The arrest of victims of domestic violence occurs at an unexpectedly high rate and is a problem of growing concern. In this study of 111 police officers, it was predicted that those inclined to arrest the victim would have more negative stereotypes and attitudes toward victims and women in general and would tend to justify the violence. Results showed that officers with an inclination to arrest victims in vignette depictions of domestic violence believed that domestic violence is justified in some situations and that women stay in violent relationships for psychological reasons. They also reported less comfort in talking with victims. General sex-role beliefs were unrelated to their responses. Suggestions are made for officer training and further research.

The Tendency to Arrest
Victims of Domestic Violence

A Preliminary Analysis of Officer Characteristics

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The arrest of domestic violence victims is a growing concern among policymakers and victim advocates, yet has received little scientific study. One study found that a substantial minority of officers reported that they would arrest victims or warn them of arrest under some circumstances (Saunders, 1980). Case studies indicate that if victims argue in front of officers, they may be arrested for disorderly conduct (e.g., Gregory, 1976). The adoption of mandatory arrest policies may exacerbate officers' tendency to arrest victims. Some advocates are having second thoughts about these policies because of their negative side effects, especially the arrest of victims (Stafne, 1989; Wisconsin Coalition, 1987). Underlying anti-victim behavior by the police may be particular attitudes about victims, women in general, and the acceptability of violence. An understanding of the possible role of negative attitudes can help to improve officer selection and training.

Officer attitudes have not been the focus of much study. When officers claim that they do not want to interfere in the "private matters" of the home, they may be revealing a general attitude about their role in protecting the "public peace." Brown (1981), for example, found that a higher percentage

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of officers reported that they would make an arrest when juveniles were creating a public nuisance than when a man injured his wife in the home. A preference for not intruding into "private matters" may also reflect the patriarchal attitude that "a man's home is his castle."

Evidence shows that officers rely mostly on legal factors in the arrest decision, but to some extent use factors outside the law (Dolon, Hendricks, & Meagher, 1986; Ford, 1987; Saunders, 1980). A study of mostly male police officers found that attitudes toward women and domestic violence were associated with the extent of officers' interventions (Saunders, 1980). The more that officers held traditional views of women's roles or approved of marital violence, the less likely they were to arrest the offender or give crisis counseling. Ford (1987) found that several beliefs of officers about a victim in a vignette scenario were related to a lower propensity to arrest the offender. These beliefs were: that the victim was culpable, that she had ulterior motives, that she was "unworthy" because she consumed alcohol or was agitated, and that both should be arrested. Stith (1990) did not find that attitudes about sex roles or marital violence were related to officers' self-reported tendencies to arrest. However, she did find that more rigid sex-role beliefs and greater justification of marital violence were associated with a propensity to be "anti-victim."

As mandatory arrest policies expand to more departments (Sherman & Cohn, 1989), there is a concern that officers opposed to the new policies will arrest victims as well as offenders (Wisconsin Coalition, 1987). After mandatory arrest was adopted in a Minnesota county, 13% of the arrests in the first year were of victims, rising to 25% the following year (Minnesota Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1990, personal communication). In a Wisconsin survey, the rate of victim arrests was about 13% in the year the state passed a mandatory arrest law (Stafne, 1989). There was a 12-fold increase in the number of women referred by the legal system to an abuser program in the state, compared with a doubling of referrals of the men (Hamberger & Arnold, 1990). The program found that almost all of the women were arrested for violence committed in self-defense. The arrest of some victims may be appropriate because they are also perpetrators or do cause a public disturbance, but the majority of these arrests do not seem justified.

Many officers admit that they do not think arrest is the best response in these situations (Loving, 1980; Saunders & Size, 1986). Advocates suspect that a "backlash" against new policies has occurred among some officers because they resent limits placed on their discretion and have little sympathy for female victims to begin with (Lyon & Mace, 1991; Stafne, 1989). Consequently, they may arrest victims on trivial charges or for violence used

in self-defense. A negative side effect can be the reluctance of many victims to call the police again (Stafne, 1989). Reports by victims that the police are less helpful and more hostile than other formal helpers (Bowker, 1984; Brown, 1984; Carlson, 1977; Fotjik, 1977/1978; Homant, 1985; Saunders & Size, 1980) are likely to continue under new policies unless thorough training goes hand-in-hand with policy change. Some training is needed to clarify policies, but some may need to be directed at changing attitudes. Such training is favored by advocates as part of a coordinated, community-wide response to domestic violence. In this coordinated response, arrest is followed quickly by victim safety planning and specialized abuser treatment (e.g., Pence, 1989).

This report focuses on some unexpected findings from a study of the police response to domestic violence. Two vignettes were used in the study to measure officers' likelihood of responding in a variety of ways, including arrest and "informal actions" such as counseling and referral. A substantial proportion of the officers (28%) reported that they might arrest the victim (with any likelihood of arrest). In response to one of the vignettes, 15% said there was a good chance (50% or greater likelihood) that they would arrest the victim. I hypothesized that officers who had a propensity to arrest victims would have: (a) more traditional sex-role attitudes, (b) more negative views of battered women, (c) greater justification for domestic violence, and (d) stereotypes about victim behavior. The survey was conducted in a state that had a warrantless arrest statute for misdemeanor assaults, but prior to state or local adoption of pro-arrest or mandatory arrest policies.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 111 officers from three city and seven small-town police departments in Wisconsin. About three fourths of the officers had the rank of patrol officer, and nearly all of them had recent patrol experience. Six of the officers were women. The average number of years of police work was 8.2 ($SD = 5.7$). Nearly 17% had college degrees, with the average number of years of education being 14 ($SD = 1.5$). Ninety-seven percent of the officers were Caucasian. Seventy-nine percent were married, 16% separated, and 4% divorced.

Departments were selected for the varying size and economic base of their communities. Officers were asked to participate in a voluntary, anonymous survey. The number who volunteered and returned questionnaires repre-

sented approximately 30% of all officers on active patrol. The study was conducted before the adoption of mandatory arrest policies by the state or any of the local governments or police departments. Two of the city departments had routine recruit and in-service training on domestic violence ($n =$ 57 officers).

Measures

The dependent measure consisted of responses to the following two vignettes.

Vignette A: You arrive at the scene of a family disturbance, the third such call to this family in about 2 months. The woman has a broken nose and numerous cuts and bruises on her face and arms. She is crying and says between her sobs, "He came home drunk and started accusing me of spending too much money on myself. When I said I wouldn't discuss it when he was drunk, he started hitting me." Immediately the husband says she is lying and tells you angrily: "Our fights are none of your business. She deserved what she got and she knows it too."

Vignette B: You are dispatched to the scene of a domestic disturbance. The woman who comes to the door tells you her husband has been beating her and she wants him removed. She has apparently been crying and has a black eye and bruises on her arms and neck. They continue to argue in your presence.

Ten response options followed each vignette, and subjects could respond from 0% to 100% probability that they would use each option. Officers could respond to more than one option. The ten options were factor analyzed for each vignette (principal component, varimax rotation). Two similar types of options were derived for the two vignettes: referral of the man and woman, and informal actions (e.g., understanding feelings, mediating the dispute, giving legal and personal options). In addition, Vignette A had a factor for arrest of the man and another for warning or arresting the woman. Vignette B had a factor for mutual arrest and another for warning the woman of arrest. Despite the differences in factor structures, all of the corresponding items between the vignettes correlated positively and significantly with each other (average $r = .43$; range $= .25$ to $.78$). Criterion-related validity was shown by the significant point-biserial correlation between the vignette responses and the corresponding accounts of the actions the officers reported in their most recent encounter with a domestic assault situation (average $r = .22$).

For this study, two dependent variables were created from the vignettes. A dichotomous variable was created, dividing officers who indicated a propensity to arrest the woman in either vignette from those who did not have this propensity. Thirty-one officers indicated such a propensity. Logistic

regression analysis was used with this dependent variable. The other depen-
dent variable was created from the scores of the factor "mutual arrest" using
Vignette B. The factor loadings greater than .10 were as follows: arrest man
(.86), arrest woman (.81), warn man (–.12), warn woman (.27), mediate
(–.16), and give woman options (.26). Multiple regression analysis could be
used because the distribution of the factor scores approached normality. The
sample size for this analysis was considerably smaller because listwise
deletion had to be used in the creation of the scores ($n = 64$). The overlap
between the two ways of measuring the dependent variable is indicated by
the point-biserial correlation of .68 between them.

The primary independent variables were measured with a number of
instruments.

Attitudes toward women scale. This is a measure of beliefs about the rights
and roles of women on a liberal-traditional continuum (Spence, Helmreich,
& Stapp, 1973). The 25-item version was used. Considerable evidence for its
reliability and validity is given by Spence and Helmreich (1978).

Negative evaluations of battered women. The semantic differential tech-
nique was used to obtain overall affective responses to the phrase "battered
women" (Osgood, Tannenbaum, & Suci, 1957). Respondents rated 15 adjec-
tive pairs of opposite meaning on 7-point scales to indicate their reactions to
the phrase and to show their general attitude toward it. For example, two of
the opposing adjective pairs separated by the scale were "dishonest-honest"
and "dependable-undependable." The internal reliability coefficient for the
scale was .78.

Belief marital violence justified. Respondents were asked to rate marital
violence situations on 7-point scales regarding how "bad," "necessary," or
"normal" they viewed them. A scale on beliefs about violence in response to
infidelity was chosen because it was the most reliable (alpha = .88), shown
in previous research to distinguish police officers most sharply from victims
and advocates (Saunders & Size, 1986) and to predict their behavior most
strongly (Saunders, 1980). The analysis used the factor scores of four items
on how "bad" or "necessary" this violence was considered.

Beliefs about why victims stay. Respondents were asked to check the three
most important reasons out of a list of 13 reasons that they believed women
stayed in abusive relationships. The reasons given most often by the officers
were "economically dependent on the man," "no place else to go," and "fear
of greater violence from him." These three items were combined into a single

scale, with a range from zero to four, because they were highly correlated with each other. These external, or practical factors, contrasted with items reflecting the belief that women had psychological reasons for staying (e.g., love for the man, lack of self-confidence, desire to stay in the role of wife, hope that the marriage will improve, belief that the children need their father). An emphasis on psychological factors is a negative stereotype because external and internal factors play equally important roles in keeping women in violent relationships (Strube, 1988). The stereotype can lead to the belief that the victims themselves are primarily responsible for their predicament.

Comfort with victims. Officers were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a 5-point scale with the statement: "I feel comfortable talking with women who have been assaulted by their husbands or boyfriends." This measure was included in the major analyses because it was likely to be related to negative attitudes or stereotypes.

Correction for response bias. Because the independent and dependent variables were measured with scales that could be easily faked, a measure of social desirability response bias was used as a covariate in the regression analyses. An 18-item version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale was used (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). It is uncorrelated with psychopathology and has good internal reliability (alpha = .88).

Other measures. Several other variables were used for post hoc analyses, including demographic and background variables and orientation to policing. The demographic variables were age, income, marital status, religion, and education. Years of police work, rank, and type of prior work (people oriented rather than data oriented) were also included. Officers were asked in what ways they had been "exposed to the problem of battered women." They checked responses in the areas of media and "associates" (co-workers, friends, relatives). Finally, a measure of orientation to police work was included. Five qualities characterizing a social service orientation and five more emphasizing the physical aspects of policing were taken from Wetteroth's (1967) Trait Image Scale.

Analysis

The two measures of the dependent variable were used in different types of analyses. The categorical measure of arrest versus no arrest of the woman (from either vignette) was used in a logistic regression analysis. The continu-

TABLE 1: **Comparison of Responses to Vignettes: Averages (and Standard Deviations) of Likelihood Ratings**

Item	Vignette A M	Vignette A SD	Vignette B M	Vignette B SD	t
Arrest man	50.7	(40.1)	35.0	(34.3)	3.86**
Arrest woman	1.5	(8.9)	10.6	(20.9)	−4.23**
Refer man	55.4	(41.4)	36.9	(43.1)	2.88*
Refer woman	68.9	(38.2)	53.0	(44.9)	3.23*
Warn man of possible arrest	52.2	(43.6)	70.7	(36.1)	−4.12**
Warn woman of possible arrest	5.5	(16.7)	22.1	(36.7)	−4.44**
Help couple solve immediate problem by mediating between them	47.3	(39.7)	62.6	(37.5)	−3.47**
Discourage woman from seeking arrest	11.9	(24.1)	15.2	(26.6)	−1.03
Show that I understood each person's feelings	57.1	(37.9)	57.1	(37.7)	.08
Tell woman of her legal and personal options	82.1	(30.5)	79.0	(33.4)	1.10

*$p < .01$; **$p < .001$.

ous measure of mutual arrest, based on factor scores from Vignette B, was used in a multiple regression analysis. The measure of social desirability was included in the regression equations to control for response bias. The use of closely related, but distinct, dependent measures allowed for improved validity of the results. Full support would be given to a hypothesis if both tests were significant, and partial support if only one test was significant.

In the post hoc analyses, chi-square and t tests were used as appropriate to test differences based on demographic variables, rank, years of policing, type of work before policing, orientation to police work, and type of exposure to the problem.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means for the responses to the two vignettes. There were substantial differences between the two, with seven of ten pairwise t tests being significant. The average probability of arresting the woman in Vignette A was only 1.53, compared with 10.58 for Vignette B. In terms of percentages, 15% responding to Vignette A versus 2% responding to Vignette B said there was a good chance they would arrest the victim (50% or greater likelihood). Of the 24 officers who wrote down the type of arrest they would make, 23 wrote "disorderly conduct" and one wrote "battering." The propensity to warn the victim of arrest also differed significantly between the vignettes.

TABLE 2:   Logistic Regression Results With Arrest of Woman as Dependent Variable

Variable	B	SE	p	Exp(B)
Response bias	−.12	.08	.05*	.89
Violence justified for infidelity	.46	.23	.02*	1.59
Positive evaluation of battered women	.36	.46	.23	1.41
Believe external causes for victims staying	−.58	.28	.02*	.56
Comfort talking with victims	−.40	.22	.03*	.67
Liberal sex-role attitudes	.00	.02	.92	1.00

NOTE: Overall $\chi^2 = 14.1$; $p = .03$.
*$p < .05$.

TABLE 3:   Multiple Regression Results With Mutual Arrest Factor Scores as Dependent Variable

Variable	pr[a]	β	t	p
Response bias		−.26	−1.97	.03*
Violence justified for infidelity	.17	.27	2.15	.02*
Positive evaluation of battered women	.06	.03	.28	.34
Believe external causes for victims staying	−.18	−.18	−1.37	.08
Comfort talking with victims	−.28	−.27	−2.13	.04*
Liberal sex-role attitudes	.01	−.07	−.52	.60

NOTE: $R = .48$, $R^2 = .23$, $F = 2.26$, $p = .04$.
a. pr = partial correlation controlling for response bias.
*$p < .05$.

Table 2 shows the logistic regression results with the likelihood of arresting the woman as the dependent variable. Those who preferred to arrest the woman were more likely to believe that domestic violence is justified in cases of infidelity and less likely to believe that victims stay for practical reasons. These officers also reported being less comfortable talking with victims. The relationship between arrest and general attitudes about battered women or sex roles did not approach significance.

Table 3 shows the results for the multiple regression analysis. As in the logistic regression analysis, the belief that violence is justified for infidelity was significantly related to arresting both partners, as was less comfort in talking with victims. A positive association between arrest and the belief that victims stay for psychological reasons approached statistical significance ($p = .08$). The combination of variables accounted for 23% of the variance in predicting arrest ($F = 2.26$, $p = .04$).

In the post hoc analysis, the officers with or without a tendency to arrest victims did not differ on any of the demographic variables, rank, years of policing, type of work before policing, or orientation to police work. Media exposure to the problem of woman abuse also did not differentiate them. However, there was a trend for exposure to the problem from associates to be higher among the arrest group ($p = .10$). The associate was more likely to be a co-worker (62%) than a friend (42%) or relative (46%).

DISCUSSION

Patriarchal norms (Hypothesis 1) and general attitudes about victims (Hypothesis 2) were not found to be related to the vignette option of arresting victims. However, there was full support for the hypothesis that officers' propensity to arrest victims was related to their justification of domestic violence (Hypothesis 3), and there was partial support that the propensity was related to stereotypes about why victims stay (Hypothesis 4). Both analyses found that less comfort in talking with victims was related to a greater propensity to arrest them. The above findings occurred when officers had full discretion in handling cases. The findings might have been even stronger under conditions of mandatory arrest because of many officers' resistance to such policies.

The relationship between arrest and the belief that violence is justified is consistent with that found by Ford (1987). It is somewhat consistent with the findings of Stith (1990), who used the same vignettes as in this study. However, she combined items on warning the woman of arrest, arresting the woman, and "discouraging woman from seeking arrest" into a single "anti-victim" response scale, the items of which may not be intercorrelated. It is interesting that in her study, the male officers' admission of being violent in their own marriages was related to their reluctance to arrest offenders, but unrelated to the "anti-victim" scale.

The arrest group was somewhat more likely to have been exposed to the problem by "associates." Just as men who batter can have negative norms reinforced by other men, officers might be coached into negative reactions to victims by more experienced officers (e.g., Field & Field, 1973). This finding requires further study because it only approached statistical significance and is based on a very simple measure.

Beyond attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence, officers may have beliefs about their authority and role as keepers of the "public peace" that influence their responses. Although injuries attributable to violence were

present in both vignettes, in Vignette B the husband and wife continued to argue in the presence of the officer. Such arguments have a strong impact on some officers. A 28-year-old male officer wrote this comment next to Vignette B: "Both subjects are creating a disturbance, apparently the presence of law enforcement itself has no effect on the subjects. Both subjects, if after being warned to cease the argument and it persisted, would be arrested for disorderly conduct." The affront to the officer's authority by either party or the breaking of the public peace may outweigh the legal factors that should be used in the arrest decision (cf. Buzawa, 1982; Westley, 1970).

One of this study's implications is that officers may need more than didactic forms of training. To feel comfortable talking with victims, they may need to become involved in role-play exercises. Hearing from a panel of survivors of domestic violence may also increase comfort levels and reduce stereotypes. From such a panel, they could learn directly about the reasons that survivors are sometimes agitated or angry in front of officers. They could also hear firsthand about the reasons that women sometimes stay in abusive relationships. Understanding the external forces keeping women in violent relations can increase sympathy for survivors. For those unconvinced that intervening in domestic violence cases is truly "crime fighting," they can be given evidence to show that violence in the home today will lead to violent crime inside and outside of the home in the next generation (e.g., Hotaling & Straus, 1989).

Any implications or conclusions drawn from this study must be tempered with an awareness of its limitations. These limitations point to recommendations for further research. They include: use of actual rather than vignette responses, more representative samples, a comparison of male and female officers, and a more reliable measure of officers' comfort level with survivors. The most important research will involve experiments to test the content and methods of officer training. Such research can foster the implementation of change that does not further victimize the victim.

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