In the Line of Duty: Police Social Work

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What Do You See?

- Administration / Supervision
- Aging
- Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs
- Child Welfare
- Children, Adolescents & Young Adults
- Health
- Mental Health
- Social and Economic Justice & Peace
- Private Practice
- School Social Work
- Social Work and the Courts
Police Social Work Defined

• Possible because the majority of law enforcement functions involve a social service response

• Police social workers are professional social workers and individuals with related academic degrees due to civil service regulations that guide hiring practices

• A small area of practice

• Provide services to clients referred by police officers; train police officers in stress management, mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse; provide consultation to police officers; and counsel officers and their families
• A fairly extensive literature exists defining the types of social problems that are the focus of interventions, tasks performed, and the challenges and benefits derived from police social work practice

• Police social work practice has been documented in numerous countries (Australia, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Scotland, U.S.) noting the similarities between law enforcement and social work functions, the challenges they face and types of social problems they manage

• Yet, few law enforcement agencies hire social workers to perform police social work
The Tasks and Functions of Police Social Work Units Vary, in General:

• Crisis intervention
• Referrals to human service and other agencies
• Short-term counseling
• Follow-up services
• Mediation
• Case status information
• Transportation
• Psychosocial and psychological evaluations/services to officers and their families are provided by psychologists
Types of Social Problems

- Family matters
- Criminal offenses
- Mental health services
- Domestic violence
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Child protection cases
- Juvenile delinquency
- Medical needs
- Neighbor/landlord-tenant disputes
- Police brutality/misconduct cases are not handled by police social workers
The History of Police Social Work

• In the U.S. has been traced to female police officers from the 1920s through the 1960s.

• The first policewoman was a social worker.
Published Areas of Research

• Differences in attitudes towards child abuse
• Attitudes regarding child sexual abuse
• Attitude differences regarding responsibility for child sexual abuse and case management interventions
• Perceptions of responsibility and seriousness of domestic violence situation
• Overall, domestic violence and child welfare are two areas that have received the most police social work practice and research consideration
International Scope

• Domestic violence collaboration in Australia

• Domestic violence response in the southwestern U. S.

• Child sexual abuse collaborations in Scotland

• Child protection collaborations in Great Britain

• Child sexual abuse response in Hong Kong
Benefits

• Police officers and social workers are more similar than different due to their roles in children and youth cases, domestic violence, the elderly and mental health cases.

• As a result of joint training/meetings between social workers and police officers, social workers gained a better understanding of law enforcement functions in response to child sexual abuse cases; and police officers gained increased understanding of sexually abused children/families.

• Police officers responded favorably and perceived a social work domestic violence team as effective because intervening with victims at the same time that police officers handled suspects was helpful for victims. Interventions included assisting domestic violence victims with orders of protection, providing information about the criminal justice system, referrals, and transporting victims to domestic violence shelters.
Challenges

• Sex role stereotypes, social structures of oppression, injustice and inequality creates a barrier to collaboration.

• Collaboration is impractical due to structure of the two occupations and society, the differences in mission, objectives, social ideology, types of interventions, gender and education are greater than the similarities between social workers and police officers.

• Differences in professional values.

• The quasi-military structure of law enforcement agencies and consultative structure of social work agencies, differences in power and occupational culture.

• Hostility, suspicion and mistrust between social workers and police officers.

• Differences based on philosophy, age, social class, societal demands, and professional responsibilities.

• Most literature suggests these challenges can be resolved.
Early Police Social Work Programs

1. Article titled Coordinating Police and Social Work published in 1952 described the first hiring of social workers (who were not female police officers) to work in the Rochester Police Department (RPD).

2. The Englewood Project was conducted in Chicago from August 1954 through August 1957.

3. The Jane Addams College of Social Work participated in two demonstration projects: (1.) 1970 in a police department located Wheaton, IL., (2.) 1971 in Niles, IL.
Current Police Social Work Programs

1. Nearly 60 years after the 1952 article, the RPD continues to maintain a Family and Crisis Intervention Team (FACIT).
2. The Jane Addams College of Social Work demonstration projects continue to operate in the Chicago area.
3. Youth Service Providers Network (YSPN) program located in Boston, M.A. was initially implemented with one police social worker in 1996 and increased to 13 as of 2000. YSPN is a collaboration between the Boston Police Department and the Boys and Girls Club of Boston. It has been replicated in Albuquerque, N.M.
4. The FBI implemented the Victim Assistance Rapid Deployment Team in 2004 to respond to the scene of mass disasters and violence.
5. The FBI Terrorism Victim Assistance Unit, the Child Victim Identification Program (CVIP), the Forensic Child Interviewing Program, and the assignment of victim specialists who provide victim services to Native American victims of crime.
Police Social Work Skills in Law Enforcement Settings

• Ability to work in a para-military/authoritarian host setting
• Ability to collaborate with police officers, criminal justice professional and social service agencies
• Crisis intervention and referral
• Ability to diffuse/mediate volatile disputes
• Ability to work with diverse community residents
• Understanding of law enforcement culture, functions and tasks
• Knowledge of community/criminal justice/social service resources
Working with Clients in a Non-Law Enforcement Setting

• Awareness of personal feelings about police. It is not helpful to collude with clients who still have to face issues related to law enforcement contact.

• Know community resources--such as ACLU, police departmental complaint, and procedures

• Understand police culture, functions, and tasks.

• Understand criminal justice system.

• Know next steps after police involvement, for example: police report will be required for victims assistance.
Thank You For Your Participation

Q & A