

Study examines impact of domestic violence intervention

February 11 2015, by Heather Beshears

It is estimated that nearly 25 percent of women will experience severe violence at the hands of an intimate partner. The first step to seek help: call the police.

Yet, this is only half of the [equation](#), says Jill Messing, associate professor in the School of Social Work, part of the College of Public Service & Community Solutions at Arizona State University, citing the need for safety planning.

Messing recently completed a study examining the effectiveness of The Lethality Assessment Program, a collaborative intervention that brings together [police](#) and social service providers in an effort to implement a more holistic solution.

"Police may remove the perpetrator, but the victim is left with the question of what to do next," Messing says.

The intervention consists of two steps. First, the police officer completes a brief, 11-question risk assessment, called the Lethality Screen. Second, victims identified at high risk of homicide are put in immediate contact with a social service provider to discuss short-term safety plans and resources for other needed services. Police are also encouraged to help implement any immediate actions.

Physical violence is shown to be the largest risk factor preceding homicide – and researchers estimate that prior violence occurred in up to

80 percent of cases that end in murder.

Messing says the question is whether this brief intervention decreases the number and severity of violent attacks while at the same time increasing help-seeking among victims.

Her study began in 2008 with seven police jurisdictions in Oklahoma, a state with a very high incidence of [intimate partner](#) violence and homicide, particularly among Native American women.

Messing's research team collected data over the next five years from women who called the police due to domestic violence. Their quasi-experimental field trial was able to assess differences between a comparison group of women who received usual police treatment and an intervention group of women who participated in the Lethality Assessment Program. All participants spoke with researchers by telephone immediately after a [domestic violence](#) incident and again an average of seven months later.

"We learned that the intervention group reported less severity and frequency of violent occurrences and was also more likely to engage in protective actions," Messing says.

She also notes a "durability of intervention" – with a greater number of victims continuing to seek help over time.

The Lethality Assessment Program was created by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence. The program has expanded to 30 states. This evaluation, funded by the National Institute of Justice, was the first comprehensive analysis of the program's impact.

"This is a relatively quick, easy [intervention](#) that utilizes services already in place," Messing says, "and it works."

She also notes that facilitating these collaborative partnerships between police and advocacy organizations has offered additional benefits. The Lethality Screen is also being used by police in additional ways. It has led to a "strengthening of evidence collection for stronger prosecution," and the screens are being used in applications for protection orders.

Provided by Arizona State University

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