most of Arizona’s police agencies, conducted by the Governor’s Commission to Prevent Violence Against Women. The number represents all calls. Numerous calls to 911 or police may relate to one incident.

2. Top 25 Dispatched/Callback Calls for Service for the City of Phoenix 1/1/00-8/31/05, Phoenix Police Department, Crime Analysis and Research Unit.

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### **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

#### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA**

**Table 2: The Largest Counties Have the Most Domestic Violence Arrests**

Domestic Violence Arrests in Arizona by Study Region and County, 2003-August 2005

Study Region and Counties	2003	2004	JAN - AUG 2005	Total % of DV Arrests in Arizona (2003-AUG 2005)
<b>Region 1</b>				
Maricopa	10,640	11,091	8,272	46.3%
<b>Region 2</b>				
Pima	5,870	5,493	3,789	23.4%
<b>Region 3</b>				
Coconino	754	832	581	3.3%
Yavapai	833	706	564	3.2%
subtotal:	1,587	1,538	1,145	6.5%
<b>Region 4</b>				
La Paz	111	104	38	0.4%
Mohave	1,449	1,540	883	6.0%
Yuma	1,212	1,255	806	5.1%
subtotal:	2,772	2,899	1,727	11.5%
<b>Region 5</b>				
Apache	74	68	54	0.3%
Cochise	681	723	539	3.0%
Gila	421	443	308	1.8%
Graham	123	111	62	0.5%
Greenlee	36	42	42	0.2%
Navajo	365	267	175	1.2%
Pinal	1,161	965	560	4.1%
Santa Cruz	204	166	143	0.8%
subtotal:	3,065	2,785	1,883	11.9%
Arizona Other	88	84	64	0.4%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>24,022</b>	<b>23,890</b>	<b>16,880</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Arizona Department of Public Safety.

**Table 3: Patterns for Domestic Violence Convictions Generally Follow Arrest Patterns**

Domestic Violence Convictions by Study Region and County, Arizona 2003-August 2005

Study Region and Counties	2003	2004	2005 Thru AUG	Total % of DV Convictions in Arizona (2003-AUG 2005)
<b>Region 1</b>				
Maricopa	3,835	4,147	1,763	46.5%
<b>Region 2</b>				
Pima	1,823	1,049	301	15.1%
<b>Region 3</b>				
Coconino	261	238	89	2.8%
Yavapai	353	241	118	3.4%
subtotal:	614	479	207	6.2%
<b>Region 4</b>				
La Paz	42	29	7	0.4%
Mohave	785	832	326	9.3%
Yuma	951	927	520	11.4%
subtotal:	1,778	1,788	853	21.1%
<b>Region 5</b>				
Apache	51	45	16	0.5%
Cochise	207	227	150	2.8%
Gila	132	104	65	1.4%
Graham	66	65	26	0.7%
Greenlee	12	14	2	0.1%
Navajo	132	35	8	0.8%
Pinal	425	358	134	4.4%
Santa Cruz	25	7	2	0.2%
subtotal:	1,050	855	413	11.1%
Arizona Other	1			
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9,101</b>	<b>8,318</b>	<b>3,537</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Arizona Department of Public Safety.

**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA**

# Characteristics of Survey and Interview Respondents

## Survey Respondents

Completed surveys were collected from 777 police officers serving in 24 town or city police departments and seven sheriff’s offices throughout the state. The agencies are not listed, in order to preserve the confidentiality of the respondents.

Sixty-six percent of those surveyed work in the counties containing the major metropolitan areas of Phoenix and Tucson, with the remaining 34% in non-metro, predominately rural counties. In the data presented below a distinction is made between “major urban” and other police agencies, excluding the Maricopa and Pima County Sheriff’s offices, which in part serve rural areas of their counties.

Survey respondents ranged in age from 21 to 59, with an average age of 33.9 years. They had worked in law enforcement for periods from a few months to 37 years, with an average length of service of 8.5 years. According to data from Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training Board (AZPOST), frontline officers from all of the city and county police departments and sheriff’s offices in the state averaged 36 years of age and had an average service time of 8.5 years.<sup>3</sup> Survey respondents included line (patrol-level) officers (82%), sergeants (12%), with “other” (6%) comprising ranks that included lieutenants, corporals, and field training officers. Respondents were primarily male (89%), reflecting the composition of city and town police departments and sheriff’s offices in Arizona. AZPOST reports 88% of Arizona line officers are male. Nearly three-quarters of respondents were non-Hispanic white, with the remaining quarter comprised of other racial and ethnic groups, mainly Hispanics. In this report, findings are analyzed by white and non-white categories. AZPOST does not provide racial and ethnic data on Arizona police officers.

All respondents had some experience responding to domestic violence calls, except for one officer who had recently joined law enforcement, although this person had received police academy training. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of domestic violence calls they had been to in the last

**Table 4: Officers from Throughout Arizona Provided Data for the Study**  
Distribution of Survey Responses by Study Region

Regions	Number	Percent
1 Central (Maricopa)	409	52.6%
2 Southern (Pima)	104	13.4%
3 Northern (Coconino/Yavapai)	100	12.9%
4 Western (La Paz/Mohave/Yuma)	73	9.4%
5 Eastern (Apache/Cochise/ Gila/Graham/ Greenlee/Navajo/Pinal/Santa Cruz)	91	11.7%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>777</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2005.

3. Average age and service time were computed from the AZPOST database of sworn officers that included agency, gender, date of birth, and hire date.

**Table 5: Calls Vary Widely Across Arizona**

Average Number of Domestic Violence Calls Responded to by Selected Variables

Characteristics	Average Number Of Calls
Male	84.5
Female	117.3
Officer	96.4
Sergeant	54.2
Other	56.2
1 Central (Maricopa)	105.8
2 Southern (Pima)	96.7
3 Northern (Coconino/Yavapai)	70.7
4 Western (La Paz/Mohave/Yuma)	67.8
5 Eastern (Apache/Cochise/ Gila/Graham/ Greenlee/Navajo/Pinal/Santa Cruz)	41.3
Major Urban Areas	103.4
Non-urban Areas	58.9

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2005.

year. Responses ranged widely from 0 to (a highly unlikely) 3,000 with an average of 115.5. Table 5 shows the self-reported average<sup>4</sup> number of calls responded to in the last year by selected characteristics.

On average, female officers reported responding to a much higher number of domestic violence calls than males, and line officers responded to more calls than either sergeants or other ranks. Calls varied by region, with officers in major urban areas reporting a much higher number of responses than those in non-urban areas.

Respondents were asked to indicate how long ago their last training was on domestic violence and how many domestic violence trainings they had ever attended in Arizona. Respondents reported a range from 0 months (never trained, or trained only at the mandatory police academy, and not since) to 23 years since their last domestic violence training, with an average of just over two years. Similarly, respondents reported a broad range of domestic violence trainings attended, from 0 to 200 with an average of 3.6. The number of trainings attended are grouped into three roughly equal categories: Low (0 or 1), Medium (2 or 3), and High (4 or more).

**Table 6: Interviews Were Done Throughout Arizona**

Distribution of Interviews by Study Region

Study Regions	Number of Interviews
1 Central (Maricopa)	9
2 Southern (Pima)	9
3 Northern (Coconino/Yavapai)	3
4 Western (La Paz/Mohave/Yuma)	6
5 Eastern (Apache/Cochise/ Gila/Graham/ Greenlee/Navajo/Pinal/Santa Cruz)	4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>31</b>

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2005.

### Characteristics of Interviewees

Of the 31 interviews 20 were with men and 11 with women. Table 6 shows their distribution by study region.

The confidential interviews were conducted with detectives specializing in domestic violence (11), sergeants (5), lieutenants (4), shelter staff (4), prosecutors (2), and a chief of police, a deputy chief of police, an assistant chief of police, a sheriff’s office captain, and a lead patrol officer. When extracts from interviews are used, individuals are identified only in general terms to safeguard anonymity. In this report only survey findings and interview excerpts from police officers are included, although comments and opinions from several prosecutors and domestic violence shelter staff have informed the interpretation of findings. Comments from supervisor interview are shown in what follows in italics. Written comments from survey respondents are shown in regular type.

4. Table 6 excludes self-reported estimates of calls responded to that were too high to be likely, i.e., 1,000 or more. These results are known as “trimmed averages.”

## LAYERS OF MEANING:

### **Domestic Violence: Highlights from History**

- 1972:** One of the country's first battered women's shelters, Rainbow Retreat, opens in Phoenix.
- 1978:** The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) created.
- 1980:** Arizona legislature passes first domestic violence bill. Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence is founded.
- 1984:** Publication of the *Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment* generates national momentum in favor of arresting offenders.
- 1984:** The U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence recommends that family violence be treated as a crime and that law enforcement agencies should make arrests in such cases. Congress passes the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA). Phoenix Police Department adopts policy stating officers should arrest offenders even if victims object to prosecution, and when probable cause exists that officers should arrest even if a misdemeanor offense did not occur in their presence.
- 1985:** Surgeon General identifies domestic violence as a major public health concern.
- 1994:** Congress passes the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) into law.
- 1995:** Office of Violence Against Women created within the U.S. Department of Justice.
- 1997:** Arizona Legislature creates the Domestic Violence Shelter Fund, a dedicated fund source for shelter services in the state.
- 2000:** Congress reauthorizes the Violence Against Women Act, adding the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.
- 2004:** Governor's Commission to Prevent Violence Against Women releases *The State Plan on Domestic and Sexual Violence: A Guide for Safety and Justice*.
- 2005:** Arizona Legislature eliminates law providing lesser penalties for sexual assault of a spouse than for sexual assault of a stranger.

Sources: Ferraro 1989; Governor's Commission to Prevent Violence Against Women 2004.

### **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

# Findings

**“Preventing domestic violence is prevention of crime, all the way around.”**

— Female Region 4 detective

**“[Domestic violence] invades a life, and we’re finding that it’s so much more far-reaching than just the domestic violence act itself. It’s a life.”**

— Female Region 2 detective

## Characteristics of the Data

Morrison Institute for Public Policy’s interest in and research on domestic violence started with *Hitting Home: Voices of Domestic Violence*. This publication told stories of victims and others involved in the issue. *Layers of Meaning: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona* follows up with the voices of law enforcement officers and an in-depth, statewide exploration of their outlooks.

The results presented here probably form the most comprehensive dataset collected on the issue of police attitudes to domestic violence in Arizona because of: 1) the size and scope of the data collected; and 2) the use of both quantitative and qualitative sources.

Taking a cue from criticisms of the existing literature on police attitudes to domestic violence, the study was designed to hear directly from officers from all parts of the state, from the largest police departments to some of the smallest. The result is a rich dataset which is representative of frontline police officers statewide by gender, geography, years in law enforcement, and age. This information expresses the depth and diversity of police opinion in Arizona.

With input from the study’s clients, other local experts in domestic violence issues, and the extensive literature, survey responses were gathered across a wide range of domestic violence topics, including attitudes toward domestic violence arrests, attitudes toward victims and offenders, police role in domestic violence incidents, views about what causes domestic violence, and opinions about response by the criminal justice system as a whole (see Appendix for survey instrument).

The completed surveys included background and demographic information about the respondents’ gender, ethnicity, age, years in law enforcement, experience of domestic violence calls, and attendance at domestic violence trainings. It also included an open-ended question on what would help officers in dealing with domestic violence and included a space for other comments. All comments were coded using the same scheme used to code the 31 transcribed interviews. The result was a dataset comprising 777 observations across almost 100 variables, 31 fully transcribed interviews, and 600 written survey comments, comprising almost 1,000 pages coded across nearly 100 topics (see Appendix for methodology).

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### LAYERS OF MEANING:

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA

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## Survey Responses

Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with statements about domestic violence on a 5-point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” For the sake of exposition, in the summary table (Table 7) and in most graphics throughout, the category “strongly agree” and “agree” are combined into a single “agree” category and “strongly disagree” and “disagree” are combined into a single “disagree” category. In selected cases, the full 5-point scale results are shown. The “neither agree nor disagree” category is open to a number of interpretations: respondents may have meant they had no opinion, they didn’t know, or that they were undecided. In several instances respondents wrote next to this option, phrases such as “Every case different” or “Depends,” indicating it was sometimes difficult to come to a general view.

Results of the full 5-point scale for each statement are provided in the Appendix (and in selected results reported below); it should be noted that the full results were used as the basis for statistical tests of significance among a series of demographic and other variables (see Appendix for details). Table 7 shows respondents’ overall level of agreement for each of the 32 statements in the order they occurred in the survey. The *Layers of Meaning* findings that follow are grouped under six major themes:

- Officers Consider Domestic Violence a Major Problem
- Officers View Domestic Violence as a “Real Crime”
- Officers Consider Arrest Alone of Limited Value in Reducing Domestic Violence
- Officers Often Struggle to Understand Victims’ Actions and Attitudes
- Officers Feel Too Few Cases Are Prosecuted
- Officers Want More Discretion in DV Cases

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### LAYERS OF MEANING:

**Table 7: Diverse Views Are Held by Officers Across a Wide Range of Domestic Violence Issues**

Summary of Survey Responses by Three-point Scale

Survey Statement	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree
I am more likely to be injured during a DV call than in a violence call involving strangers.	68.7%	26.6%	4.8%
Too many DV calls are for only verbal family arguments.	66.7%	22.3%	11.0%
I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls.	48.4%	30.0%	21.6%
It's often best to arrest both parties in DV calls.	11.6%	34.5%	53.9%
Substance abuse by the victim is a primary cause of DV.	32.2%	30.9%	37.0%
Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents.	58.1%	18.4%	23.5%
Police should arrest in DV cases only when there is clear evidence of injury.	41.6%	17.2%	41.2%
DV calls take too much of officers' time and effort.	29.7%	28.0%	42.3%
DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police.	6.1%	16.3%	77.6%
In my experience, prosecutors usually follow up effectively on DV arrests.	14.4%	31.2%	54.4%
DV victims are often as responsible for the incident as the person arrested.	36.3%	35.1%	28.6%
It's often hard to know who to arrest in DV incidents.	26.6%	27.2%	46.2%
I am less likely to make a DV arrest if the suspect is cooperative at the scene.	6.9%	19.4%	73.7%
An arrest policy is the best approach to DV calls.	31.6%	31.8%	36.6%
Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't.	71.8%	14.6%	13.6%
Most DV incidents occur because of offenders' anger-control problems.	59.6%	27.7%	12.7%
A major problem with DV is that there are so many repeat cases.	87.3%	9.4%	3.2%
Substance abuse by the suspect is a primary cause of DV.	58.3%	30.2%	11.6%
Most DV calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships.	6.5%	25.1%	68.4%
I need stricter guidelines from supervisors on how to deal with DV calls.	2.1%	17.1%	80.8%
I am more likely to make DV arrests when children are witnesses.	24.0%	42.3%	33.7%
There should be a limit on how many times I respond to DV calls from the same victim at the same address.	22.4%	17.9%	59.8%
I think DV offenders should be arrested even when victims don't want it.	71.9%	12.1%	16.0%
More training would help me sort out what happens at DV scenes.	35.4%	29.7%	34.9%
I find it's often hard to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases.	11.9%	22.9%	65.2%
DV victims often exaggerate the amount of violence involved.	40.5%	34.5%	25.0%
Most DV incidents stem from abusers' need for power and control over victims.	55.3%	38.3%	6.5%
Mental health problems are a major contributor to DV incidents.	19.3%	52.1%	28.6%
Most DV victims are receptive to interventions by law enforcement.	19.9%	29.9%	50.3%
I am more likely to make an arrest if the victim is cooperative at the scene.	19.4%	38.2%	42.4%
Most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship.	62.9%	21.0%	16.1%
DV is a significant problem in the community I serve.	80.4%	14.4%	5.2%

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2005.

**LAYERS OF MEANING:****DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA**

## Officers Consider Domestic Violence a Major Problem

### “High-volume” and “Resource Heavy” for Law Enforcement

Among the strongest and most consistent findings in the study is the importance that Arizona officers place on domestic violence as a social problem. A majority of Arizona officers, both line and supervisory, say they consider domestic violence to be a serious issue in their communities, requiring a substantial amount of agency resources.

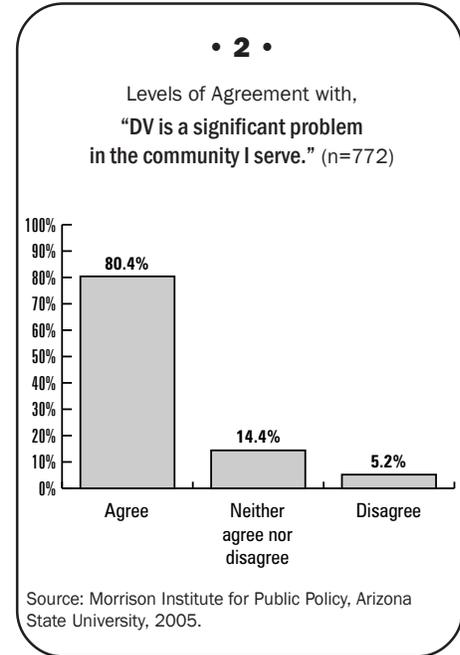
Among survey respondents, 80.4% agreed that domestic violence, “is a significant problem in the community I serve” (Figure 2). While a large majority of respondents of both sexes agreed, women were more likely to agree than men (91% compared to 79%).

Nationally, some researchers and advocates have faulted police agencies for devoting insufficient attention and resources to domestic violence, due to competition from felony crimes, resistance from officers who believe domestic violence is primarily a private matter, or other reasons. While that competition and those attitudes surely exist in Arizona, this survey shows that most officers at least acknowledge the negative impact that domestic violence is having on their communities.

Most of the supervisors interviewed cited domestic violence as their agency’s most common call for service, or most frequent violence call. They also described it as a resource-heavy task, because many agencies regularly dispatch more than one officer to these scenes, and require on-scene evidence gathering that can be time consuming. A male lieutenant in Region 1 commented, *“I would say it’s probably number one [among his community’s law enforcement problems]...Of 15 homicides last year, we were able to find that eight of them were domestic violence related.”* A male sergeant in Region 1 said, *“It’s a situation that we deal with every day.”*

Similar responses came from supervisors in other regions. A male lieutenant in Region 5, for example, said, *“I’m going to say that if we’re responding to some type of fight, probably 80% of the time it’s going to be a DV.”* And a male sergeant in Region 4 noted *“It’s not unusual for just on a day shift to have two or three [domestic violence calls] a day. And in the evening, people are home and things happen.”* Finally, as a male Region 2 detective put it: *“Right now, I think DV is probably the hotbed number one crime in this country.”*

The seriousness with which Arizona officers view domestic violence is similar to that of metropolitan Phoenix residents. In May 2005, as a companion to this study, a telephone survey was administered to 600 heads of households by Behavior Research Center in Maricopa County to explore public attitudes



**“The seriousness with which Arizona officers view domestic violence is similar to that of metropolitan Phoenix residents.”**

### LAYERS OF MEANING:

**“Because of all the issues within a family, [domestic violence incidents] can generate all other kinds of crimes.”**

— Female Region 4 detective

**“My sons and daughters who want to become police officers are going to be dealing with the same family, perhaps, 20 years from now.”**

— Male Region 1 detective

toward domestic violence. Commissioned by Morrison Institute for Public Policy and Maricopa Association of Governments, the survey found that a large majority of residents (76%) have heard “a lot” or “some” about domestic violence in Arizona and consider it a “major” problem (72%); that 40% report that they or someone close to them has been a victim; and that the vast majority (89%) support the notion that, “arresting offenders for domestic violence is usually a good policy.” The public’s acceptance of police as appropriate first responders is shown by the 78% who report they would call 911 if someone close to them was in a situation of, “aggressive behavior between intimate partners that threatens or causes physical injury or property damage.” In addition, 34% would call 911 if someone close to them was in a situation of, “verbal, psychological, and/or financial abuse between intimate partners through which one seeks domination and control over the other.”

### **Police Warn of the “Ripple Effect” of Domestic Violence**

A point raised by many supervisors is the role of domestic violence in generating more crime, violence, and other anti-social behavior. They said that domestic violence is linked to child abuse, animal abuse, substance abuse and other crimes within and outside the family. A female detective in Region 4 said:

*Because of all the issues within a family, [domestic violence incidents] can generate all other kinds of crimes. If we address issues of domestic violence, we’re going to compensate down the road [for] other violence crimes. You have people that are in . . . prisons, they’re in jails, juvenile [detention], and often times those [crimes] come back to . . . family issues . . . Preventing domestic violence is prevention of crime, all the way around.*

A female detective in Region 2 described the collateral effects of domestic violence that go beyond the criminal issues.

*[Domestic violence] affects . . . a victim’s interaction in the rest of her life. She might have to be absent from work a lot because of injuries or because she gets so many harassing telephone calls at work [that] she has to leave. She gets fired; she gets kicked out of her apartment. It invades a life, and we’re finding that it’s so much more far-reaching than just the domestic violence act itself. It’s a life.*

In addition, supervisors said, they recognize the potential of domestic violence to breed future crime and violence within families, because they consider children who witness domestic violence more likely to become criminally involved themselves. A male detective in Region 1 said:

*It’s just the ripple effect of DV. It causes so many problems down the road [for] the children that see this. My sons and daughters who want to become police officers are going to be dealing with the same family, perhaps, 20 years from now.*

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## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

Finally, several supervisors expressed concern that even the high volume of domestic violence cases they deal with represents only a fraction of actual incidents. A male detective from a different Region 1 agency said: *“I think there’s probably a phenomenal amount of domestic violence that goes unreported.”*

At least one agency has taken these concerns a step further by charging some adults involved in domestic violence with the additional crime of contributing to delinquency of a minor. A female Region 2 detective said:

*We tell our officers... that [domestic violence is] having an effect upon [children, and] that if you don’t reach these kids, these are going to be future offenders...” We started looking at the laws and the research that was coming out on domestic violence and children [and found] they’re habitually lower performers in school, that they habitually have drug and alcohol problems...*

**“[Domestic violence] affects...a victim’s interaction in the rest of her life. She might have to be absent from work a lot because of injuries or because she gets so many harassing telephone calls at work [that] she has to leave. She gets fired; she gets kicked out of her apartment. It invades a life, and we’re finding that it’s so much more far-reaching than just the domestic violence act itself. It’s a life.”**

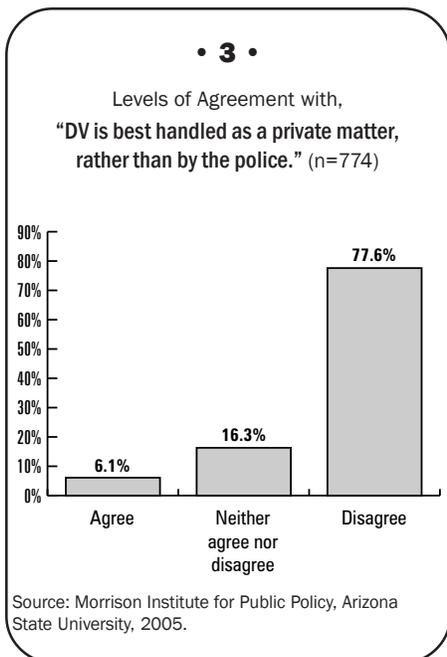
— Female Region 2 detective

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

“We started looking at the laws and the research that was coming out on domestic violence and children [and found] they’re habitually lower performers in school, that they habitually have drug and alcohol problems...”

— Female Region 2 detective



## Officers View Domestic Violence as a “Real Crime”

### Domestic Violence Warrants Law Enforcement Intervention

Most Arizona law enforcement officers agree with the “criminalization” of domestic violence, according to both survey responses and interviews. Nearly eight out of 10 survey respondents *disagreed* with the statement, “DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police” (Figure 3).

This outlook contrasts with the “traditional” police approach that advocates and researchers had long identified as a major obstacle to improved social responses to domestic violence. That approach categorized most incidents of domestic violence as “nuisance calls” that family members could — and should — resolve in private. Changing this attitude has been a key objective of the decades-long national campaign for pro-arrest statutes and policies. In Arizona, that effort seems to have been successful. Virtually all supervisors who have worked in law enforcement long enough to witness this evolution readily acknowledged the marked change in how their and other agencies respond to domestic violence calls now compared to 15-20 years ago.

A male supervisor in Region 4 said:

*Oh, [it’s been] just an amazing change ... When I first got in this job, it was separate them, make sure everybody’s happy and gone their separate way, and you moved on. And in lots of instances even where there was obvious assault or obvious criminal activity, it was [something] for your family to handle. I’ll come in here and keep you from punching on each other, but you people need to ... fix your family ... And then in the ‘90s, the laws came along that said you don’t have a choice as a police officer. ...*

A male Region 5 supervisor said:

*We used to do temporary divorces ... [telling the two parties] ‘You put your hand on my badge, and you put your hand on my badge, and you’re divorced for the night. You go here and you go there,’ and no arrests were made. Very informal stuff, just so that really people didn’t go to jail.*

A male Region 1 sergeant said:

*As a new officer, I would go to a family fight where you could substantiate that there was in fact a victim there that had been assaulted ... And our course of action was pretty much based on what the victim wanted to do. And if they didn’t want to prosecute, which years ago was pretty standard ... we couldn’t make an arrest.*

“Traditional” attitudes may have greatly diminished among Arizona law enforcement, but a small minority (6.1%) still *agreed* that domestic violence, “... is best handled as a private matter.” One of these wrote: “If there is any

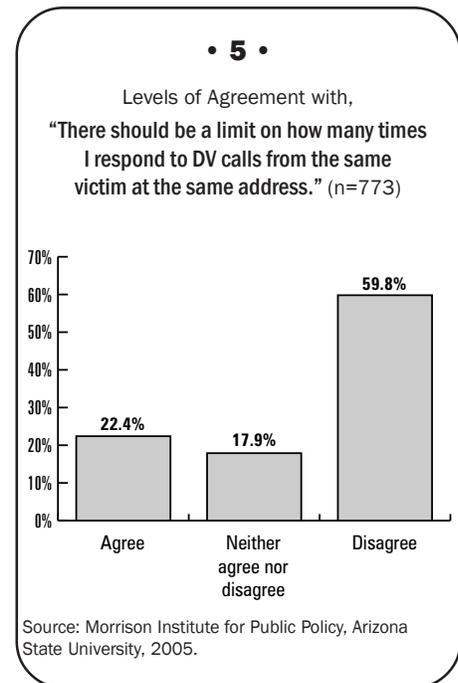
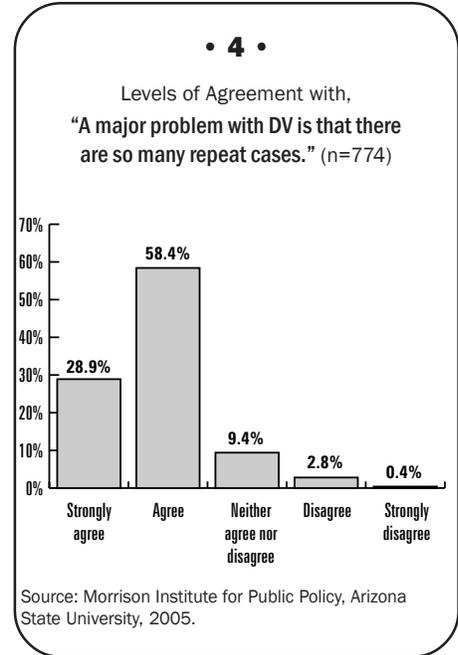
## LAYERS OF MEANING:

one type of call that would make me leave patrol, it's domestic violence. Domestic violence is a civil matter and is not worthy of police response." And not even the most positive attitudes about intervention can prevent the frustration officers feel over having to return to the same addresses time after time. Fully nine out of 10 respondents – the highest rate in the entire survey – agreed that, "A major problem with DV is that there are so many repeat cases" (Figure 4). Nearly three out of 10 strongly agreed with the statement. Still, most officers also acknowledged their moral as well as legal duty to keep showing up when called. For example, a majority (59.8%) disagreed that, "There should be a limit on how many times I respond to DV calls from the same victim at the same address." But with over one in five agreeing, a warning is clear about frustration (Figure 5).

Officers say the frustration of repeatedly dealing with the same individuals is heightened by their widespread conviction that these interventions – even including arrest – will change little in the long run. Officers overwhelmingly said – as one put it – "we cannot do it alone;" that they cannot deal successfully with Arizona's domestic violence problems without support and follow through from the rest of the criminal justice system, from social-service providers, and from victims themselves. The policy of criminalization has generated more arrests, officers say, but has been much less successful in providing safety and support to victims and accountability to offenders. The survey responses thus raise questions about how to make good on the entire promise of criminalization, beyond arrests.

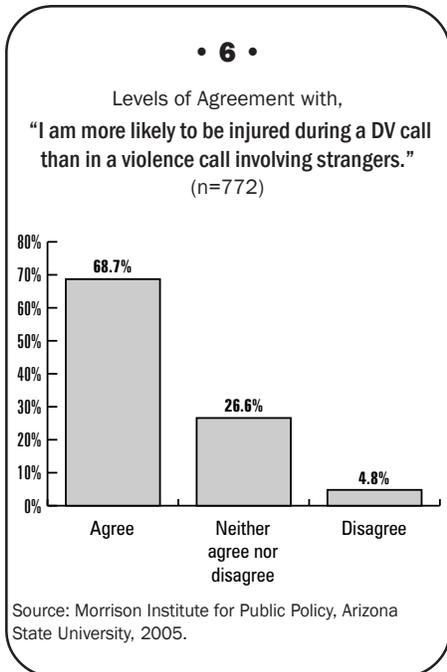
**Never Routine, Considered More Dangerous**

Officers consider domestic violence calls to be particularly hazardous assignments. A combined 68.7% of survey respondents agreed with the statement, "I am more likely to be injured during a DV call than in a violence call involving strangers." And while just over a quarter (26.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed; only 4.8% disagreed (Figure 6). This perception differs from the findings of national studies, in which researchers have concluded that domestic violence calls do *not* necessarily pose a higher risk to officers than public violence calls. Nevertheless, domestic violence incidents do account for a considerable number of officer injuries, not least because of the sheer volume of cases (Buzawa and Buzawa 2003: 80-81).<sup>5</sup>



5. In Arizona data are not currently available to research this perception.

**LAYERS OF MEANING:**



**“The domestic violence call is your most dangerous because there are so many unknowns.”**

— Male Region 2 detective

Supervisors worry about domestic violence’s threat to officers. A male detective in Region 2 described domestic violence calls as, “... *the number one priority in dangerousness.*”

*It’s just a hot-bed for emotions. When the deputies respond, they don’t know what they’re getting into. There can never be a routine DV call. And you never know how your victim’s going to react. And you don’t know what you’re facing.*

Several supervisors commented on the volatility of a situation in which a victim is suddenly faced with a partner – often the breadwinner – being arrested and taken to jail. As a male Region 4 supervisor put it:

*You go into a domestic violence call and all the wife wanted you to do was to stop the argument. The law says you take this person into custody and the next thing you know you’re being assaulted by the other half. So, they are more dangerous.*

A woman supervisor in Region 2 expressed a similar view:

*One of the things we’ve seen is the victim actually turns on the officer. They’ve called us for assistance, they want our assistance, but when we get there and start intervening, we do the investigation, we find out he’s going to jail or she’s going to jail, then they realize what’s going to happen to the kids ... there’s my income, and so they’ll turn on us, on the officers who are trying to assist them.*

One male supervisor in Region 2 considered public knowledge of the pro-arrest policy as itself adding to the danger:

*Once the public knows that if the police respond that somebody’s going to be arrested, then there is the anticipation that somebody’s going to be arrested. If they don’t want to be arrested, then the violence increases.*

In part, the sense of danger arises from the very fact of entering into the domestic realm. A sergeant in Region 4 described it as, “*You’re going into the lair, into the home. The dispatcher is saying ‘there’s no weapons,’ well, every house has drawers full of butcher knives, rolling pins, frying pans, and that’s just in the kitchen.*”

In addition, the duality of the first responder’s role as both law enforcer and counselor can produce its own tension. A male detective in Region 2 explained the uncertainty from the officer’s point of view:

*The domestic violence call is your most dangerous because there are so many unknowns. [In] an armed robbery call you ... go right into condition red and you remain there. [With] domestic violence, you can’t go into a condition red as readily because you still have to look out for the victim, as far as being able to communicate with them using your interpersonal skills, showing a little empathy and sympathy. ... But all of a sudden that whole situation can turn around on you, [and] this individual that you are speaking with that’s a victim may come after you ... It becomes a very volatile situation and it can go from zero to a hundred in an instant.*

## LAYERS OF MEANING:

**Opinions about the Strain on Police Resources Also Reflect Frustration**

Officers differed over whether domestic violence calls take too heavy a toll on agency resources, with 10.5% strongly agreeing and 19.2% agreeing that “DV calls take too much of officers’ time and effort.” Roughly a third said yes, approximately 42% said no, and 28% neither agreed nor disagreed (Figure 7).

These differences point to a debate in progress: On the one hand, officers know they must respond to domestic violence scenes and agree that they should; on the other hand, many regret the time and effort these encounters consume and, as shown in other questions, are pessimistic about the likely effects of intervention in preventing future incidences.

Concerns about workload might be expected on any issue. But the fact that so many officers agree is particularly relevant here, given that most Arizona agencies require first responding officers to gather sufficient evidence at domestic violence scenes so that prosecution will be possible even if the victim later decides not to cooperate. The execution and enforcement of this requirement vary among agencies, according to supervisors, but complaints about it are common among officers. Concern over the time required may also be linked to outlooks on prosecution. These are described later in this report.

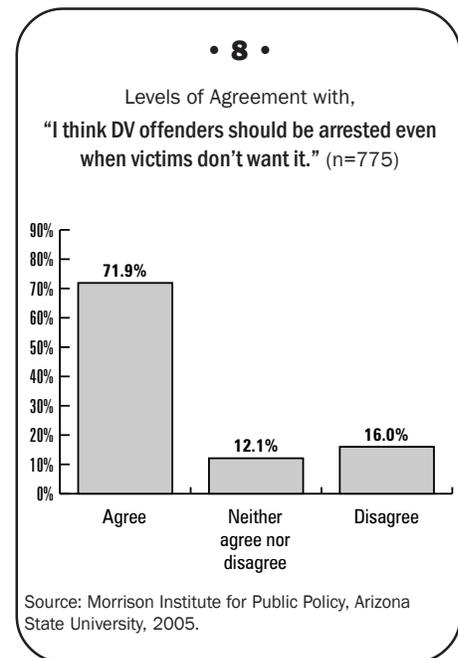
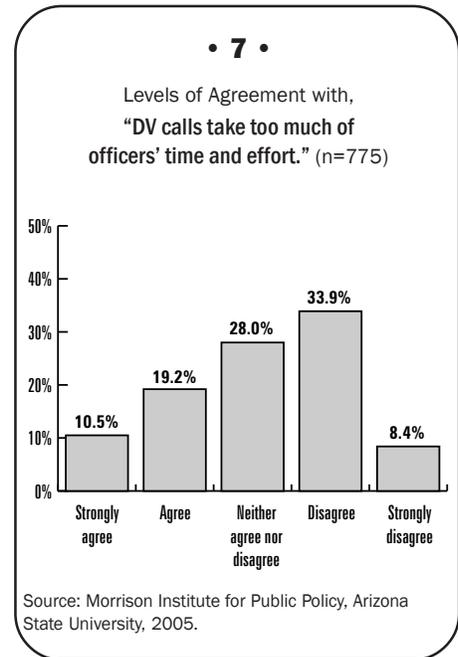
**Officers Support Arrest Even When Victims Are Reluctant**

Survey respondents heavily supported the statement, “I think DV offenders should be arrested even when victims don’t want it,” with 71.9% agreeing (Figure 8).

This view again reflects the change from past practices that goes to the heart of the current pro-arrest approach, which is in part based on the notion that domestic violence victims may be too traumatized or intimidated to make wise choices at the scene. Officers’ strong support for arrest policies is also important given that so many officers express extreme frustration at the fact that so many victims later refuse to prosecute.

**“Why Isn’t Anything Getting Done?”**

As noted, officers in all agencies expressed enormous frustration at dealing with domestic violence calls. This feeling, in fact, was one of the study’s most widespread findings. Arizona officers’ exasperation cuts across virtually all responses, all locations, and all ranks. The pervasiveness of this frustration seems to reduce officers’ support for the pro-arrest policy and their willingness to follow its requirements.



**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

### **It's Different in the City: Outlooks Among Urban and Rural Officers**

Arizona is a place of many contrasts, not least being the divergent patterns of life in its urban and rural areas. It thus might not be surprising that different attitudes towards domestic violence emerged between urban and rural law enforcement officers. In this study, “urban” agencies are defined as those operating in the urban areas of Maricopa and Pima counties. Officers in these areas report responding to much higher volumes of domestic violence calls than their colleagues in “rural” areas – which include smaller Arizona cities.

Urban officers, in fact, were more likely than their rural colleagues to express exasperation at the sheer volume of domestic violence calls, to agree that calls take too much time and effort, and to view too many calls as involving merely verbal arguments. Urban officers were more likely than rural ones to want more freedom in handling domestic violence calls, to feel that they should arrest only in clear cases of injury, and to believe that arrests seldom help reduce future violence. They also were more likely to agree that domestic violence is best handled as a private matter, that there should be a limit on how many times they respond to the same address, and that victims are often as responsible for a domestic violence incident as the person arrested.

Rural officers, on the other hand, were more likely to agree that an arrest policy is the best approach to domestic violence, that they need stricter guidelines from supervisors, that offenders should be arrested even when victims don't want it, and that more training would help them do a better job on domestic violence calls.

A male detective from Region 2 said:

*I think [most officers] are very frustrated going to DV calls because for the most part they are probably responding to a residence they've been to before. [They ask] “Why isn't anything getting done with these individuals?”*

A male Region 2 officer said:

*The victim is mad at us because we took the other party out of the residence, or the children are mad at us because we're taking one of their parents away. You know the person that we arrest is never happy with us. It's a lose situation all the way around for us.*

A male Region 3 sergeant suggested that frustration arises in part from the concern for officer safety: “I mean, we see that they are in an abusive relationship. I mean, it is frustrating to continually go back there and continually jeopardize my guys' lives.”

A female Region 2 detective, on the other hand, said officers' frustration derives in part from their own personalities:

*You're dealing with the personality of somebody who is used to making things better, used to taking charge, and used to having things happen because they say they are going to happen. And [in cases of] domestic violence . . . we can't do that, and it's a real frustrating crime.*

A male Region 5 sergeant said: “You get to a point where you are just sick and tired of talking to people. You're sick and tired of seeing the same people over and over and over. You're sick of the same call over and over and over.”

Nevertheless, officers' majority support for a pro-arrest policy does mark a noteworthy change in the law enforcement approach to domestic violence, and even perhaps in what's often called “police culture” – the underlying complex of beliefs and values said to be shared by the insular community of sworn law enforcement personnel. Interestingly, survey responses show that 34% of officers with relatively few years

in law enforcement (3.5 years or less) were *more* likely to agree that, “DV is best handled as a private matter,” than those with more than 12 years of experience (11%). This finding suggests that agencies should focus on the attitudes of officers with the least experience, rather than those with the most time on the force.

## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

## Officers Consider Arrest Alone of Limited Value in Reducing Domestic Violence

### Police Show Mixed Support for the State’s Pro-Arrest Policy

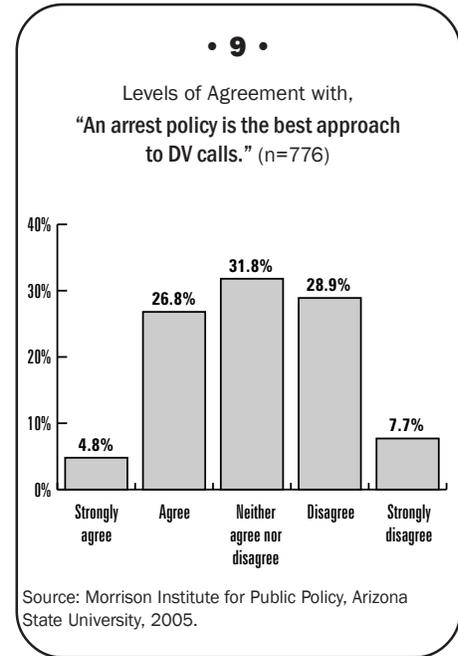
Arizona law enforcement officers make approximately 24,000 domestic violence arrests annually. State law requires them in most cases to arrest domestic violence suspects who inflict injury or display weapons, and authorizes them to arrest in other circumstances.

In general, this study finds that Arizona officers agree that an “in-custody” arrest – meaning removal from the home in handcuffs and usually a jail stay – is often the necessary and proper response to domestic violence incidents. At the same time, however, they remain highly skeptical about the long-term deterrence effects and problem-solving value of these arrests – at least as they are currently processed in Arizona’s criminal justice system. Officers believe that to be truly effective, arrests should trigger other justice and community services that could prompt positive changes in the behavior of victims and offenders, and, eventually, a reduction in the level of domestic violence. But they say this follow-through often does not happen or is stymied by a lack of sufficient resources and personnel to adequately address the high volume of domestic violence cases.

In fact, based on officers’ responses, it would not be an exaggeration to say that they believe that Arizona’s pro-arrest policy – as currently practiced – is not working to reduce the number and severity of domestic violence incidents. Officers’ ambivalence appears, for example, in their response to the statement, “An arrest policy is the best approach to DV calls.” Respondents were evenly distributed on the issue (Figure 9). Officers outside of major urban areas were more likely to agree with the statement, as were officers who answered 20 or fewer domestic violence calls in the previous year.

The substantial “neither agree nor disagree” response (31.8%) and the small number of “strongly agree” (4.8%) responses highlight that the pro-arrest policy may leave officers with fewer choices than they might want. Respondents’ lack of support for arrest as the “best” policy may reflect a view that it is often the *only* response available, which in many cases they feel is inappropriate and ineffective. The third of neutral responses may also reveal a feeling that a single approach is a mismatch to what is perceived as the unique nature of each domestic violence situation.

The split responses to this statement might seem contrary to officers’ apparent acceptance of domestic violence as a crime calling for police intervention. If domestic violence is a crime, why wouldn’t arrest be the best approach? Qualitative data suggest that officers’ reservations about arrests



### LAYERS OF MEANING:

**“I’m very much into pro-arrest, and maybe it’s my 20 years in law enforcement because I think it really sends a message ... It allows for a lot of healing, a lot of services to be in place that maybe will assist them in repairing their family unit.”**

— Female Region 3 detective

stem not so much from dissatisfaction with the action itself, but rather from the restrictions placed upon them by their departments’ pro-arrest policies, and what they view as chronic lack of follow-up by other actors in the criminal justice system.

Support for the policy was expressed by a male Region 1 detective:

*That policy for mandatory arrest needs to be there. One, it’s nice to get these guys off the streets. Two, it gives us a night off from them for a little while. And I think it teaches them a lesson.*

A male Region 5 lieutenant agreed, adding that, “It takes a lot of the burden off mom, who maybe is abused but she’s mentally trained that that’s the situation she needs to live in.” A female detective in Region 3 said,

*I’m very much into pro-arrest, and maybe it’s my 20 years in law enforcement because I think it really sends a message ... It allows for a lot of healing, a lot of services to be in place that maybe will assist them in repairing their family unit.*

A female detective in Region 2 said she thinks the pro-arrest policy also, “... eliminates the macho police attitude with some officers ... They don’t have a choice.”

In fact, a male Region 5 sergeant said that not having a choice can be easier on officers:

*You’re a person, too, and you hear all these things going on [at the scene] and you feel for one party or the other and your emotions get involved whether you like it or not. So a lot of times you really are thinking, “Man, I don’t want to arrest this person.” But they did what they did and that’s that.*

Supervisors — like this male Region 2 officer — also cited arrests as preventing potential liabilities for law enforcement agencies:

*I don’t want to put the department in the position of incurring a liability if we go [to a call] and we make a bad decision and we leave [a suspect] in the house and it turns violent after we leave.*

A male Region 5 sergeant said the pro-arrest policy made it easier for him and other supervisors to advise officers calling for guidance from domestic violence scenes. But many officers see the situation differently. As one respondent wrote: “I feel DV arrest laws are too strict. Almost every time state law requires an arrest and victim does not want to prosecute, the victim almost always never shows up for court and the cases are thrown out.”

Supervisors who expressed reservations about the “pro-arrest” approach cited two other concerns. One was the toll that arrests take on department time and resources; another was — as a female Region 2 supervisor said — that making

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

an arrest “... has a huge financial impact. Boarding someone at jail is not cheap.” And a male Region 2 sergeant asked whether officers should be required to arrest a suspect who fled at the time of the incident and is encountered by officers later. “Two or three days later, is the mandatory arrest necessary?” he asked. “If we go back in there and say an arrest is necessary, you make enemies of the victims.”

In addition, officers noted that an arrest, even when warranted by circumstances, can simply add to the woes of already troubled families. “In our area, [given] the economic issues out there, it’s harder on the families if [suspects] go to jail,” a female Region 1 detective said, “especially if ... the whole reason they’re fighting is because of money.” A male sergeant from Region 2 cited what he considers another downside to the pro-arrest policy:

*We’ve trained these families that are involved in domestic violence. They know after the first time, hey, we have a mandatory arrest policy. So when I show up at Mr. and Mrs. Smith’s house, and Mrs. Smith’s got a black eye, she says, “The dog jumped up and hit me in the eye,” knowing full well that if she says that [he hit her], there goes the breadwinner out of the house. Or [she thinks], “If I’m the cause of him getting arrested, it’s going to be worse for me next time.”*

And even supervisors who support the policy said that making an arrest serves only an immediate purpose. “I’m 100% behind it,” said a male Region 4 sergeant. “[But] all I can do is make a difference at the minute. It’s up to the courts to make a difference forever.”

**Officers Have Little Faith in Arrest’s Deterrent Effects**

A Region 1 lieutenant said he’s convinced that a victim’s initial 911 call rarely marks the first actual instance of domestic violence:

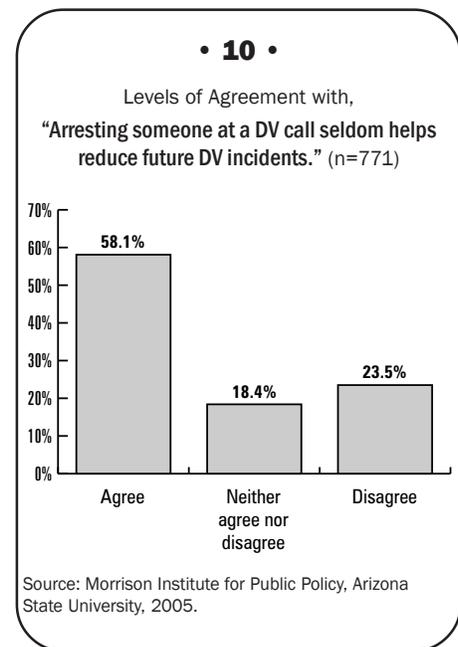
*Usually it’s like when you catch a shoplifter — although they say it’s their first time, when you catch a DV [offender] it’s not their first time ... There’s so many different levels of domestic violence that maybe it didn’t register [with the victim] until they actually were slapped.*

Interviews with domestic violence shelter staff support that assertion. Thus, victims who call 911 may already have suffered multiple times without intervention, making the arrest a potentially dramatic break with the past. Yet most officers put little stock in arrest’s preventive power for any but a few offenders.

A majority — 58.1% — agreed (Figure 10) that “Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents.” Officers from metro Phoenix and Tucson were more likely to agree, as were those who answer high numbers of calls. In the interviews, supervisors concurred. They repeatedly noted the heavier impact arrest typically has on employed, generally law-abiding

**“[But] all I can do is make a difference at the minute. It’s up to the courts to make a difference forever.”**

— Male Region 4 sergeant



**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

**“If [a suspect] is holding down a job, if they have to pay the bills, if they are a responsible person and know they might get more jail time next time, I think [arrest] is going to deter them.”**

— Male Region 1 detective

residents, compared with those already living outside conventional social norms. This Arizona view echoes national “stake-in-conformity” studies, which found that arrest more often deterred future violence when suspects had jobs (Maxwell, Graner et al. 2001).

A male Region 1 detective said:

*If [a suspect] is holding down a job, if they have to pay the bills, if they are a responsible person and know they might get more jail time next time, I think [arrest] is going to deter them. But [with] people who don't work, or work job-to-job, or [heavily use] drugs and alcohol, I don't think it's going to deter them very much.*

A male Region 4 captain agreed: “The middle-class family where dad’s got a job and mom’s taking care of the kids and he gets arrested for the one time he lost his temper, I think it makes a difference.” A male Region 1 detective said, “I’ve seen men break down and cry because they’re so scared of what’s happening. They’ve never been through this before.”

Not so with suspects who have few connections to the community mainstream — and who form the majority of suspects in the estimates of most supervisors. These “frequent flyers” usually see little that’s damaging, humiliating, or even unusual about being booked. A trip to jail has not deterred them in the past and is unlikely to alter their behavior in the future. “They see it as a routine occurrence,” the Region 4 captain said. “[They’ll say] ‘Well, I got popped for DV this week,’ and maybe you got arrested for dope last week or burglary the week before,” he said. “For those people, it doesn’t matter.”

A female Region 1 detective said, “I’ve had plenty of people tell me, ‘I did not want to go back to jail.’ But people that have been there a few times, you know, basically it’s, ‘Yeah, it’s just another day down there.’” A female Region 2 detective said arrest doesn’t deter most suspects, “because [to end abusive behavior] they have to change their entire life, how they handle stresses. And you’re not going to avoid stresses in your life.”

A male Region 1 detective said that the amount of deterrence also might in part rest upon the attitude of the arresting officer:

*I think it depends very much on the officers who arrest the person. I’ve booked [domestic violence suspects] in jail after getting in a fight with them [and] my adrenaline’s pumping and I’d love nothing more than to . . . get even, but I’ve found that when you treat them with respect . . . and just have a conversation with them, I’ve had some guys [who say], “I never really thought about [spouse abuse] like that” . . . You kind of have a counseling session, type of thing.*

But a Region 5 sergeant said, “Every once in a great while we’ll see [a repeat offender] that says ‘Enough is enough’ and they end the relationship. But it

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA

usually doesn't have anything to do with the aggressor going to jail. It's usually the victim deciding they've had enough."

A female Region 2 detective said:

*I would like to say yes [that arrests deter future violence]. I think if the [offender] wasn't drunk or high, if there wasn't so much emotion involved [at the time of the incident], I would say that it would be a deterrent. But I think at that point, [the offender says], "I don't care."*

Asked what good the pro-arrest policy is if it doesn't deter future violence, she said: "It keeps people alive for another night."

In some cases, another night will likely bring just another argument and another 911 call. "Many of our repeat offenders are families that argue about everything, but we [are] still mandated to respond up to five times per week." A male Region 5 lieutenant said:

*Probably about half of all DV calls are . . . repeat calls for us, and some of them are multiple repeat calls. We've had instances where it seemed like every week, we're going over to a particular residence and either arresting one or the other. And it isn't just one victim. Sometimes it's one party, the next time, it's the other party.*

The high rate of repeat calls further suggests that, in too many cases, arrest in Arizona currently provides only a short-term respite from conflict and violence. Arrest clearly has its uses in combating domestic violence, officers say, but prevention of future violence seems seldom to be one of them.

**Widespread Resentment of "Verbal-only" Calls**

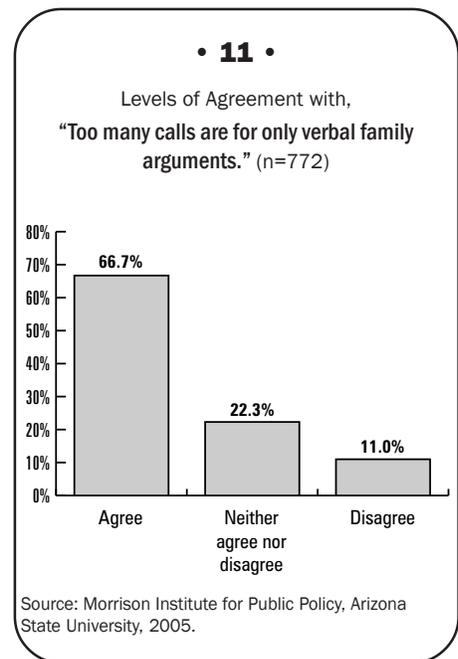
At the same time, officers complain that too much of their time is wasted on domestic violence calls that don't come close to requiring arrest. Two-thirds of respondents agreed that, "Too many DV calls are for only verbal family arguments," (Figure 11). Officers from busier urban areas throughout Maricopa County concurred more often, as did officers with 3.6-6.5 years experience, those with less training (0-1 sessions attended) and those who reported answering a higher volume of calls in the previous year (150+). Busy officers resent going to scenes where, in their opinion, there is a low level of risk to residents.

A male Region 4 sergeant said, "We'll get [to a scene] and there's no injuries, no criminal damage or anything ... And both parties [will say] 'we were just arguing. Can't we argue?' It's OK to argue."

One survey respondent wrote: "Most calls are verbal only, no crime. If we only responded to physical violence calls, officers would take it more seriously."

**"It [arrest] keeps people alive for another night."**

— Female Region 2 detective



**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

Another wrote: “Most calls are labeled as domestic violence when in fact they are just arguments.” A third wrote: “Most DV calls are verbal. They say communication is the only way to solve problems and we should allow that to happen, and not need to arrest someone for that.”

Conversely, a male Region 1 sergeant said it would be wrong to discount “verbals” entirely:

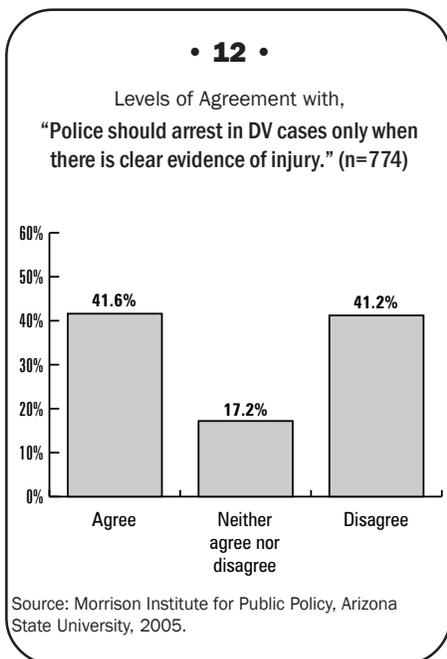
*I wouldn't say they are nothing, [because] somebody's upset about something to the point where they had to call the police. So even if it is verbal, maybe it hasn't gotten to the point where it's physical yet. But at least we're still getting there and we're intervening before that does happen.*

Of course, officers cannot know the nature of a call until they arrive. Once at the scene, they must decide what level of conflict triggers an arrest. Asked to comment on, “Police should arrest in DV cases only when there is clear evidence of injury,” opinions were split: 41.6% agreed, 17.2% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 41.2% disagreed (Figure 12). Non-white officers were more likely to agree with this statement than white officers, as were officers in major urban areas, those in Region 1, and those who had had fewer training sessions. One officer who favored limiting arrests wrote: “Sometimes the letter of the law regarding DV/criminal damage seems exaggerated. I've seen something minor that was broken and felt obligated to arrest.” Another wrote: “I think we arrest during arguments just to cover the department.” Then again, a supervisor noted in an interview that arresting someone for disorderly conduct or criminal damage might be preventing a later assault.

This even split among officers on the issue of arrests and injury reflects a similar significant division in the broader community over how domestic violence should be defined. Researchers, advocates, and mental health professionals note that verbal, financial, and emotional abuse can be as damaging as some physical abuse and are as much parts of the overall pattern of abuse as assaults. Law enforcement officers, however, must respond to domestic violence as it is construed in law and policy. And while they clearly see domestic violence as a crime, the exact definition of what should count and what is the best response in each situation is less clear cut.

### Officers Say Dual Arrests Are Decreasing

Dual arrest — arresting both parties at a domestic violence scene — did not find favor with most officers, as only 11.6% agreed with the statement, “It's often best to arrest both parties in DV calls” (Figure 13). Past national research has suggested that high numbers of dual arrests have in part reflected officers' frustration with the difficulty of figuring out who's to blame in a domestic conflict, as well as their overall resistance to pro-arrest



## LAYERS OF MEANING:

requirements (Buzawa and Buzawa 2003: 138). In the current study, supervisors said that dual arrests — dubbed the “family plan” by some — are increasingly rare in the wake of many departments’ recent training efforts to help officers identify the “primary aggressor” at the scene.

It wasn’t always so. A Region 5 sergeant said:

*When I first came out on the road, it was “solve the immediate problem.” If that means take everybody to jail, then they all go. If we get there and they’re yelling and screaming and they won’t shut up, just hook everybody up and take them, just so we don’t have to deal with it over and over and over again.*

But he added: “Now they’re telling us if we do a dual arrest, we’d better be damned sure that we can prove that both parties were aggressors.”

A male Region 4 supervisor said:

*I watch [dual arrest] in our people because I don’t want that to become a habit. I don’t want [officers to have the attitude that] ‘Just because you made me come to your house, everybody goes to jail.’*

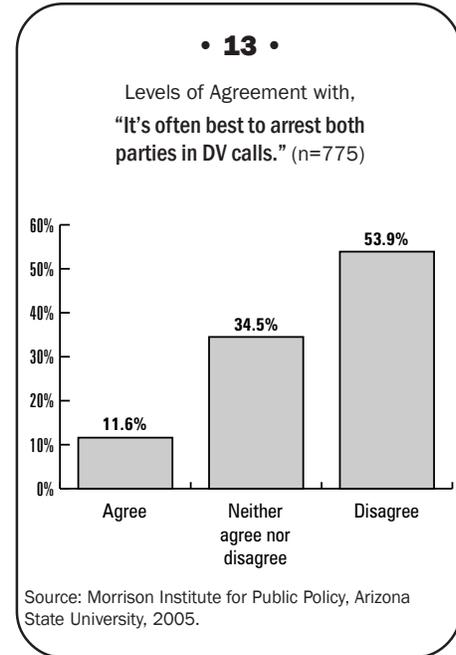
A male Region 1 detective cited another drawback: “[Dual arrest] is an absolute waste because [prosecutors] never prosecute ... They just say it’s a mutual [combat situation], and that’s it.”

A female Region 4 sergeant said:

*A lot of our victims ... finally have had enough of being the victim and they fight back, and the officers want to make a [dual] arrest. [But] you’ve got to look at what actually happened here and go a little deeper. And most of the time, [officers] understand that.*

Still, dual arrest does sometimes make sense, as a male Region 2 lieutenant said:

*If it’s clear that they are both combative, they’re both intoxicated, they’re both fully engaged in this thing and ... they were both aggressively fighting [and] knocking stuff over in front of the children, absolutely ... there’s no question that both need to go.*



### **A Diverse Police Force Produces Diverse Opinions**

Women officers were more likely than men to agree that officers need more training and stricter guidelines from supervisors in handling domestic violence calls. Women also were more likely to believe that suspects should be arrested even when victims don't want it, and that domestic violence stems from abusers' need for power and control over victims. Female officers saw mental health problems as a more serious contributor to domestic violence than men. They also seem more ready to acknowledge the problem of domestic violence in general, with a higher percentage of women officers agreeing that "DV is a significant problem in the community I serve."

Male officers, on the other hand, were more likely to favor more freedom to handle domestic violence calls. Men also indicated greater impatience with victims. Male officers were more likely to agree that domestic violence calls take too much time and effort, that many victims could easily leave their abusive relationships, that victims often exaggerate the amount of violence, and that most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship.

Significant differences also appeared in survey responses from white and non-white officers. Non-white officers are more likely than white officers to think that domestic violence calls are especially dangerous, that police should arrest only upon clear evidence of injury, that many victims could easily leave their relationships, that most calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships, and that repeat cases are a major problem. In other words, these officers tended to express more "traditional" attitudes about domestic violence than white officers.

### **Officers Often Struggle to Understand Victims' Actions and Attitudes**

The nationwide adoption of pro-arrest laws was advocated and accomplished in the name of victims. Researchers, domestic violence workers, victims-rights advocates, feminists and others argued that the criminal justice system's traditional hands-off attitude toward "family fights" condemned victims — overwhelmingly women — to lives of hidden suffering, tacitly endorsed violence as acceptable behavior, and ensured the perpetuation of societal ills through successive generations. Critics charged that officers' reluctance to arrest batterers stemmed in some measure from their view of many domestic violence victims as irresponsible and unreliable, and from the general devaluation of women inherent in male-dominated "police culture."

The proper social response, they said, was prosecution of domestic violence as a crime and help for women to leave abusive relationships. Thus, a large part of the solution depended on deep, sustained involvement by those who had been labeled as part of the problem. Prosecutions start with arrests, and obtaining those required a turnaround in actions and attitudes at every level of law enforcement — but especially on the front lines. The solution, policy makers decided, also included victims' being advised and assisted to leave abusive relationships. Here, law enforcement officers also were called upon to contribute by providing information to victims and encouraging steps toward better lives.

Clearly, the system to reduce domestic violence desired by advocates, supported by research, and agreed to by policy makers in Arizona and across the country depended to a significant extent on law enforcement officers having sufficient knowledge of domestic violence and the "right" attitudes. Much attention has been focused on these goals, from passing pro-arrest statutes to allocating dollars for law enforcement training and special domestic violence units to creating domestic violence shelters and services.

This study found a diversity of opinion among officers about victims and domestic violence responses. Many responses suggest that "police culture" may not be as monolithic as is often portrayed. Officers exhibit such a range of opinion that a single interpretation is difficult. At the same time, the results reveal lingering ambivalence toward domestic violence victims. This is not to suggest that Arizona law-enforcement officers condone violence, oppose punishment for offenders, or lack sympathy for victims — the survey and interviews show officers striving to do their best on a challenging and frustrating assignment. Nevertheless, the findings call attention to attitudes toward victims that seem strong and widespread enough potentially to detract from the quality of domestic violence enforcement.

### **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

### Some Officers Question Victims' Behavior

For example, approximately a third of officers believe that victims play a role in bringing violence on themselves. Survey responses broke out fairly evenly on the statement, "DV victims are often as responsible for the incident as the person arrested," with 6.6% strongly agreeing and 29.7% agreeing (overall 36.3% agreement), 35.1% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 24.7% disagreeing and 3.9% strongly disagreeing (overall 28.6% disagreement) (Figure 14). Officers from major urban areas and throughout Region 1 were more likely to agree with the statement. Exactly where officers think victims' responsibility lies is not clear. One possibility is that officers are referring to the fact that many domestic violence victims remain in abusive relationships despite efforts by police and others to help them leave.

A female detective in Region 2 said: "We say our worst enemies are our victims."

A male Region 1 detective expressed what seems to be a widespread wariness among officers about victims:

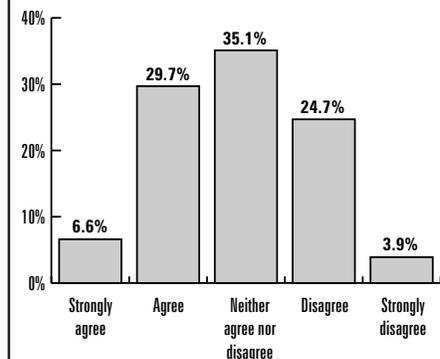
*Not to sound, you know, insensitive, but I never really see like a true victim [in domestic violence cases], like I assume I'm going to see. Like I anticipated — and I know they're out there. But when I think of domestic violence, I think of the cycle of violence that occurs, and [the victim] can't get out, and they're being really beat ... But I never really found that here. I just found ... fights, arguments that break out where at least both people are scrapping at each other."*

The victims, of course, did not deserve to be assaulted, the detective said. But they may have:

*... escalated the situation and certainly maybe participated in it. And ... I see so many [domestic violence] reports where sometimes I feel like there's other issues behind the scenes. Custody battles, divorce proceedings, you know. Many times I look at a report and I think ... there's a civil custody battle going on is why I'm getting this report.*

Another factor in officers' opinions may be that many victims do not welcome law enforcement intervention. Or, they may be unaware of what the law requires of law enforcement personnel. Officers frequently complained about victims' actions and attitudes at the scene and later in the prosecution process. In most cases, officers said, victims are glad when they arrive and stop the threatened or actual violence. Later, however, many victims become a hindrance to the further execution of the legal process. Also, victims may be unhappy to see officers when they themselves did not initiate the intervention.

• 14 •  
Levels of Agreement with,  
"DV victims are often as responsible for the incident as the person arrested." (n=772)



Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2005.

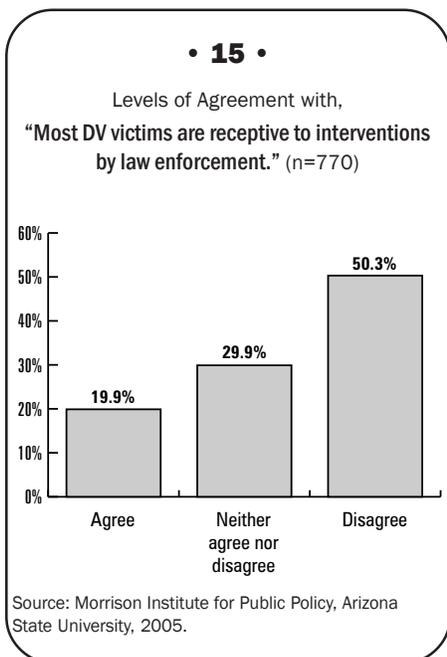
**“Not to sound, you know, insensitive, but I never really see like a true victim [in domestic violence cases], like I assume I’m going to see.”**

— Male Region 1 detective

## LAYERS OF MEANING:

**“But when the media hits, it’s always, ‘The police department didn’t do this, didn’t do that.’ And they don’t know how long we fought with this victim to try to help her help us ... We fight with our victims as bad as we fight with our suspects.”**

— Female Region 2 detective



A female Region 2 detective said:

*I don’t think people realize the level of difficulty that DV victims are for us. Intellectually, we know that’s all part of being a domestic violence victim. But when the media hits, it’s always, “The police department didn’t do this, didn’t do that.” And they don’t know how long we fought with this victim to try to help her help us ... We fight with our victims as bad as we fight with our suspects.*

A female Region 4 sergeant said:

*If a third party calls us to respond, [the victim] is not quite as receptive, saying, “Why are you interfering? We’re just arguing. Nothing’s going on, there’s no fighting, it’s none of your business.”*

A female sergeant in Region 4 said:

*Nothing makes me more angry than going [to a scene] and the victim doesn’t want to tell us what happened. We had one the other day; he had a knife and she would not tell us that he had a knife ... I mean, [in] the majority of the cases there are children involved, and not only is she being the victim but she’s teaching them it’s OK to be the victim or it’s OK to be the aggressor because it’s just standard practice.*

A male Region 2 detective said:

*A lot of times they don’t want to be a victim. They’re like, “No, nothing happened” – [even though] the victim has a big black eye ... And you’re trying to extract information without re-victimizing the victim.*

A female Region 2 detective said:

*[Some] victims call us every filthy name in the book and tell us that we’re splitting their family apart, and “You don’t know him” and ... “We can work it out.” By then, the [domestic violence] cycle has started again and they don’t want to hear from us.*

**Intervention Can Be Frustrating for Officers Who Set out to “Save”**

Fully half of the respondents disagreed with the statement, “Most DV victims are receptive to interventions by law enforcement.” Just one out of five agreed (Figure 15). The level of disagreement rose with the number of calls officers reported answering.

One respondent wrote: “The more we [do], the more it seems a useless cause. Uncooperative victims are the biggest, most frustrating problems with domestic violence.” Another wrote: “Victims seem to just feel sorry for themselves, and don’t look for a real way out. By the time it goes to court they are ‘in love’ again.” A third officer wrote: “Most of our ‘victims’ get the suspect out of jail the next day and don’t show up in court. They only called 911 to stop

**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

the suspect from hitting them at that moment. They waste our time.” And another asked for, “Consequences for victims who recant their stories, fail to appear at trial or who take no action to solve the situation.”

This situation contrasts dramatically with other law enforcement circumstances, where victims usually are appreciative of officers’ work. The ideal image of law enforcement officers as welcome rescuers and peacemakers clashes with the reality of many domestic violence situations. A male Region 4 supervisor said this can take a toll on officer morale:

*You know, a fireman is always a good guy no matter what he’s doing . . . Usually, in a violence call, there’s an aggressor and there’s a victim. In domestic violence, the victim doesn’t always want to be a victim. And they’ll turn on you . . . You’re not always the knight in shining armor . . .*

Officers say they understand why some victims are reluctant to cooperate. A female Region 1 detective noted one reason:

*[Some victims] don’t want to aid in prosecution because they are illegal [immigrants] and they’re afraid of deportation. So they’d rather be abused than be sent back to Mexico.*

Officers say many victims who call 911 do not fully realize the consequences — and are not pleased when they find out. A male Region 2 detective said:

*When we get there, there’s been plenty of times that [the victim] says, I just want him to stop.” And we’ll say, “Well, we have to take him to jail.” And she goes, “Well, can’t you just do something else?” So in these cases . . . they weren’t really overly thrilled that we were taking him to jail. And I would say . . . that in maybe 80% of the cases they weren’t overly thrilled that we were there . . . Kids [are] screaming, wife upset, we’re taking him out. But that’s all we can do.*

Another issue is the passage of time that can elapse between arrest and follow-up investigations by busy detectives. A male Region 2 detective said:

*We’re getting to these cases six, seven, eight, nine months down the road. In that time [the suspect] has been let out of jail, he’s gone to counseling, he’s done whatever, he’s apologized and said it’ll never happen again. [The victim has] accepted him — and we’re going back and contacting them. [So the victim says], “I don’t want to do anything. We’re back together and everything’s good.”*

Then, officers said, there’s the cold reality of economic survival. A female Region 2 detective said:

*[The offender is] in jail again. But now, there’s no paycheck. There’s three kids in diapers. Everything’s in his name. [So the victim says] “I have nothing. I’m going to get kicked out of my home. My family tells me I need to go home. He’s a good man. He’s a provider. I need to go home and shut my mouth.”*

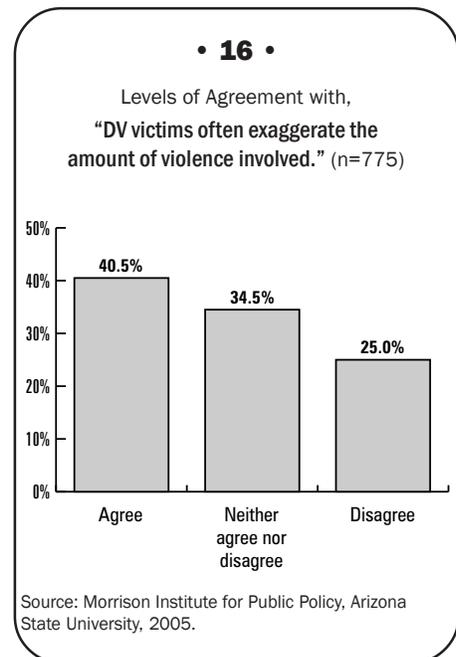
**“... You’re not always the knight in shining armor ...”**

— Male Region 4 supervisor

**“... in maybe 80% of the cases they weren’t overly thrilled that we were there ... Kids [are] screaming, wife upset, we’re taking him out.**

**But that’s all we can do”**

— Male Region 2 detective



**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

If some victims are unhappy with law enforcement’s efforts, officers say others exaggerate their plight. For example, four out of 10 officers expressed skepticism about victims’ accounts of domestic violence incidents. Asked to comment on the statement, “DV victims often exaggerate the amount of violence involved,” 40.5% of respondents agreed, 34.5% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 25% disagreed (Figure 16). Male officers were more likely to agree, as were officers from Regions 1 and 4.

A variation on this theme was expressed by a male Region 5 supervisor:

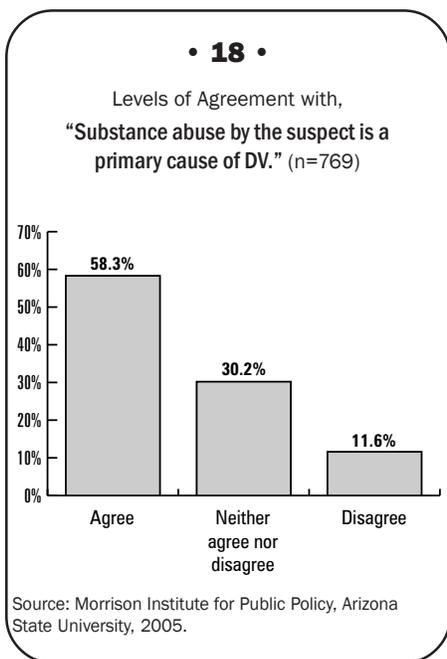
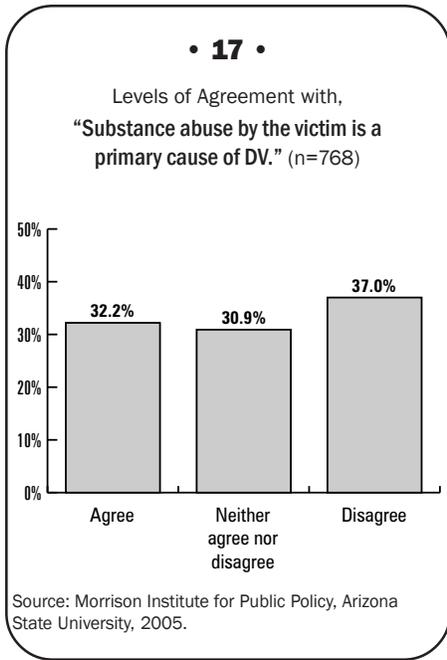
*I’ve gone to these cases where the woman or man – it’s happened both ways – [says], “I’m deathly afraid he’s going to come back and kill me.” And you say, “Well, we need to get you to the shelter for the evening.” [And the victim says] “Are you kidding? I can’t leave my stereo. He’ll come back and bust up my stereo.” Now, how seriously can you take this person?*

**Substance Abuse Often Seems to Play a Part**

Some officers who see victims bearing some responsibility for their situation may be referring to victims’ use of drugs or alcohol as factors in violent incidents. In interviews, supervisors repeatedly cited drug and alcohol abuse as major contributors to domestic violence – as they are to other crimes. A female region 2 detective said, “[We] started keeping track years ago, and what my own percentages show [is that] in our cases at least 93% [of incidents have] either drugs or alcohol involved [with] either [party].”

A Region 1 detective said drug abuse can be part of the bond holding an abusive relationship together: “If they are both addicted to drugs, and she gets the drugs from him, she might be willing to be hit twice a week and stay in the relationship.”

Line officers, however, seemed less sure about the role of substance abuse. In response to the statement, “Substance abuse by the victim is a primary cause of DV,” respondents were evenly split: 32.2% of officers agreed, 30.9% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 37% disagreed (Figure 17). There were no significant variations across sub-groupings of officers. Officers were more uniform in citing the problem of substance abuse by domestic violence offenders, with 58.3% agreeing that, “Substance abuse by the suspect is a primary cause of DV,” and only 11.6% disagreeing (Figure 18). There were no significant differences across officer subgroups.



**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

### Many Officers Have Limited Understanding of Victims' Predicament

Officers' frustration with victim behavior was most strongly revealed in their response to the statement, "Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't." Three out of 10 strongly agreed and 42% agreed (Figure 19). Male officers were more likely to express this view, as were non-white officers, those from Region 1, those with less domestic violence training, and those who reported answering higher numbers of calls.

Research on domestic violence has found that the physical injuries witnessed by police are often only the outward manifestation of a deeper, more insidious form of trauma. Researchers have sought to further explain victims' reluctance to leave abusive relationships by citing the paralyzing impact of degraded self-esteem and of long-term psychological manipulation by offenders who mix threats, humiliation and violence with apologies, affection and pledges of better behavior. Indeed, the research concludes that control over the victim — psychological, physical, and sexual — is the batterer's primary goal, and is pursued via a pattern of behavior that can render victims susceptible to depression, assorted medical problems, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (Buzawa and Buzawa 2003: 16-25).

These patterns of behavior, sometimes called the "cycle of violence," can be largely hidden to those outside the relationship — and the results of the current study suggest that many officers are either insufficiently aware of them or not persuaded of their importance. A male captain in Region 4 seemed to reflect the latter view:

*You have to ask yourself — well, we talked about the circle of violence and we know about all these little phases and everything — but whatever happened to personal accountability in life?*

A female Region 1 detective said:

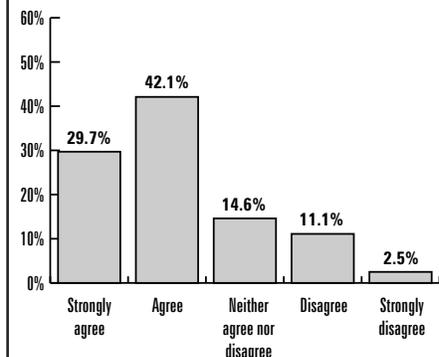
*There's very little sympathy for some [victims]. You have people that put themselves in the [abusive] situation, and they've been given resources, they've been provided with shelter and information, they've been given every possible outlet that we have available . . . and they continue to choose to put themselves in the situation.*

A female Region 2 detective said:

*The percentage is very high as to [victims] that don't want us. We have a policy that if a victim says [later] that they lied [about having been assaulted], we tell them . . . that's a crime and you can be arrested for it.*

In interviews, other supervisors said they understand why many victims find it difficult to leave.

• 19 •  
Levels of Agreement with,  
"Many DV victims could easily leave  
their relationships, but don't." (n=774)



Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2005.

A female Region 1 detective said:

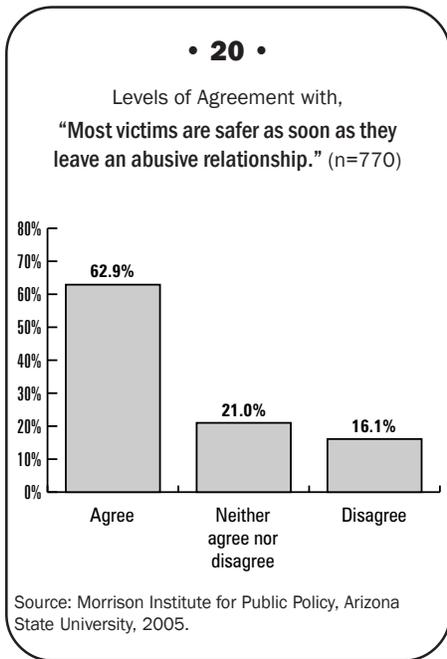
*A lot of [victims] . . . grew up in that environment, and they move from an abusive father to an abusive husband. Even though they know, technically, this is wrong, on some sub-level they don't know that they shouldn't be in that situation . . . Their brothers or their father or their grandfather – somebody's abused them.*

A male Region 1 detective said:

*Sometimes it sounds ridiculous, but you'll have a victim where they really think that [abusive] behavior is normal. They think that every husband, you know, hits them in the head with a rolling pin.*

The same detective noted a more basic reason:

*You know, [the victim says], "I love him. He beats the crap out of me but I love him. I don't want to hurt him even though he hurts me."*



In a related issue, most officers supported the statement that “Most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship,” with 62.9% agreeing (Figure 20). Male officers, those from major urban areas, those with less training, and those who’ve responded to more calls were more likely to agree. Views also varied across regions, but no clear pattern emerged. While the statement seems plausible, or even obviously true, research has suggested that the most dangerous time for a domestic violence victim might indeed be just after they leave the abusive relationship. Scholars say this counter-intuitive situation stems from abusers’ escalating the violence precisely because they are losing control. Officers may have looked at the survey statement as referring to long-term safety or as the clean break needed to start a new life. However, the responses here could signal an important lack of knowledge about specific aspects of domestic violence.

**Officers May Be Uneasy with the Dual Role of Policing and Counseling**

Finally, other interview responses concerning victims are worth noting. The first suggests that officers’ attitudes towards victims flow in part from the fact that officers do not like to function as “social workers,” are skeptical of the possibilities of counseling, and feel unqualified to try. Rather, they see their function in terms of more concrete challenges and outcomes. A male Region 5 sergeant said:

*We know all the stuff that goes on in family life, and we feel [victims’] pain – we really do. But you don't want to sit there and counsel somebody [when] you know it's not going to help. There's been plenty of times where I'm sitting there and I'm thinking, "What the hell am I going to tell this person that's going to make it any better?"*

And a female Region 1 detective noted the baggage that some officers bring to a domestic violence scene:

*Frustration [also arises] because there's plenty of officers that have been involved in [their own] domestic violence situations. And sometimes I think maybe they see a reflection of themselves in these things, and they tend to be harsher and more frustrated because they can't control their [own] lives. So they go, "Why aren't you fixing this?" But I'm saying that, on their level, they're doing it, they've living with the same type of thing. I've seen that.*

A male Region 2 detective said:

*There's a line of thought that says police officers, despite their best intention and training, still kind of tend to be macho guys who think, "I'm not a social worker. I'm supposed to chase bad guys, not mess with family disputes."*

A male Region 3 sergeant was more blunt:

*Realistically, officers could give a shit about counseling. Most of us don't like going there and having to fix [families'] problems. We want to go there and take care of what we have the capability of taking care of because we know that a lot of times these victims, they're listening but they're not hearing us. And so we're going there and we're preaching and preaching this stuff, but we know it's falling on deaf ears and nothing's going to change.*

A female Region 1 detective said:

*We don't normally hang around. We're not a counseling service. You know, we do what we can. But our purpose is criminal, and once the threat's removed, we're usually done with that individual until it's time to go to court.*

Ideally, officers said, assistance would come in the form of a multi-agency response team — which does exist in some jurisdictions — that could respond directly to certain domestic violence scenes. A male Region 1 detective said:

*[What's needed are] information dissemination and sharing and open communications lines between these different services . . . [If that happens], these victims and suspects are going to have people coming at them from all angles. The success rate when you do things like this multi-disciplinary angle . . . is much improved.*

But this view was not unanimous. A female Region 3 detective said sometimes victims don't want to have to tell their story to a second person after having already told it to an officer. And she added:

*Our philosophy of community policing . . . is if you have to sit down and talk to a victim for a while, that's what you do. Our officers are pretty good at that. We don't have too many that just want to shuffle the emotional stuff off somewhere else. And that [attitude] lends itself to a lot better service in a community and a lot better rapport with our community.*

**“Frustration [also arises] because there’s plenty of officers that have been involved in [their own] domestic violence situations.”**

— Female Region 1 detective

**“Our philosophy of community policing . . . is if you have to sit down and talk to a victim for a while, that’s what you do. Our officers are pretty good at that. We don’t have too many that just want to shuffle the emotional stuff off somewhere else.”**

— Female Region 3 detective

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

## Officers Feel Too Few Cases Are Prosecuted

The arrest of a domestic violence suspect is only the beginning of the criminal justice process, which in general continues through investigation, prosecution, and sentencing – and perhaps further monitoring by probation officers. However, many Arizona officers express significant dissatisfaction with what they consider a lack of system follow-up. In other words, street-level officers widely feel that when it comes to coping with domestic violence cases they are too often on their own.

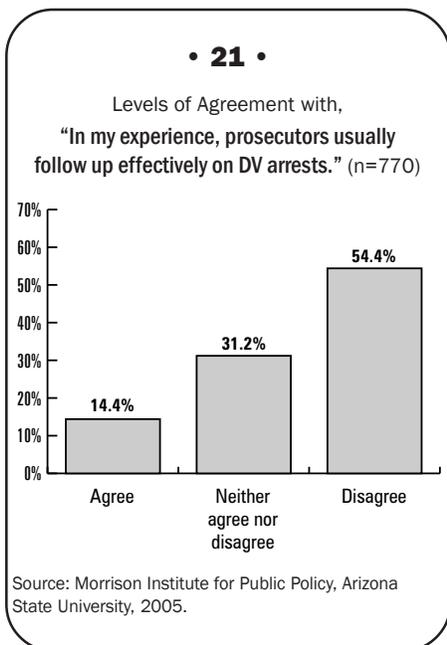
### Prosecutors Particularly Are Viewed as Dropping the Ball

For example, over half of respondents did not see prosecutors as following up effectively on cases. In response to the statement, “In my experience, prosecutors usually follow up effectively on DV arrests,” a minority agreed (14.4%), some 31.2% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 54.4% disagreed (Figure 21).

The negative numbers on this statement show the high level of concern among Arizona officers about prosecution. They perceive the current level of prosecution as too little, too late. This dissatisfaction with another criminal justice branch may be because many busy patrol-level officers, and even detectives, say they simply cannot keep up with what happens to their cases. Or, they may be unaware of circumstances that changed the course of the case. Communication between officers or detectives and prosecutors from this research appears to be much more superficial, and much less often, than those outside the system might expect or assume.

The deluge of critical comments on prosecution, from officers on survey forms and from supervisors in interviews, attests to the depth of feeling on the issue. Complaints about lack of prosecution were the most common among the more than 600 comments written by officers. Many of their and supervisors’ comments criticized the fact that, while they may be required to arrest, prosecutors are not required to prosecute; and resentment that, while officers responding to domestic violence calls are told to take time and effort to collect sufficient evidence to enable prosecutors to proceed even without victim cooperation, such “victimless” prosecutions are, in fact, rare.

One survey respondent wrote that what is needed are, “Prosecutors following the same guidelines as police in court. Mandatory arrest [must lead to] mandatory prosecution, or else our time, money and efforts are a total waste.” Another wrote: “It takes more than six hours to finish a simple DV report and it only takes 30 minutes for the courts to release all the DVs. A serious DV will sometimes take more than 12 hours to be done. County Attorney will just not prosecute.”



## LAYERS OF MEANING:

Other respondents noted that the lack of prosecution has unfortunate impacts on victims and offenders. “Many victims say, ‘I call, but you guys never do anything.’ Victims may need to be aware that as police officers ... we have no control over prosecution after the arrest.” Another officer wrote: “Most offenders have been arrested in the past for DV, and are aware of the system’s failure to follow through with cases. Therefore, there is no fear of conviction.” Clearly without fear of conviction, the deterrence value of arrest becomes nil.

Differences of opinion between police and prosecutors are not new, and are not limited to domestic violence cases. And, as noted below, a number of supervisors in particular cited good relationships with some prosecutors, and expressed sympathy for those struggling with large caseloads that include serious felonies as well as domestic violence misdemeanors. Still, supervisors and line officers alike repeatedly warned that a lack of effective follow-up to arrest is undercutting Arizona’s pro-arrest policy, leaving too many victims vulnerable and offenders unpunished, and spreading cynicism among all parties — notably including themselves.

A female Region 3 detective said:

*It’s very frustrating to do as much as we can in law enforcement and then have the rest of this system not have the funding or the persons to be able to do these things in a manner that we need to do it as a community ... I feel like our officers, we’ve gotten tools, we’ve gotten an education, but we can’t do it by ourselves.*

A male Region 2 detective said:

*It’s just a waste of resources if we’re going to [arrest] and the county attorney is going to say, “Well, we’re not following through with those charges.” Or, a lot of times this person’s been arrested six times, and “Well, we’re just going to lump it all together [into] one misdemeanor charge.” Well, what was the whole point of us doing these six other charges?*

The impact on officers was noted by a male supervisor from Region 5:

*We have training and we tell the officers this is what you need to do. [That] you make arrests and you break the cycle of violence and the woman goes to get counseling and ... blah, blah, blah. But the fact of the matter is that officers make arrests and whether they have evidence or not, the prosecution thing doesn’t occur ... and the officers look at it as, “This [domestic violence] can’t be as big a problem as everybody’s telling me.”*

Still, it’s the police who usually end up having to explain, a male Region 1 detective said:

*We get blamed a lot for nothing happening in the courts. We’ll go out [to a scene] and they’ll say, “Well, I’ve called you guys 15 times and he’s been arrested four of those times and each of those cases got dropped and you’ve got to explain.”*

**“I feel like our officers,  
we’ve gotten tools,  
we’ve gotten an  
education, but we can’t  
do it by ourselves.”**

— Female Region 3 detective

**“... the prosecution  
thing doesn’t  
occur ... and the  
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as big a problem  
as everybody’s  
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— Male Region 5 supervisor

## LAYERS OF MEANING:

**“Mandatory arrest  
[must lead to]  
mandatory prosecution,  
or else our time,  
money and efforts  
are a total waste.”**

— Written officer comment

**“Our city prosecutors  
are extraordinarily  
willing to prosecute ...  
The county’s done a  
better job too in  
recent years...”**

— Male Region 1 detective

A male Region 1 detective said the offenders also take note:

*The worst problem is when it gets to the courts and the judge just says, “Dismissed.” Or the county attorney doesn’t file it. I mean, what is that teaching the [suspect]? “OK, he just smacked the shit out of her. She lost a tooth. The county attorney’s going to turn it down because she’s not showing up in court. Sweet” ... You know, they think they can get away with it.*

### **Some Police and Prosecutors Work Well Together**

Respondents also cited positive relationships with and noteworthy work by prosecutors, especially city personnel who handle misdemeanors. From these comments, when the arrest/prosecution process works well, everyone benefits. A female Region 2 detective called city prosecutors *“phenomenal. They are aggressive [and] innovative.”*

A male Region 4 supervisor stressed the power of effective prosecution:

*When you see the prosecutors, with their tenacity and their desire to make ... the community a better place because they want to work on these things, it keeps your head in the game, too.*

A male Region 1 detective said:

*Our city prosecutors are extraordinarily willing to prosecute... The county’s done a better job too in recent years; [with the county,] I think it’s more a function of volume, and the sheer numbers of crap they have to handle.*

A male Region 5 lieutenant said:

*Our prosecutors do a pretty decent job ... especially if we have a specific case where, like, hey, we want to see this one [done]. Do they have the time to do a really good follow up? No. They’re overburdened like all the other courts and prosecutors are.*

A male Region 4 sergeant said:

*My personal experience is that we’d rather charge somebody with a misdemeanor because they get follow up, as opposed to the county attorney’s office [where the case] gets lost with all the other felonies.*

### **Officers Have Varied Explanations for Prosecutor “Action” (and “Inaction”)**

Supervisors occasionally acknowledged that officers don’t always give prosecutors what they need to proceed effectively. A male Region 1 detective said:

*The prosecutors do the best with what they have, and more often than not, the cases I’ve seen where there’s [police] frustration – “Why didn’t they do anything with this?” – Well, they didn’t have anything to work with ... You can’t prove something out of nothing.*

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## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

A male captain from Region 4 said:

*One of the problems [is that] on a misdemeanor case, the officers are in a hurry, and they don't gather the kind of evidence that the prosecutor needs to support a prosecution in the face of a suddenly uncooperative victim.*

Supervisors also said ineffective prosecution can arise from prosecutors' offices having to cope with inexperienced attorneys and high turnover rates.

A male Region 1 lieutenant said:

*Because prosecuting DV is at the bottom rung, an entry-level [prosecutor] starts there, and you get a lot of turnover. By the time you get this guy educated or this girl educated, they've moved on . . . and they're not doing DV any more.*

A male Region 1 detective said:

*[With] our county attorneys, there's been such a huge turnover rate that once we get an attorney on board and kind of educate that attorney . . . that attorney is going to go to the dark side, as we say, [and] become a defense attorney.*

A female Region 1 detective said:

*In my seven years here, I've probably seen nine prosecutors go through [the local court] at least. And every time they step in there, they're green, so you lose a lot of cases because going to trial scares a lot of them. And I've had them call me, "Well, we're going to drop this case." I said, "No, we're not."*

Supervisors repeatedly said that prosecutors' reluctance to pursue domestic violence cases stems from their desire to keep their conviction percentage as high as possible. A male lieutenant in Region 5 said:

*[State law] says I don't need victim cooperation to make the arrest. But when it comes down to prosecuting, prosecutors feel they have to have the victim cooperation . . . I wish that prosecutors would take more of a chance, [but] they're evaluated on their conviction rate. And so they don't want to take anything unless it's a sure bet.*

In response to reluctant prosecutors, a male Region 5 sergeant said, officers must be persistent:

*The only relief we really get from the prosecutors is [when] they get tired of seeing the same [suspects] over and over and so does the judge. And so . . . then they tend to prosecute them harder and harder.*

A male Region 1 detective noted that differences between officers and prosecutors are hardly rare:

*It's frustrating to us, and I know they complain about us, and you know, we complain about them. That's just the nature of the business we're in.*

**“[State law] says I don't need victim cooperation to make the arrest. But when it comes down to prosecuting, prosecutors feel they have to have the victim cooperation...”**

— Male Region 5 lieutenant

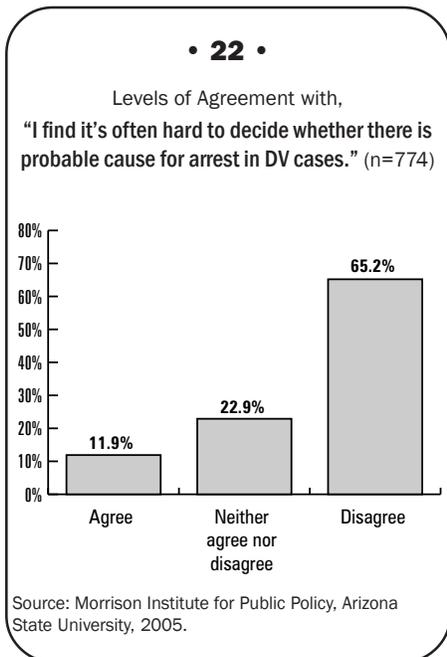
**“It's frustrating to us, and I know they complain about us, and you know, we complain about them. That's just the nature of the business we're in.”**

— Male Region 1 detective

## LAYERS OF MEANING:

## Officers Want More Discretion in DV Cases

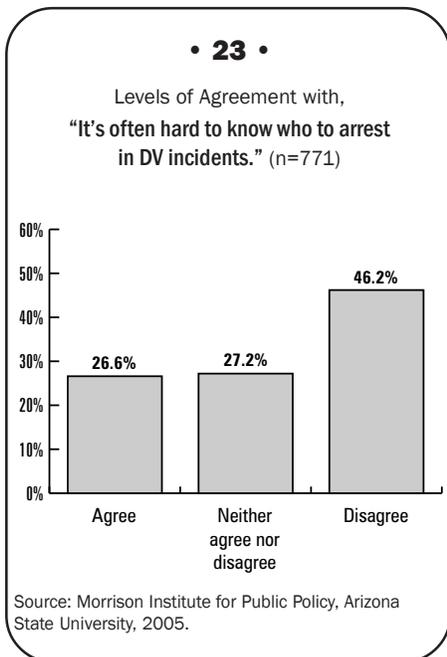
Arizona officers say domestic violence calls are complex, sometimes dangerous, and often draining assignments that present challenges not found in other tasks. They also believe they are up to the job. They say they understand the dynamics of family conflicts and would do an even better job given more discretion. They firmly reject suggestions for more guidelines and are split over the value of more domestic violence training.



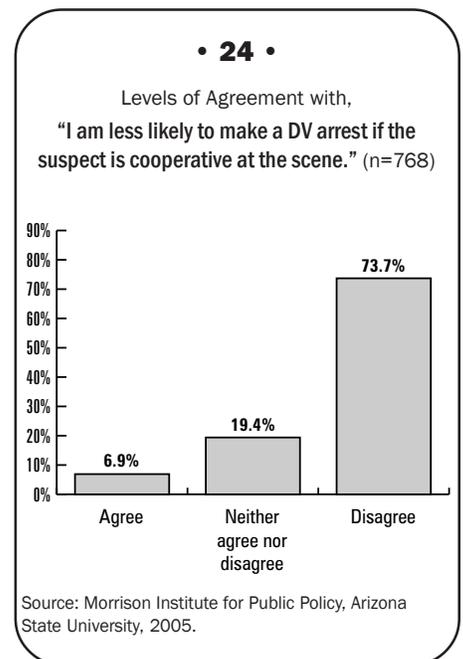
### Officers Report Confidence in Their Ability to Sort Out the Scene

Despite the difficulties presented by domestic violence calls, most officers think they know when an arrest should be made. That is, they are confident in their ability to determine if there’s sufficient “probable cause” to believe a crime has been committed and a certain individual committed it – the legal standard for arrest. Nearly two-thirds of respondents disagreed that they struggle to sort out the scenes they encounter. In response to the statement, “I find it’s often hard to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases,” 65.2% of officers disagreed and only 11.9% agreed (Figure 22). Not surprisingly, officers with more years of service were even more confident in their judgments than the others.

Knowing who to arrest was trickier, but still nearly half of officers reported little difficulty when the statement was, “It’s often hard to know who to arrest in DV incidents,” with 46.2% disagreeing and 26.6% agreeing (Figure 23).



Nor, officers said, are they easily led astray at domestic violence scenes by the demeanor of either suspects or victims. Researchers have pointed out that batterers can sometimes evade arrest by appearing calm, cooperative and – of course – innocent to arriving officers. Victims, meanwhile, may be driven by their trauma, fear, and anger to be uncooperative with and even hostile to police; this may especially be true if the victim is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. However, presented with the statement, “I am less likely to make a DV arrest if the suspect is cooperative at the scene,” 73.7% of Arizona officers disagreed (Figure 24).



## LAYERS OF MEANING:

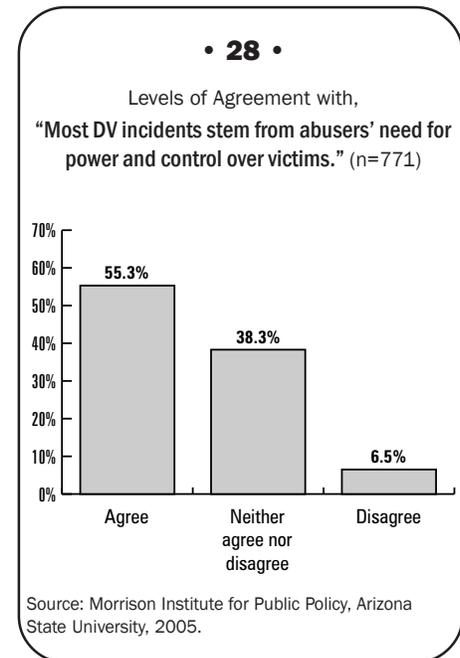
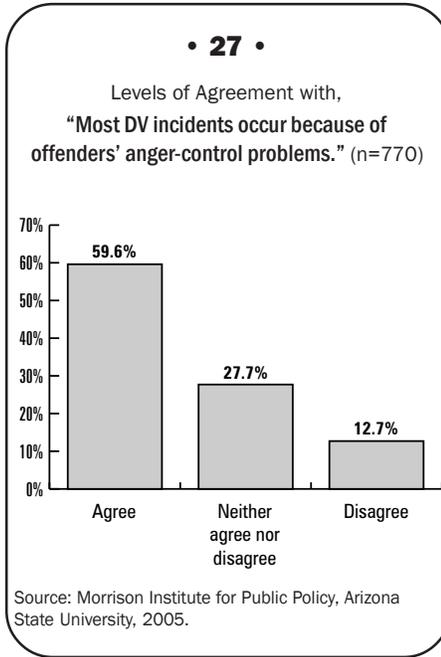
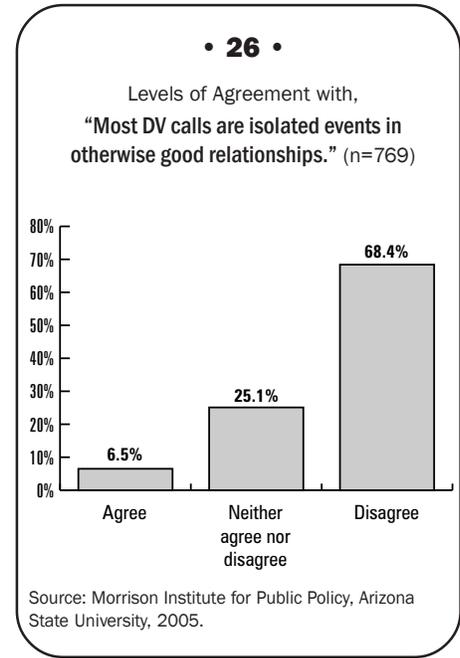
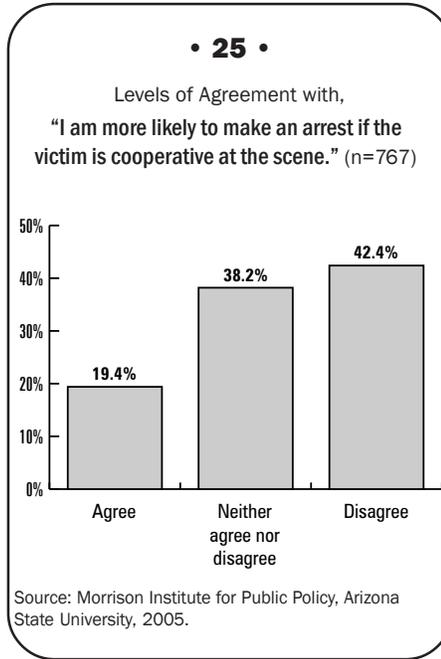
Officers were more split in describing their reactions to the behavior of victims — perhaps reflecting the ambivalence many officers feel toward victims. In response to the statement, “I am more likely to make an arrest if the victim is cooperative at the scene,” 42.4% disagreed, 38.2% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 19.4% agreed (Figure 25).

**Officers Say They See the Many Facets of Domestic Violence**

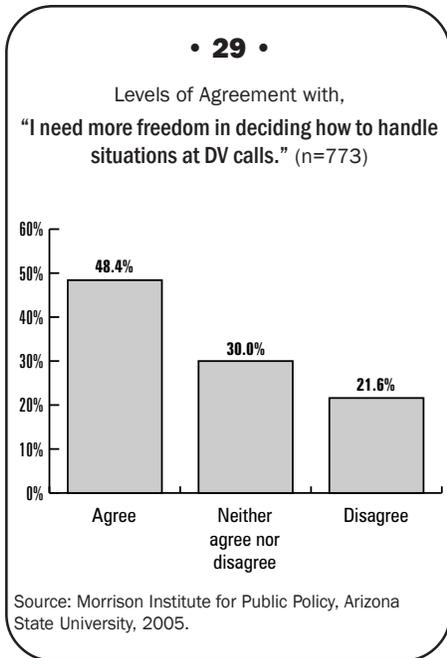
Recent scholarship on domestic violence has presented incidents as part of an extended pattern of behavior by an abuser who’s driven to dominate and control his or her intimate partner (Buzawa and Buzawa 2003: 16). According to the survey, most Arizona officers appear to accept this analysis. In response to the statement, “Most DV calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships,” 68.4% disagreed and only 6.5% agreed (Figure 26). Non-white officers were more likely to agree with the statement.

However, officers have not completely abandoned the “excessive anger” explanation in favor of the “power and control” one. Instead, they seem to accept both outlooks, because they say they see both at domestic violence scenes. In response to the statement “Most DV incidents occur because of offenders’ anger-control problems,” 59.6% agreed and only 12.7% disagreed (Figure 27).

And in response to the statement, “Most DV incidents stem from abusers’ need for power and control over victims;” a similar percentage — 55.3% — agreed and 6.5% disagreed (Figure 28). Female officers were more likely to agree with the statement, as were non-white officers.



**LAYERS OF MEANING:**



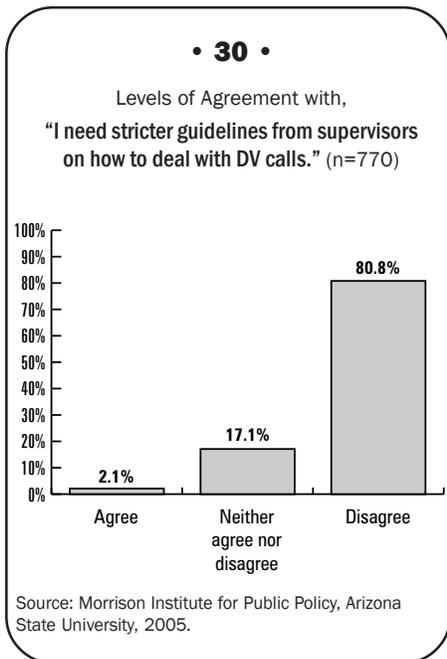
Some researchers may see these explanations as different, making it seem impossible that “most” domestic violence incidents could be traced to two roots. But many Arizona officers do not appear to see them as incompatible; indeed, 38.6% agreed with both statements.

**The Call for More Officer Discretion**

Regardless of the sources of domestic violence, it’s clear that officers believe that successfully dealing with it requires them to make difficult decisions in complex, fast-moving circumstances. This may be one reason why nearly half — 48.4% — agreed with the statement “I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls,” and only 21.6% disagreed (Figure 29). Support for this was stronger among male officers, those in urban areas, and those who had responded to larger numbers of calls in the past year (150+).

In keeping with that view, an overwhelming majority of officers rejected stricter guidelines. Less than 3% of respondents agreed that they needed, “...stricter guidelines from supervisors on how to deal with DV calls (Figure 30). Indeed, 89.8% of those who said they did *not* want more freedom also said they did not want stricter guidelines.

Opposition to stricter guidelines was again stronger among men, those in urban areas, and those who had responded to larger numbers of calls in the last year (150+). It was also stronger among newer officers — those with less than 3.5 years in law enforcement.



The issue of discretion elicited more than 50 written comments. One officer wrote, “I understand the spirit of the law, but many times by making an arrest we prevent that person/family to ever call 911 again for fear of someone being arrested for minor things.” Another wrote, “[What would help] is more leniency in the law/policy on how officers must handle DV calls. An arrest doesn’t always solve the problem, especially when prosecutors do not prosecute suspects when victims do not want to cooperate.”

A third officer asked for: A bit more latitude in the ability to make an arrest. For example, sometimes we respond to a DV situation in which, ‘by law,’ we would be required to make an arrest. Sometimes we do that (make the arrest) only because we are required to – not necessarily because we think that would be the best solution. If officers felt more comfortable to make decisions about resolutions without fear of possible liability – perhaps more DVs would be quickly and efficiently resolved.

Only one respondent wrote against officer discretion: “85% of DV murder victims are killed after leaving their partner; there should not be any discretion in making decisions on making arrests ... Mandatory arrest works well.”

**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

Supervisors were in general less supportive of giving first responders more discretion. A lieutenant in Region 5 saw lack of discretion as a useful tool for the officer in the field:

*In a way, it's also a bit easier for the officer, because it does take the discretion away from them, in the sense that . . . the person is no longer directly angry at the officer, there's like, "Look, you know what, I don't have a choice. I'm really sorry." And it gives us a way to diffuse the situation, so that helps.*

And a sergeant in Region 5 noted that current rules made a supervisor's job easier:

*But the arrest law, it's a clear-cut thing, so if the officer calls me and says "This happened." [I say] "Well then, you shall go ahead and arrest that party based on the information you have given me." And so it makes it kind of easy for me as a supervisor, too, to deal with DVs.*

Some supervisors, however, did support greater officer discretion. A male detective in Region 2, for example, remarked on the value of experience in helping officers "read" the situation:

*And I think we need that [discretion] . . . because I don't think you have anything better in the field than a patrol officer that's been on the force for awhile . . . that knows what he's looking at and has a good feel for what he sees.*

In keeping with some of the written responses, a female supervisor in Region 2 summarized the dilemma officers can face at domestic violence scenes:

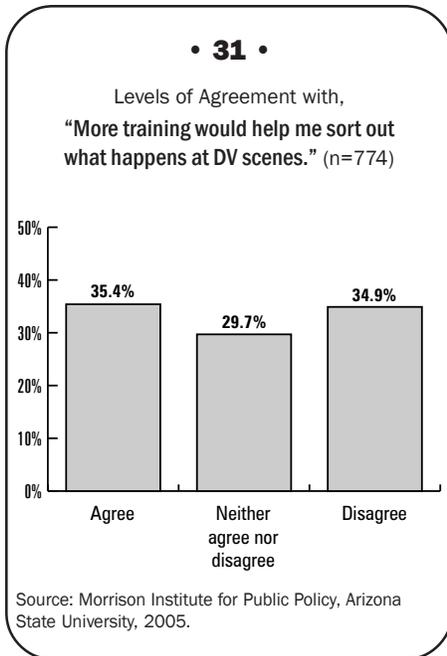
*. . . if there's two aggressors or if there's situations that are very minor that you think, okay, somebody lost their temper here a little bit, a mistake was made, poor judgment was used, . . . do we really need to take it to [the arrest] level? Well, the law says we do. And so, I think that's where some of the frustration comes in, because [officers] really don't feel taking this individual to jail is going to resolve anything. Somebody had too much to drink, somebody lost their temper, somebody took some frustration out, and somebody got hurt because of it. It wasn't their intent. So, you know, when officers go there, they're looking at intent, they're looking at the victims involved, they're looking at the whole scenario. But the way the statute is written, sometimes they don't have a choice, even if it's a minor infraction. Technically, if it's domestic violence, then they have to [arrest].*

### **More Domestic Violence Training Is Not a Very Attractive Possibility**

Many of the issues discussed in this study deal with topics covered in domestic violence training for Arizona officers, particularly the requirements of Arizona law and the understanding of "victimology." Yet exactly how much training officers receive differs across the state. Wide variations in the number of trainings attended, as reported by survey respondents, and in the time reported since their last training surface in these data. Some of this variation is likely explained by differences among respondents as to what

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## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**



**“... I don’t think you have anything better in the field than a patrol officer that’s been on the force for awhile...”**

— Male Region 2 detective

they counted as “training.” The only mandatory training is 14 hours — out of 585 hours — at the police academy, before any direct experience in the field.

Opinions were mixed among survey respondents about the value of further domestic violence training. In response to the statement, “More training would help me sort out what happens at DV scenes,” 35.4% agreed, but almost as many (34.9%) disagreed (Figure 31). Among those significantly more likely to agree were female officers, those outside of major urban areas, those who had been on fewer domestic violence calls in the last year, and those with less than 3.5 years or more than 12 years in law enforcement. There was no relationship between agreement with this statement and the number of domestic violence trainings received in Arizona or time since the last training.

Several supervisors who supported training saw its main utility in teaching officers about the law, arrest procedures, and evidence gathering, rather than about the nature of domestic violence. For instance, a male supervisor in Region 4 said:

*I think every one of us that’s been a cop for more than about 20 minutes has probably seen a woman that’s been abused, a man that’s been abused, a child that’s been abused — you don’t need to show us that again. ... We don’t need to have them tell us their sad story because we’ve seen it. Tell us why the law is the way it is, help us understand what it truly means. ... When it says, if this is the case, you must do this ...*

A male lieutenant in Region 5 said:

*[Useful training would include] something about safety at DVs, making an arrest, how to elicit information from a victim while you are there doing the investigation. Interrogation techniques, and things like that and interpersonal skills.*

But further statistical analysis of survey responses suggests that more training on understanding the ins and outs of domestic violence might also show results. As would be expected, the longer officers reported working in law enforcement, the more domestic violence training sessions they were likely to have attended. Still, there were plenty of exceptions, as Table 8 shows.

The association between the number of sessions and certain survey statements was analyzed while controlling for years in law enforcement. The results showed that — regardless of years in service — the more training sessions respondents reported attending, the more likely they were to agree with the statement: “I think DV offenders should be arrested even when victims don’t want it,” which arguably is the central tenet of the current pro-arrest approach to domestic violence and still the approach favored most by advocates and domestic violence experts. Officers with more training experience also were less likely to agree with statements which most

## LAYERS OF MEANING:

researchers now say reflect an erroneous approach, including:

- Too many DV calls are for only verbal family arguments.
- Police should arrest in DV cases only when there is clear evidence of injury.
- DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police.
- Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't.
- Most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship.

**Table 8: Cross-tabulation of Domestic Violence Training Sessions Reported by Years in Law Enforcement (N=715)**

DV Training Sessions		Years in Law Enforcement				Total
		3.5 Years and Less	3.6 - 6.5 Years	6.6 - 12 Years	More than 12 Years	
0-1 Sessions	Count	99	58	51	22	230
	%	40.0%	25.2%	22.2%	9.6%	100.0%
2-3 Sessions	Count	65	59	72	53	249
	%	26.1%	23.7%	28.9%	21.3%	100.0%
4 or More Sessions	Count	28	40	75	93	236
	%	11.9%	16.9%	31.8%	39.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	192	157	198	168	715
	%	26.9%	22.0%	27.7%	23.5%	100.0%

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2005.

These results suggest that — despite most officers’ lukewarm support for training and their confidence in their own knowledge and abilities — repeat training does have a positive effect on certain key understandings of domestic violence issues. However, given that much training is voluntary and that these data do not tell us what type of training was involved, it could be that those who develop the better understanding of domestic violence are more likely to go on training courses or be more interested in domestic violence. Training may be a consequence of understanding or interest, not a cause of it.

**Officers Voice Frustration with Many Domestic Violence Issues**

In sum, Arizona officers’ frustration with domestic violence comes from many sources. They include:

- restrictions that current law and policy place on officers’ discretion
- the high number of repeat calls
- the many calls that end up being “verbal only” disputes
- the frequency with which victims refuse to prosecute or leave an abusive relationship
- the perceived lack of effective follow-up by prosecutors and judges
- the perceived lack of emergency support for victims from social service agencies.<sup>a</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate how potent and universal these concerns are among Arizona law enforcement officers. Even the best-intentioned of them seem to be struggling against cynicism and a draining sense of futility.

a. In 2003, 9,473 women and children received services in Arizona’s domestic violence shelters; only one-third of those who requested shelter were able to be accommodated, according to the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

# Conclusions and Next Steps

Arizona law enforcement officers take domestic violence seriously, even if they don't always appreciate its nuances. They see the far-reaching effects of domestic violence and are trying to do what is asked of them in the face of a high-volume, high-stress, high-frustration issue that sometimes offends their personal sense of right and wrong. Officers welcomed the opportunity to tell those outside law enforcement what they think. They did not hold back.

Their dedication, frustration, isolation, indignation, resignation, and misperceptions jump off the page. Their words and responses reveal the tension between the concrete nature of police work and the psychological nature of domestic violence.

Their participation in this study provides important input into developing policies that can do more to reduce and prevent domestic violence. Their opinions showed:

## **Agreement on a Law Enforcement Role in a Serious Issue**

- The vast majority of Arizona officers consider domestic violence to be a serious, underreported problem that generates other crime and violence and contributes to a variety of costly issues for families, communities, and employers — all residents in fact.

## **No “Lockstep” Opinion about Domestic Violence**

- The assumption that police officers will almost always hold the same opinions about issues is unfounded. Officers do not think or act in lockstep, but draw diverse meanings and conclusions from their common experience.

## **Policy Change Brought Community Change**

- Nearly all officers accept the view of domestic violence as a “real crime” that warrants police intervention. Many related efforts over the past 20 years have changed how most officers think and work.

## **Arrest Alone Has Disappointed as a Deterrent**

- Much remains to be done beyond a pro-arrest policy. Across the state, officers do not agree that Arizona's pro-arrest policy, on its own, can be effective in reducing domestic violence.

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## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

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**Handling Victims is a Conundrum**

- Victims' actions and attitudes often confound officers who sympathize with their plight yet question why victims so often remain in abusive relationships and fail to follow through with prosecution of abusers.

**An Unfulfilled Promise as yet in Prosecution**

- Officers recognize the burdens faced by overworked prosecutors, yet voice frustration with what they perceive to be a lack of follow up. Officers feel this lessens the impact of arrest, discourages victims, emboldens batterers, and spreads cynicism among officers themselves.

**Officers Are Looking for More Choices at the Scene**

- Most officers want more discretion and fewer guidelines from supervisors about how to handle domestic violence calls.

**Increase and Improve Training for Officers**

- Officers are split over whether more training is needed, but evidence suggests that additional training specifically geared to the outlooks and realities of law enforcement officers is warranted, particularly those with relatively short service in law enforcement.

**Stopping the Downward Spiral**

- Officers' frustration reflects a swamped criminal justice system caught in a downward spiral of expectation, action, and outcome. Based on their experience with too many uncooperative victims and arrests that are not followed by timely prosecution, many officers seem to end up resigned to the conclusion that intervening at a domestic violence scene will at best protect the victim for that one night. Over time, this pessimism may erode officers' appreciation of victims' needs, rendering officers less sympathetic and less meticulous in gathering the evidence necessary for effective prosecution. As a consequence, prosecutors may reject cases they say are ill-prepared; victims lose faith in the system, and some stop calling 911; and offenders learn there may be no consequences for their actions.

Officers stress the devastating effects of domestic violence on families and neighborhoods. They recognize that it is a problem that makes other community issues worse. And they want to do their part. But officers also feel caught between a number of conflicting forces and isolated in their efforts. As a result, they fear they may not be doing the best for victims or ensuring that offenders are held accountable.

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**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

Domestic violence is, of course, far from a new problem. In Arizona, many public officials, law enforcement officers, advocates, and others have been working for years to enhance victim safety and offender accountability, and they continue to pursue vitally important projects in this area. *Layers of Meaning's* findings confirm the significance of these efforts, and suggest some useful next steps in furthering the state's campaign to prevent and reduce domestic violence:

- **Promote Domestic Violence Training for Officers.**

The data in this study suggest that, perhaps surprisingly, newer officers are most in need of training, especially in understanding the psychological dynamics that drive victim attitudes and behavior. They — as well as older officers — could also benefit from a deeper appreciation of the frequently long-term demands of domestic violence enforcement — that repeat calls are commonplace, and should be accepted as an opportunity to establish a better rapport with the victim and a stronger case against the abuser. The data also suggest that officers could use further training in effective problem-solving at domestic violence scenes, which includes securing the scene, dealing with the offender (present or not), attending to the victim and witnesses, and gathering evidence. Such training could help raise officers' expectations of their role beyond just keeping the victim safe for one more night.

Domestic violence training in Arizona comes in many forms, from the full curriculum developed by AZPOST to squad room briefings by supervisors and detectives. But, as previous research has noted, no systematic compilation of the various training approaches nor evaluation of their efficacy has been made. There is a need to know what training works, for which officers, at which points in their service.

- **Strengthen Community Efforts to Prevent Domestic Violence.**

Efforts to combat domestic violence must start well before a 911 call. Everyone in Arizona has a stake in preventing and reducing domestic violence because of its connections to other crime, violence, and social dysfunction. Many communities already are making strong efforts in such areas as education, shelters, counseling, and other victim services. But this study suggests that more should be done to emphasize the links between the crime of domestic violence and its broader social antecedents and consequences; the concern is that too many Arizonans might now believe that calling 911 is a sufficient response to domestic violence, while the majority of officers in *Layers of Meaning* say that it is only one necessary element to successfully combating this pervasive social ill.

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

- **Strengthen Arizona’s Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence.**

Communities throughout Arizona are busy pursuing varying approaches to a more efficient criminal justice response, including special domestic violence courts, family advocacy centers and victim-assistance staff. These are promising initiatives, but have yet to be examined to determine how well they work or even how best their performance can be measured. Arizona’s pro-arrest laws and policies have primarily altered the operation of law enforcement – only one component of the state’s criminal justice system. To be truly effective, the pro-arrest approach would ideally be followed by the appropriate statewide “pro-prosecution” initiative and by suitable sentencing and community supervision of offenders. Existing groups, including the Committee on the Impact of Domestic Violence and the Courts (CIDVC), are making valuable contributions to this end. A further key element would be realigning the system to make it more supportive of victims, in order to keep them involved in prosecution.

- **Map Key Domestic Violence Decision Points.**

Domestic violence cases in Arizona must pass through numerous key decision points (arrest, detective follow up, submission for prosecution, etc.) across several separate bureaucracies. This might contribute to the fact that the state still lacks a reliable means of tracking cases along these points, from 911 call to final disposition. Creating a case-tracking mechanism – which ideally could evolve into a case-management system – would enable policy makers to accurately assess the magnitude and nature of Arizona’s domestic violence problem, pinpoint bottlenecks in the criminal justice system, and ensure greater overall system accountability.

- **Review How Prosecution Functions as Part of the Overall System.**

Now that the viewpoints of Arizona’s domestic violence victims and law enforcement officers have been examined, it is important to consider the perspective of prosecutors. The data in *Layers of Meaning* suggest that Arizona’s pro-arrest approach has shifted discretion in domestic violence enforcement from law enforcement officers to prosecutors. At the least, officers and prosecutors must establish more reliable means of sharing information, resources, and strategies in domestic violence enforcement. At best, prosecutors and the courts should consider upgrading their treatment of even misdemeanor domestic violence – the typical violation – as a serious offense that generates other crime and otherwise has extensive negative impacts on communities. This is another area in which approaches currently being tried by police and prosecutors, and courts in various Arizona communities might offer examples of best practices.

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## LAYERS OF MEANING:

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The findings in this study likely confirm what many in law enforcement and domestic violence work already know. For others, however, the results open a window on an issue that, though quite widespread, is often hidden and frequently perceived as someone else's problem. For all Arizonans – public institutions, private employers, neighborhood groups, schools, faith-based organizations – these findings should be a wake up call: Domestic violence is everyone's problem. Arizona's police officers and sheriff's deputies form the state's front line, but it is an assignment impossible to do alone. By strengthening prevention efforts, enhancing training, and helping the criminal justice system function better as a system, Arizonans can reduce debilitating levels of frustration and ensure that "first responder" does not mean "only responder."

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**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

# Appendix

## Methodology

One of the main aims of this study was to gather information from Arizona's police officers both quantitatively, through a widely distributed opinion survey, and qualitatively, by individual in-depth interviews with key informants. Another goal was to ensure that answers were candid and represented a broad array of experience and opinion.

Advice from experts in criminal justice research, local police supervisors, and members of Morrison Institute's advisory group warned of the difficulties of achieving these goals without personal contact with each targeted police department, on-site administration of the survey, and a visit to each interviewee at his or her office. In addition, a random sample survey of officers in Arizona was ruled out because of logistical difficulties and the expectation that surveying via mail would produce a low response rate.

The study focused on officers in Arizona's 87 local general-purpose law-enforcement agencies — police departments and sheriff's offices — and did not include Native American tribal police, special agencies (those serving universities, state agencies, railroads, etc.), the statewide Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS), or several one- or two-person operations in small towns (marshals and constables). Most were excluded because their officers seldom deal with domestic violence calls; Native American officers were omitted because it was feared that tribes' varying laws and policies would unduly complicate efforts to blend their data with that from the rest of the state. This omission in no way discounts the problem of domestic violence on reservations; indeed, indications from current research are that domestic violence among Native Americans in Arizona is clearly deserving of separate study (National Indian Justice Center. 1993; Murphy 1998).

A pilot survey was administered and an interview conducted with a police supervisor in March 2005, at an agency in southern Arizona, to test survey administration, questionnaire wording, and the quality of results. A pilot interview was also conducted in northern Arizona. The survey instrument was revised slightly, vetted by domestic violence detectives, and final interview questions developed in April and May 2005. A target of 750 completed surveys and 30 interviews was agreed to by the study's advisory panel, based on the distribution of frontline officers across regions and agency size, and a protocol for administration was developed.

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### LAYERS OF MEANING:

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA

An analysis of AZPOST data showed that 80% of potential target officers worked for Maricopa or Pima County located police agencies. In order to have a broader representation of the state, 5 study regions were targeted, and police agencies contacted in each region to maximize a geographically disbursed distribution. The result was a survey response comprising 66% percent from Maricopa or Pima county police agencies and 38% from the balance of the state (see Table 4). It was decided to visit as many and varied police agencies in the state as possible in the time available. The current study gathered data from 31 law enforcement agencies; 8 in Region 1, 4 in Region 2; 7 in Region 3; 5 in region 4; and 7 in Region 5. A listing of all law enforcement officers in Arizona was obtained from AZPOST to indicate the work locations of potential target agencies and the size of the agencies. An attempt was made to include not only agencies throughout the state but also a mix of large and small agencies and police departments and county sheriff's offices. The largest police agency in each region was included.

All 31 agencies contacted agreed to take part in the study. Each agency chosen was visited by researchers, who provided instructions, questionnaires and return-mail envelopes to agency administrators. The administrators then distributed the questionnaires – each in its own sealable envelope – and collected the responses. At 13 agencies – including all of the state's largest – most or all questionnaires were administered directly to officers by researchers. All 31 interviews were in-person, one-on-one sessions.

Given this was not a random sample survey, the quantitative data analysis presented uses simple descriptive and exploratory statistical techniques. The tests used to report statistical significance are non-parametric and, therefore, do not make assumptions about the underlying population from which the sample was constructed. The disadvantage of this approach is that results tend to be less sensitive than parametric equivalents and may miss some differences between groups. However, 49 of 256 items tested were significant using the Mann-Whitney test for differences between two independent groups (males and females, for example) and the Kruskal-Wallis test for three or more groups (the five study regions, for example), and the 32 continuous variables of statements about domestic violence. These tests are the non-parametric equivalent of independent-samples t-test (Mann-Whitney) and one-way between-groups ANOVA (Kruskal-Wallis).

Transcribed interview data were coded using QSR-N6 software for qualitative data analysis. The coding scheme was organized into 6 major areas corresponding to the issues focused on in the survey instrument: arrest process and decision; attitude to victims; comments about offenders; the police role in domestic violence, the criminal justice system response; and other issues. Each area was sub-coded; for example, the police role in

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## **LAYERS OF MEANING:**

domestic violence area was sub-coded into: attitude to victims, danger of DV, relationships to DV organizations, general view of DV cases, dedicated DV staff, agency protocols, workload, discretion, experience with DV, police personalities, rural issues, emotional response to DV, counseling role, private vs. police role in DV, evidence gathering, and frustration. In total, nearly 100 sub-codes were created. Each transcribed interview was coded for as many codes as applied. The codes were used to analyze content and to produce the extracts included above. The extracts come directly from the transcribed interviews with only small changes and omissions made to wording for the sake of readability.

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**LAYERS OF MEANING:****DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA**

# Survey Instrument



## Law Enforcement Survey on Domestic Violence Incidents

Please take a few moments to complete the items below. All answers and comments are completely confidential. No individuals or departments will be identified in reports. Your opinion counts.

How many years in total have you worked in law enforcement? \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how many domestic violence training sessions have you attended in Arizona? \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how long ago was your last training on domestic violence issues? \_\_\_\_\_  
years months

Have you ever responded to a domestic violence (DV) call?  Yes  No

Approximately how many DV calls have you responded to in the last year? \_\_\_\_\_

Does your job involve any special domestic violence duties?  Yes  No

If Yes, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Based on your experience and opinion, please check your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am more likely to be injured during a DV call than in a violence call involving strangers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too many DV calls are for only verbal family arguments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's often best to arrest both parties in DV calls.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substance abuse by the victim is a primary cause of DV.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police should arrest in DV cases only when there is clear evidence of injury.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DV calls take too much of officers' time and effort.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In my experience, prosecutors usually follow up effectively on DV arrests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DV victims are often as responsible for the incident as the person arrested.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's often hard to know who to arrest in DV incidents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am less likely to make a DV arrest if the suspect is cooperative at the scene.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
An arrest policy is the best approach to DV calls.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most DV incidents occur because of offenders' anger-control problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Please turn page over and complete the items on the other side ➡

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A major problem with DV is that there are so many repeat cases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substance abuse by the suspect is a primary cause of DV.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most DV calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I need stricter guidelines from supervisors on how to deal with DV calls.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am more likely to make DV arrests when children are witnesses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There should be a limit on how many times I respond to DV calls from the same victim at the same address.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think DV offenders should be arrested even when the victims don't want it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More training would help me sort out what happens at DV scenes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find it's often hard to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DV victims often exaggerate the amount of violence involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most DV incidents stem from abusers' need for power and control over victims.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental health problems are a major contributor to DV incidents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most DV victims are receptive to interventions by law enforcement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am more likely to make an arrest if the victim is cooperative at the scene.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DV is a significant problem in the community I serve.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What would help you in dealing with domestic violence calls?

Please add any other comments or thoughts about your experience with domestic violence calls.

Does your agency have a domestic violence unit?  Yes  No  Don't know

Finally, for statistical purposes, please indicate the following:

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ Rank: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender  Male  Female Age \_\_\_\_\_ Race/Ethnicity  White  African-American  Hispanic  Asian  Native American  Other \_\_\_\_\_

For further information about this survey, please contact Richard Toon, Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 480•965•4525 or richard.toon@asu.edu. Morrison Institute for Public Policy is an independent, nonpartisan public policy research unit in the School of Public Affairs, College of Public Programs.

**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA**

**Table 9: Summary of Survey Responses by 5-point Scale**

Statement		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I am more likely to be injured during a DV call than in a violence call involving strangers.	Count	172	358	205	35	2	772
	%	22.3%	46.4%	26.6%	4.5%	0.3%	100.0%
Too many DV calls are for only verbal family arguments.	Count	165	350	172	82	3	772
	%	21.4%	45.3%	22.3%	10.6%	0.4%	100.0%
I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls.	Count	148	226	232	147	20	773
	%	19.1%	29.2%	30.0%	19.0%	2.6%	100.0%
It's often best to arrest both parties in DV calls.	Count	18	72	267	347	71	775
	%	2.3%	9.3%	34.5%	44.8%	9.2%	100.0%
Substance abuse by the victim is a primary cause of DV.	Count	74	173	237	232	52	768
	%	9.6%	22.5%	30.9%	30.2%	6.8%	100.0%
Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents.	Count	137	311	142	160	21	771
	%	17.8%	40.3%	18.4%	20.8%	2.7%	100.0%
Police should arrest in DV cases only when there is clear evidence of injury.	Count	101	221	133	269	50	774
	%	13.0%	28.6%	17.2%	34.8%	6.5%	100.0%
DV calls take too much of officers' time and effort.	Count	81	149	217	263	65	775
	%	10.5%	19.2%	28.0%	33.9%	8.4%	100.0%
DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police.	Count	14	33	126	393	208	774
	%	1.8%	4.3%	16.3%	50.8%	26.9%	100.0%
In my experience, prosecutors usually follow up effectively on DV arrests.	Count	14	97	240	283	136	770
	%	1.8%	12.6%	31.2%	36.8%	17.7%	100.0%
DV victims are often as responsible for the incident as the person arrested.	Count	51	229	271	191	30	772
	%	6.6%	29.7%	35.1%	24.7%	3.9%	100.0%
It's often hard to know who to arrest in DV incidents.	Count	16	189	210	323	33	771
	%	2.1%	24.5%	27.2%	41.9%	4.3%	100.0%
I am less likely to make a DV arrest if the suspect is cooperative at the scene.	Count	9	44	149	468	98	768
	%	1.2%	5.7%	19.4%	60.9%	12.8%	100.0%
An arrest policy is the best approach to DV calls.	Count	37	208	247	224	60	776
	%	4.8%	26.8%	31.8%	28.9%	7.7%	100.0%
Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't.	Count	230	326	113	86	19	774
	%	29.7%	42.1%	14.6%	11.1%	2.5%	100.0%
Most DV incidents occur because of offenders' anger-control problems.	Count	110	349	213	90	8	770
	%	14.3%	45.3%	27.7%	11.7%	1.0%	100.0%
A major problem with DV is that there are so many repeat cases.	Count	224	452	73	22	3	774
	%	28.9%	58.4%	9.4%	2.8%	0.4%	100.0%
Substance abuse by the suspect is a primary cause of DV.	Count	114	334	232	81	8	769
	%	14.8%	43.4%	30.2%	10.5%	1.0%	100.0%
Most DV calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships.	Count	4	46	193	421	105	769
	%	0.5%	6.0%	25.1%	54.7%	13.7%	100.0%
I need stricter guidelines from supervisors on how to deal with DV calls.	Count	4	12	132	420	202	770
	%	0.5%	1.6%	17.1%	54.5%	26.2%	100.0%
I am more likely to make DV arrests when children are witnesses.	Count	23	161	325	231	28	768
	%	3.0%	21.0%	42.3%	30.1%	3.6%	100.0%
There should be a limit on how many times I respond to DV calls from the same victim at the same address.	Count	62	111	138	336	126	773
	%	8.0%	14.4%	17.9%	43.5%	16.3%	100.0%
I think DV offenders should be arrested even when victims don't want it.	Count	185	372	94	78	46	775
	%	23.9%	48.0%	12.1%	10.1%	5.9%	100.0%
More training would help me sort out what happens at DV scenes.	Count	44	230	230	208	62	774
	%	5.7%	29.7%	29.7%	26.9%	8.0%	100.0%
I find it's often hard to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases.	Count	8	84	177	416	89	774
	%	1.0%	10.9%	22.9%	53.7%	11.5%	100.0%
DV victims often exaggerate the amount of violence involved.	Count	51	263	267	181	13	775
	%	6.6%	33.9%	34.5%	23.4%	1.7%	100.0%
Most DV incidents stem from abusers' need for power and control over victims.	Count	90	336	295	47	3	771
	%	11.7%	43.6%	38.3%	6.1%	0.4%	100.0%
Mental health problems are a major contributor to DV incidents.	Count	11	138	402	207	14	772
	%	1.4%	17.9%	52.1%	26.8%	1.8%	100.0%
Most DV victims are receptive to interventions by law enforcement.	Count	7	146	230	323	64	770
	%	0.9%	19.0%	29.9%	41.9%	8.3%	100.0%
I am more likely to make an arrest if the victim is cooperative at the scene.	Count	13	136	293	283	42	767
	%	1.7%	17.7%	38.2%	36.9%	5.5%	100.0%
Most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship.	Count	130	354	162	99	25	770
	%	16.9%	46.0%	21.0%	12.9%	3.2%	100.0%
DV is a significant problem in the community I serve.	Count	245	376	111	35	5	772
	%	31.7%	48.7%	14.4%	4.5%	0.6%	100.0%

**LAYERS OF MEANING:****DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA**

**Table 10: Statements Showing Statistically Significant Results by Selected Variables**

Statement	Mann-Whitney Test (categories)			Kruskal-Wallis Test (# of categories)				
	Gender (Male/Female)	Ethnicity (White/Non-white)	Urban (Urban/Non-urban)	Region (5)	Years in Law Enforcement (4)	Total DV Trainings Attended (3)	Months Since Last DV Session (4)	Number of DV Calls Last Year (4)
I am more likely to be injured during a DV call than in a violence call involving strangers.	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
Too many DV calls are for only verbal family arguments.	NS	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05
I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls.	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
It's often best to arrest both parties in DV calls.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Substance abuse by the victim is a primary cause of DV.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents.	NS	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
Police should arrest in DV cases only when there is clear evidence of injury.	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05
DV calls take too much of officers' time and effort.	NS	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police.	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
In my experience, prosecutors usually follow up effectively on DV arrests.	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
DV victims are often as responsible for the incident as the person arrested.	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
It's often hard to know who to arrest in DV incidents.	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
I am less likely to make a DV arrest if the suspect is cooperative at the scene.	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
An arrest policy is the best approach to DV calls.	NS	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't.	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05
Most DV incidents occur because of offenders' anger-control problems.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
A major problem with DV is that there are so many repeat cases.	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Substance abuse by the suspect is a primary cause of DV.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Most DV calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships.	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
I need stricter guidelines from supervisors on how to deal with DV calls.	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05
I am more likely to make DV arrests when children are witnesses.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS
There should be a limit on how many times I respond to DV calls from the same victim at the same address.	NS	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS
I think DV offenders should be arrested even when victims don't want it.	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05
More training would help me sort out what happens at DV scenes.	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
I find it's often hard to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
DV victims often exaggerate the amount of violence involved.	≤ .05	NS	NS	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
Most DV incidents stem from abusers' need for power and control over victims.	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
Mental health problems are a major contributor to DV incidents.	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
Most DV victims are receptive to interventions by law enforcement.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	≤ .05
I am more likely to make an arrest if the victim is cooperative at the scene.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship.	≤ .05	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05	NS	NS	≤ .05	≤ .05
DV is a significant problem in the community I serve.	≤ .05	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS

Key: NS = not significant; ≥ = statistically significant for test at ≤ 0.05 level

**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ATTITUDES IN ARIZONA**

## Interview Questions

(Asked of detectives and supervisors in one-on-one, in-person interviews)

- Does your agency have personnel dedicated solely or specifically to DV work (e.g., detectives)? If so, how many?
- Does your agency have a training officer who trains in DV?
- Does your agency fund or otherwise provide DV training past the initial field training stage?
- Does your agency have a written policy or protocols concerning DV?
- Do your officers routinely use cameras and/or tape recorders at DV scenes?
- Do you think they are useful?
- Does your agency participate in a local interagency team addressing DV issues?
- Where would you rank DV among the law-enforcement problems facing this community, and among the demands on your agency's time and resources?
- How frequent are DV calls compared to all your violence calls?
- Do you have any sense of whether DV calls are increasing, decreasing or remaining the same?
- What proportion of DV calls are repeat calls?
- How dangerous are DV calls for your officers compared to all calls or all violence calls? Of DV calls, what proportion end up being verbal disputes without evidence of violence or damage?
- What proportion of DV calls involve conflicts among siblings, in-laws and parents and children – not between adult spouses or partners?
- Thinking for a moment of your own experience, has police handling of DV changed during your career? If so, how?
- Could you describe in general how you think your officers feel about DV calls?
- How well do you think your agency is handling DV workload in your jurisdiction?
- What do you think of “pro-arrest” policies in DV cases?
- Do you think dual arrest is often a good solution?
- One study showed that women make up a high percentage of DV arrestees in Arizona. Is that the case for your agency?
- Do you think arresting somebody does any good in the long term? Reduce repeat visits? Reduce future violence?

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### LAYERS OF MEANING:

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- How would you respond to concerns that not enough DV arrests are being made?
  - Are local prosecutors able to follow up on DV arrests as effectively as you would like? Are their plea practices acceptable to you?
  - Are local judges able to follow up on DV arrests as effectively as you would like?
  - Do local DV organizations, advocates and shelters contribute effectively to handling the DV problem? How or why not?
  - How would you describe your agency's relationship with local DV organizations?
  - Do Orders of Protection do any good?
  - What 2 things would most help your agency improve its DV performance?
  - What changes in training would most help your agency?

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**LAYERS OF MEANING:**

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### LAYERS OF MEANING: