



Intimate Partner Violence

ESSAY

– a new role for the police?

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The problem of intimate partner violence (IPV) has recently surfaced once again in Sweden – essentially defined as men's abuse of women. IPV is not rare – around three percent of the women are afflicted each year (Nerøien & Schei, 2008). We know that serious crimes of violence are committed by men with substantial psychiatric problems and comorbid abuse diagnoses, particularly alcoholism (Belfrage & Rying, 2004). Less serious partner violent crimes are committed by two kinds of perpetrators (Rasmussen & Levander, 2021):

1. A smaller dys-social, treatment resistant group with psychopathic features and a general tendency to use violence; almost always with a comorbid mixed abuse diagnosis.
2. A larger group who limits violence to their partner. They often have abuse problems as well as other but less serious psychiatric disorders, sometimes in combination with medieval views of sex and gender. Many acknowledge that they have a problem and want help, but we do not know how to help them.

Crime-preventive interventions should be **knowledge-based** and primarily break causal chains leading to crime. In addition to **common sense** there are two relevant kinds of knowledge: based on **Proven Professional Experience** (PPE, tacit knowledge) and **Science** (S). Science can change knowledge almost immediately, knowledge by PPE takes time to change. Treatment in medicine is governed by **S&PPE**.

The knowledge base of the police profession, like that of physicians, need S&PPE to be as true as it can be (Sahlin, 2021). The conservative spirit of PPE: »We have always ...«, gives science an important role to reduce the risk that important innovations are rejected. Science also protects against the development of unsound subcultures and ideological pressure but cannot address the bewildering complexity of the real world. The human brain is designed to handle such (silent, i.e. not declarative) knowledge and does it well in most cases (Levander, 2022; Sahlin, 2021).

The police as profession have the most extensive contacts with criminals »out there«, i.e. superior PPE. IPV preventive interventions are often formulated



within academic units without PPE and address a few of the many causal factors (e.g. life stress, patri-archaic structures, drug abuse). Interventions are often applied regardless of individual differences. In the absence of individualization, effects have been proven to be in best case small («Nothing works»). This is verified in many overviews of the scientific literature (Cantos, Kosson, Goldstein & O’Leary, 2019; Petersson, 2020; Rasmussen & Levander, 2021). Individualization is sometimes based on risk assessments developed by psychologists/psychiatrists – not very good during optimal conditions (more than 20% are not correct) – and much less precise when used in a police context. Typically, 40% are misclassified (Svalin, 2018). No method is distinctly better (Svalin & Levander, 2020).

To protect victims of IPV from repeat victimization, the Swedish police mainly focuses on the victim (e.g. recommending victims to hide in shelters), not on influencing the perpetrator to a change in behavior. Therefore, a group of Swedish police employees started a pilot project to find out whether it was possible to influence perpetrators of IPV in a prosocial direction by switching role: from police to participant in a dialogue. The intervention was developed on Proven Professional Experience (PPE, tacit knowledge). The process (of the pilot project) was evaluated scientifically (S). In this essay, we discuss the intervention, the results from the evaluation and the importance of combining PPE and S in police work.

The pilot project

Police employees with negotiating training and experience enter a dialogue with perpetrators selected according to a number of criteria. This dialogue is a kind of every-day conversation between one with experience of partner violent crimes and one who have met a large number of perpetrators. It should be non-emotional and non-moralistic, rational and respectful. It is similar to motivational interviewing (Leffingwell, Neumann, Babitzke, Leedy, & Walters, 2007) and requires awareness of how perpetrators think (Walters, 2002).

The scientific evaluation of such a project must be governed by theory and previous empirical studies of a similar kind. The first question should be «was it possible»? – a process evaluation assessment. The next question concerns subjective experiences, was it meaningful? In this case, the police participants discussed how they thought the perpetrators experienced the intervention. A third kind of questions refer to effects – did the intervention reduce future violence.

The evaluation was based on interviews with three coordinators and three negotiators. Three research questions were studied: How were cases selected for the intervention, what did the intervention consist of and if the coordinators and negotiators experienced that the intervention did influence people suspected of IPV crime in a prosocial direction, and thereby prevented recidivism.



Summary of results

The selection of cases (to the project) by the coordinators were based on information in the police registers, interrogations, risk assessments and discussions with police administrators. Coordinators as well as negotiators affirm that their tacit knowledge (PPE) was central in the process of selecting cases and carry out the dialogues. Initially limited resources made it necessary to focus serious cases excluding those mentally ill and/or highly aggressive. With more experience also such cases were offered a dialogue.

The dialogues were carefully prepared. It was made clear that the negotiator's role was a partner in a dialogue, and s/he was thereby giving up the role superiority. All negotiators had completed police negotiation training. In the dialogue, they used their skills based on that training and their experiences. The conversation always started with the negotiator explaining that the dialogue was voluntary and not a part of the police investigation. Further, the dialogue was based on active listening and honesty, in the first phase to build trust. In the next semi-structured phase, the negotiator directed the discussion to case salient themes and themes identified during the dialogue. Finally, the issue of change of behaviour was brought up. Usually, the perpetrator agreed to follow-up dialogues suggesting that they found it meaningful. This was also the negotiators and coordinators overall experiences, e.g. in some cases the dialogues were described as effective in preventing repeat perpetration. In cases in which threats and/or violence ceased, victims were relieved. According to the negotiators, there were also perpetrators that were grateful for being listened to and for being guided in a pro-social direction. Further, in some cases the primary aim with the dialogue was to get information on whether s/he had intentions to harm the victim again, i.e. information that helped the police to choose which measures to provide/recommend protecting the victim.

Discussion

Is it possible that police employees without knowledge and no training in psychotherapy are able to attain a large enough pro-social treatment effect resulting in lower rates of re-offending? Yes, because the choice of psychotherapeutic method usually has small effects on the outcome. In contrast, the therapist effect may be large but it is difficult to explain why and what characterizes good and poor therapists (Werbart, Annevall & Hillblom, 2019). Furthermore, there is an interaction between therapist and »patient«, some therapists are successful with specific patients and not with others (Werbart et al., 2019). The complexity is so large that we will never be able to disentangle all factors important for the outcome of a specific therapist and a patient set.



But we can assume that »good« therapists seek out situations that reward their talent and thereby accumulate experience that make them still better.

Of course, some police employees have natural talents for influencing people. They probably already work with tasks requiring psychological intelligence, control over affects but concurrently a high capacity of compassion, being low in social dominance, flexible in thinking and doing, and with courage to present a real person behind a professional mask (Levander, 2017). If such persons are updated on the current scientific knowledge and organized in groups which provide for internal discussions and »external expert visits« they will become still more skillful.

The most important evaluation aspects refer to the issue if what was achieved could be a chance effect, and that the effect is large enough to be useful »out there«. Questions referring to effects and whether the intervention reduced future violence, could not be answered in this evaluation. The number of included cases in the pilot project (50) is small for a statistically conclusive analysis of the outcome (crime prevention) particularly with respect to the limited effect size which we expected. In addition, the project was not optimally organized, and the data set we worked with had a very low quality.¹ Hence, we can say nothing about reductions in relapse rate. Another perspective that is not represented in the evaluation, that should be examined in future studies, is the perpetrators experiences of the dialogues.

So far we have failed whatever we have tried: »Nothing works« on group level. On the individual level there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that a criminal career ends abruptly after for instance a religious experience or a meeting with a charismatic »influencer« or joining a group with strong leadership, role models and peer support. This is massively documented for drug abuse treatment. So, there is room for thinking bold and new.

Conclusions

Based on the evaluation our conclusion is that the outcome of the project is promising enough to motivate its continuation. The next step is to try the intervention in a larger scale and in other police departments (i.e. outside the project group) and evaluate the effect of the intervention. The data collection for the evaluation should be guided by theory, for instance the knowledge base presented in Rasmussen and Levander (2021). In a recent report, based on all cases of murder in Norway 1955-82, the authors verified the old clinical impression that psychopathic murderers avoid to kill »near and dear« – and when they kill they use methods that underline the inferiority and vulnerability of the victim (Dahl & Rasmussen, 2022). Paradoxically, psychopathy is a

1. Due to the low quality of the dataset, it was not used in the evaluation.



negative risk factor for deadly IPV, and the Odds ratio is high (8). Do we dare to consider that counter-intuitive finding in dealing with the PPE problem?

We also suggest the establishment of a network to bridge the gap between science and proven professional experience. Such a network can facilitate the creation of contact paths between practitioners and other professionals that are relevant for the project (e.g., researchers and »experts« on psychotherapy). The network should also arrange formal seminars aiming to develop intra-professional experiences (e.g., discuss (de-identified) cases). Another possible outcome of collaborations between police employees (PPE) and researchers (S) is significantly better violence risk assessment methods adapted for police employees.

There were shortcomings which have to be addressed in future studies. As previously mentioned, the design of the pilot project was not optimally organized from an evaluation point of view. If we are to develop, implement and evaluate such projects, PPE and S are required. For an elaborated discussion on this topic, see Levander (2022). In the future let us define police work as pracademic – respecting tacit and scientific knowledge as equally important (Magnusson, 2022).

Kontaktuplysninger

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