“EVERYBODY LOSES:” UNDERSTANDING POLICE ROLES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CALLS

Anjali Fulambarker¹
Governors State University

Abstract
To better understand police response to domestic violence, it is useful to consider the perspectives of officers themselves. Through exploratory, in-depth interviews and applying the lens of role theory, this study focuses on police officers’ perceptions of their role in responding to domestic violence, their perceptions of the effectiveness of their response, and challenges they face. Findings suggest that, for these participants, there is an overlap in the different roles they inhabit, as well as limitations and barriers to their response. These limitations and obstacles are a signal that officers may be experiencing role overload, which leads to their frustration and ambivalence toward domestic violence situations. This study has the potential to serve as the groundwork for future research and policy changes aimed at mitigating role overload experienced, particularly in domestic violence calls.

Keywords: domestic violence, law enforcement, role overload

INTRODUCTION

After the 2015 killing of five police officers in Dallas, TX, the then Police Chief David Brown said, “We're asking cops to do too much in this country. We are. Every societal failure, we put it off on the cops to solve…. That's too much to ask. Policing was never meant to solve all those problems” (Dennis, Berman, & Izadi, 2016). The demands of the job of police officers are numerous and complex, with domestic violence response among those demands. Domestic violence calls represent a common call for service (Hirschel, Dean, & Lumb, 1994), and can present ambiguous and complex situations that demand officer resolutions. The demands of the role of police go beyond simply enforcing the law, and as Johnson, Sigler, and Crowley (1994) conclude, resolving domestic violence calls requires officers to take on both a social service and crime control roles.

This study aims to explore how police officers view and describe their role in responding to domestic violence. Through exploratory, in-depth interviews, this study focuses on understanding police officer perceptions of their role, their perceptions of the effectiveness of their response options, and challenges they face in responding through the application of role theory. Findings contribute to the limited literature capturing police officer viewpoints about their response to domestic violence calls. In examining their perspectives, we can further

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understand their actions and frustrations which, if addressed, may improve the response to victims and officer satisfaction in their role of responding to domestic violence calls.

POLICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As first-responders to domestic violence calls (Corcoran, Stephenson, Perryman, & Allen, 2001; Dolon, Hendricks, & Meagher, 1986), police officers inhabit a unique position to inform our understanding of the challenges and limitations of the current criminal justice response to domestic violence. A substantial amount of research exploring police response to domestic violence focuses on decisions to make an arrest. This literature generally focuses on factors particular to the situation itself, such as the presence of an injury to the victim (Eitle, 2005; Robinson & Chandek, 2000a; Tatum & Pence, 2015) or substance use by the involved parties (Eitle, 2005; Lally & DeMaris, 2012; Robinson & Chandek, 2000a).

In addition to factors pertinent to the case, research has also looked at the demographic and training characteristics of the police officers (Johnson & Dai, 2016; Philips & Sobol, 2010; Sun, 2007). Police officer attitudes about domestic violence (Gover, Paul, & Dodge, 2011; McPhedran, Gover, & Mazerolle, 2017; Stalans & Finn, 1995), officer perceptions about victim demeanor (Robinson & Chandek, 2000a), and perceptions of risk (Fulambarker, 2016; Perez-Trujillo & Ross, 2008) and their influence on arrest decisions have also been studied. While this body of research has provided more insight into the factors that impact decision-making, it does not consider the perceptions of officers about their response to domestic violence.

Sinden and Stephens (1999) interviewed police officers and chiefs about their training and experiences responding to domestic violence calls. The authors conclude that the characteristics of incidents, the law, and the victim and perpetrator impact the officer's certainty of the situation and themselves (Sinden & Stephens, 1999). About half of the officers indicated that they had a desire to both enforce the law and ensure safety, as well as help the victims (Sinden & Stephens, 1999). In another study, officers reported they viewed domestic violence calls as complex and varying as well as expressing frustration with victim non-cooperation with police and the criminal justice system (Horwitz et al., 2011). Johnson (2004) found that officers' frustrations related to responding to domestic violence include: the operations of the court system, their police organization, difficulty in “negotiating legal factors,” and the complex nature of situations (pp. 210-213). This limited body of literature directly reflects the voice of police officers and demonstrates common themes related to their response and frustrations.

Understanding how police officers conceive of their role in responding to domestic violence calls can provide valuable insight into their experience of performing this role and how it may impact the experience of victims. This research will build on this literature to further document officer perspectives and contribute an analysis of their roles which may affect their decisions. Understanding these experiences has the potential to develop a more nuanced picture of police response and may illuminate ways to improve officer and victim experiences in domestic violence response.

ROLE THEORY

Role theory is a useful lens for considering the shared behaviors and role that police officers fulfill in responding to domestic violence calls. This lens was applied in this study to provide context through which to understand the perceptions of the officers and may be useful
for interpreting officer actions and decisions in these situations. Role theory is “concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors” (Biddle, 2013, p. 4). In other words, role theory focuses on identifying those common behaviors of specific actors within a particular context. Role theory has been described differently based on varying theoretical perspectives and employed in various research settings (Biddle, 1986), with terms at times used interchangeably or inconsistently (Coverman, 1989). Utilizing the definitions offered by Biddle (2013), role theory is applied here to provide a framework for considering officer explanations of their role in responding to domestic violence. By exploring the multiple facets of their role and the issues that may arise with competing demands, unclear expectations, or overwhelming burden, this framework provides context for understanding police action (behaviors) in domestic violence cases.

Biddle (2013) breaks down the components of the role as including behavior, person, context, and characteristicness – that we can define the role as “those behaviors characteristic of one or more persons in a context” (p. 58). Behavior includes the actions of individuals, and person refers to the set of people to which these behaviors belong (Biddle, 2013). Within this framework, barriers are distinguished from the individual characteristics of a person (sex, race) that might influence these behaviors (Biddle, 2013, p. 58). The role and its related behaviors are, in many cases, confined to a specific context. Finally, a role can also be defined based on characteristicness, or those shared characteristics and behaviors of a group of people (Biddle, 2013). In the current study, the subject is police officers (person) responding to a domestic violence call (context).

Role overload occurs when roles are too complicated or complex (Biddle, 2013). Much of the research on role overload documents overload concerning multiple roles (work and family roles, for example), rather than on overload that occurs within one role, or “domain specific” role overload (Duxbury, Lyons, & Higgins, 2008, p. 130). Duxbury et al. (2008) note that while less researched, it should be distinguished from “total role” overload that occurs based on the demands of multiple role sets (p. 131). Role overload within one role, such as that of a police officer, can be considered “a type of role conflict that is specifically related to the total time and energy needed to fulfill role demands and may occur even when the role demands are compatible because the individual does not have sufficient time and energy to meet them all” (Duxbury et al., 2008, p. 129). The consequences of role overload were summarized by Duxbury et al. (2008) as including an increase in fatigue, burnout, depression, stress, anxiety, decreased satisfaction with work and with family, as well as emotional stress (p. 135).

**METHODS AND SAMPLE**

This study was designed to be descriptive and exploratory, as little research on the subject of police perceptions of their roles in responding to domestic violence has been done previously. In-depth interviews were conducted to allow the perceptions and views of officers to be revealed. Police officers from various departments were recruited through a convenience sample of key informants with whom the author became familiar during related research. Through these initial gatekeepers, snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants until saturation of the information and ideas provided by the officers was reached. The study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board with a waiver of written informed consent, therefore verbal consent was obtained. Interviews were in-person and semi-structured,
and each interview was approximately one hour in length. The main purpose of this study was to describe officer perceptions about their role in responding to domestic violence, their perception of the effectiveness of arrest in domestic violence cases, and the challenges they face with survivors and offenders. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. Coding and thematic development (Padgett, 2008) were used to identify and group common themes using ATLAS.ti (Version 1.5.4, Muhr, 1997). Role theory was applied *a posteriori* to explain further the themes that were identified.

The sample included officers from suburban, metropolitan communities in Illinois. States vary in the statutes that govern domestic violence response. There are requirements necessary for an officer to make an arrest, as well as other recommended responses (Zeoli, Norris, & Brenner, 2011). Illinois does not have a state statute that mandates arrest, but it does suggest that officers take reasonable means to prevent future violence using a range of actions that include arrest, as well as providing victims with referrals and written information, escorting victims to retrieve personal items from the home, and advising medical treatment and transportation (750 ILCS 60/304 Ch. 40, par. 2313). In addition, the statute specifies a range of actions that an officer should take if an arrest is not made, such as filing a report, informing a victim of his/her rights, advising medical treatment, and seizing weapons if appropriate (750 ILCS 60/304 Ch. 40, par. 2313-4, Sec. 304 b1-3). In total, eight participants were recruited and completed interviews. Of the eight participants, six were male, and two were female, and they represented six different police departments. Six officers identified as white; the remaining two officers were Latino and Asian. They had a wide range of experience (3-40 years on the job) and in rank (police officer – police chief).

**FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

One thing was very clear to participants – there is nothing clear about responding to domestic violence calls. Officers discussed two overlapping roles of providing safety and providing resources and, within navigating these roles, officers report several barriers to effective resolution, including situational ambiguity, the officer's skill set, and the limitations of their response. The interview data suggest that these barriers and limitations of their role lead to officer frustration and ambivalence toward domestic violence calls.

**Officer Roles - “Oh, authority, peacekeeper, the voice of reason.”**

Officers described their role as a dual function they perform when responding to domestic violence calls that is utilized differently depending on the nature of the call. As one participant noted, “If there is injury or any type of criminal, obviously, arresting officer, but the other would be resource and reference” (Participant 4). If the involved parties did not appear to be in a physical altercation, participants made the distinction that these calls were “verbal-onlies” where they see themselves “as just trying to problem-solve, find out what the – what the core issue is at hand, and then trying to give them advice going forward” (Participant 8). Half of the officers perceived their role to include providing resources for victims. One participant described this role as “Oh, authority, peacekeeper, the voice of reason. They call for assistance, and we're there to assist. It's a service call. We provide a service to them, and we try to help 'em out” (Participant 6). The remaining half, when listing what they do during a call, indicated that they would provide resources to people, particularly when there was not an injury involved.
Participants, therefore, echo the notion that police response to domestic violence is both social service and law enforcement related (Johnson et al., 1994). Using the terms defined by Biddle (2013), the role of officers can be described by the behavior related to ensuring safety (making an arrest) and providing resources (advice, reference, resources), both of which are utilized in the context of the domestic violence call. The dual facets, providing safety and resources, of the role would delineate this role as more complex based on the breadth of the tasks and actions that are ascribed to the domestic violence responder. The coherence of these two aspects – resource and safety provider – is less defined based on officer responses. While some officers perceived these two components of their role as distinct, all officers did mention activities related to both elements of this role. Regardless, officers did experience some barriers and limitations to fulfilling these role demands and achieving effective resolutions.

**Barriers & Limitations to Effective Resolutions**

One of the objectives of the study was to understand if officers perceived the resolutions they provide to be effective. One theme in the interviews was that officers could not definitively say if the resolutions they provide are effective or not. As one participant noted, “So it's—is it effective? For some. Is it not effective? For some” (Participant 7). Several circumstances acted as barriers to officers perceiving the resolutions of calls to be effective. Specifically, participants noted that attempts to discern what was happening on the scene made it difficult to respond effectively. Additionally, in cases where their role was not solely focused on providing safety, some officers discussed the limitation of their skill set in helping the involved parties. Lastly, officers stated that the resolutions that they can utilize could be temporary or unsatisfactory. These factors all acted as barriers to officers perceiving their resolutions as effective, which contributes to an overall sense of ambivalence and frustration.

**Situational ambiguity - “The A story, the B story.”** The ambiguity in a situation to which the officers were responding is two-fold. First, while officers made the distinction between verbal and physical altercations, officers reported that it was difficult to discern which type of call it was in the first place. Participants described these as “the gray areas” (Participant 7) that sometimes lie between what officers witness and the conflicting or limited information that the involved parties may provide. One participant shared that “There's always the A story, the B story and then there's the C story somewhere in the middle” (Participant 1), while another described: “It's like an auto accident. There's the red car story and the white car story, and somewhere in the middle probably lays the truth. We do split up as teams and interview people separately and get back together and figure out what's happening” (Participant 4). In other words, participants report that there is some difficulty in understanding or interpreting the circumstances. Officers described these situations of having to “sit there and figure things out” as “the rough ones” (Participant 3), which was more often associated with verbal altercations and situations where the primary aggressor was not readily evident. Other authors have also reported officer difficulty in discerning domestic violence situations (Johnson, 2004; DeJong, Burgess-Proctor, & Elis, 2008). In the present study, attempting to establish who was the physical aggressor or what occurred before they arrived is one component of ambiguity that makes the roles of officers more complex and acts as a barrier to providing effective resolutions.

The second aspect of ambiguity occurs in the lack of predictability, specifically in domestic violence calls. Officers commented that while these calls may seem routine, they always need to remain alert, as have police officers in previous research (Sinden & Stephens,
Situations could be volatile upon entry, or events may escalate after they are on the scene and they needed to be prepared for this. As one officer commented, “There's no routine domestic; even if you go to the house 30 times a month, there's always something different about it” (Participant 3). This ambiguity of the situation and the unpredictability of calls appeared to distort the distinction that officers made between the roles of safety and resource officers, as well as being a barrier to effective resolutions. When asking police officers to identify job components that make them “feel overloaded and overwhelmed,” Duxbury, Higgins, and Halinkski (2015, p. 368) found that unclear expectations and unpredictability were among the 15 distinct components that contributed to feelings of being overloaded. Managing the ambiguity of situations led officers to feel ineffective in providing resolutions and overall frustrated. Another barrier they described was the skill set officers have as it related to their safety and resources roles.

Skill set – “We're not trained counselors.” All officers described providing resources in response to domestic violence calls, particularly those that were verbal altercations. However, many officers described a limitation in their skills and their ability to provide further assistance. Additionally, officers commented on their lack of skills being inherent to their role as a police officer. While officers appeared more confident in intervening in the case of a physical altercation with a clear aggressor (with an arrest), it seemed they were less confident in their ability to provide an effective solution in verbal altercations. As Participant 7 notes: “Like I've told people, I go, ‘Listen, I understand. However, I am not qualified to give you advice…’… I go, ‘I'm not a doctor, I'm not a psychiatrist, I'm not a therapist. I am not qualified to do that.’” Another participant further elaborated this constraint on their role:

Also the problem is is [sic] we're not trained counselors, and you're going in there, and you're trying to counsel people, to calm them down. We're not provided the training for that, and some people have it, and some people don't, and some people need maybe a little training on how to deal with people. (Participant 2)

While officers are not given the training to have these types of capabilities, some officers noted that this was an intrinsic limitation that is positive. These officers felt that it would be inappropriate to provide this counsel in their role as a police officer. Participant 4 notes, “We're not counselors. I like the set of tools we have – recognizing the limitations of our role. We shouldn't be counselors. That's really beyond our role. I think the tools that we have now are pretty adequate.” Conversely, other officers commented on the inadequacy of their skills, stating that they wanted to do more for survivors and their families. These officers wished that there was more they could do to help survivors and provide better outcomes. As one officer noted:

I wish that we could – I don't know – have somebody where we know that they are gonna follow up. I wish I had more time and resources to do that, where I could say, ‘Okay, let's go to the –’ I mean, it's almost like being a mom or something or like a babysitter, you know? … But you can't really have somebody do that. If you're talking to an adult, they have to do it. They have to be the adult. I wish you could just give them a little scoot, though, or something in the right direction. (Participant 1)
It is clear that the needs of involved parties, particularly of victims, are more complicated than safety and resources. Previous research (DeJong et al., 2008) found that officers felt that they were ill-equipped or limited in their ability to respond to domestic violence calls. The complexity of the work as a source of feeling overwhelmed was also found by Duxbury et al. (2015) in focus groups with police. The inability of officers to reach a satisfactory or conclusive result then becomes another barrier they face.

Limited resolutions - “We don't often get the results.” There is a sense among participants that the resolutions they can arrive at are limited themselves. Even in the situations where officers felt their response and resolution was within the bounds of their role as an officer, the results were seen as unsatisfactory or temporary. The reasons for these views seemed to be connected to their limited impact on individual situations and the limits of the criminal justice system. Participant 7 notes, “this is not gonna be fixed over a one-time session,” indicating the complexity of the situation and the inconclusiveness of some calls. This inconclusiveness was coupled with the sentiment that victims may not follow through with the resolutions that they do provide. As shared by one officer, “We have the domestic violence forms; we hand them out to them all the time. Whether they read them …” (Participant 3). In addition to this speculation about the actions or inaction of victims, another officer described the perceived inaction of individuals as repeat calls for service:

There are a lot that are regular callers and we're always going back there, and it's the same old problems with the same old things where it's like, ‘You guys have to either get over it and move on or deal with what you're working with and that's it. Quit calling us. It's a waste of your time. It's a waste of our time. Nothing ever gets resolved.’ (Participant 5)

This limited ability to impact change is not only confined to the individual calls to which they respond but also connected to their work as part of the larger criminal justice system. One participant summarized their view of other professionals in the criminal justice system:

...The judge will give them supervision, pat them on the hand, tell them to not do it again, and go away...The state's attorneys are more and more worried about their stats and what their conviction rate is and how many ‘guilty's' they get as opposed to actually putting on a trial and actually doing stuff. If they can cut a deal to do whatever, they'll cut a deal, give someone supervision, and just get them out of the door so that they look good and that the numbers are good. That's no way to do business. Our business is to lock somebody up. That's as far as we go. We did our job, now you guys have to do your job. (Participant 5)

Sinden and Stephens (1999) and Gover, Paul, and Dodge (2011) also found that officers report frustration around the inaction of victims and systems, such as the courts. Horwitz et al. (2011) found that “Complexity not only applied to factors that prompted the ‘revolving door' scenario between the members of the couple but also chronicity within the entire criminal justice and service provider system” (p. 622). The ambiguity of the situation, the constraints of their skillset, and limitations of the resolutions all act as barriers to officers perceiving the multiple roles and available resolutions as effective. The overall emotion that officers express about
domestic violence calls is frustration and ambivalence. Their perceived inability to fulfill the complex behaviors ascribed to their dual role seems to be both overwhelming and defeating.

**Frustration - “The most frustrating part…”**

The barriers and limitations discussed thus far contribute to officers concluding that their resolutions are often not effective. Similar to Johnson (2004), participants in this study discussed multiple sources of frustration. This frustration was particularly evident when all participants were asked at the conclusion of the interview what, if anything, they found to be the most challenging and most rewarding about addressing domestic violence calls. The following quotes capture their responses:

> There's really nothing rewarding because everybody loses in those situations, everybody, everybody. (Participant 2)

> I really never found anything to – I just – at least me. I never walked out of the house going, ‘Hey, we did a good job.’ It's – you never get that feeling when you walk out of a domestic thing. ‘Cause there's always going to be something there to bring you back. (Participant 3)

> We can't fix something in 5-minutes that took them 10-15-years to go ahead and propagate. You let this go on for so long, and now you're expecting me to go in and in 5-minutes I'm going to fix it …and it's frustrating, because we don't - we're just a temporary fix, basically. We're there to keep the peace, and we're not a long-term solution, by any means. (Participant 5)

Through their words, and the expressions on some of their faces, it was apparent that they were disheartened by this reality. Some wish they could do more to assist in the long-term resolution of these issues, while others seem resigned to the limitation of their role. All officers wanted positive outcomes for victims; however, they seemed defeated in their ability to achieve these outcomes in such complex situations, even if they appreciate the duality of their role.

This feeling of frustration and ambivalence may be connected to the experience of role overload. As outlined above, findings from Duxbury et al. (2015) about what leads to feelings of being overwhelmed are similar to those described here by officers responding to domestic violence. Additionally, the emotional toll of the job contributes to feeling overloaded (Duxbury et al., 2015), which seemed to be captured in the feelings of frustration experienced by officers. The discussion of role overload will be revisited in the Conclusion section, but first, officers were asked to share ideas they had about what would improve their response to domestic violence, which may provide some insight into how we may alleviate the experience of role overload.

**Recommendations – “There's not enough resources.”**

Participants were asked what recommendations they had to improve response to domestic violence. Officers shared that more training or knowledge (two participants), a coordinated effort with civilian assistance (four participants), or additional resources for victims and families
(four participants) would improve the overall effectiveness of domestic violence response. Having more access to skilled resources outside of law enforcement and the criminal justice system are options they raised that could reduce role overload. Specifically, one participant shared that “Additional tools? It would be nice to just – I would say it would be nice to have a social worker able to actually be there at that – at that instance” (Participant 8).

Officers also see the limitations of the resources that are currently in place and believe that providing additional services would also lead to improved outcomes:

We don't have enough resources because I know places like, ‘Hey, we'll take in battered women, but they can't have kids.’ ‘We'll take in battered women, but they can only have one kid. And it has to be a girl. It can't be any boys.’ There's not enough resources. No. I absolutely believe that there's not. No, there's not. (Participant 7)

For these officers bolstering the services to meet the limitations of their skillset and inconclusive resolutions would be helpful. Both an increase in relevant services and stronger collaboration with other agencies may assist officers in minimizing the impact of the barrier of inconclusive resolutions and reduce the frustration that results from their experience of role overload. Having the skill set of a trained professional on the scene of domestic violence incidents may allow for officers to feel a decreased burden from the barrier of situational ambiguity and their limited skill set.

**IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION**

Entrenched in domestic violence response, police officers embody the dual role that they identify here. The complicated nature of their response will likely persist and addressing role overload is critical to improving our response to domestic violence. While the competing demands of the job may seem like everyday stress, role overload has particular consequences. Duxbury et al. (2008) summarize that the research on the effects of role overload demonstrates, in general, an increase in fatigue, burnout, depression, stress, anxiety, decreased satisfaction with work and with family, as well as emotional stress (p. 135). In samples of police, higher levels of work-related stress are predictive of higher rates of anxiety and depression, which are mediated by emotional exhaustion (Santa Maria et al., 2017). Additionally, Kwak, McNeeley, & Kim (2018) found that for officers in South Korea, there is a relationship between officer burnout and the experience of emotional labor, emotional dissonance, and role stress. Officers in this study experienced greater levels of burnout when, among other factors, experience stress in their roles, such as role overload as described above. Findings from Frank, Lambert, & Quershi (2017) confirm that experiencing role conflict, overload, and ambiguity are associated with levels of higher stress for police officers in India. There is a significant impact on the stress experienced by police officers when there is a higher level of strain on their role, making it a critical factor to examine in policing and particularly cases of domestic violence as explored here. Few studies have looked specifically at role identification and role overload, or other forms of load stress, and its impact on domestic violence response. Myhill and Johnson (2016) note that there has not been much recent research on how police construct and understand domestic violence. Their research found that officers use ample discretion in their response to domestic violence and they conclude that it is possible that, with this discretion, there is the opportunity for domestic
violence cases to be minimized. While there is significant research on police response to domestic violence more broadly, there is little focus on the impact that these types of cases, and officers perceptions of them, may have on the officer themselves and in turn the influence this may have on their response.

While a scale to measure role overload was not given in this study, the similarities in descriptions of police work reported by Duxbury et al. (2015) allows for the application of the model of role overload here. In the development of a scale to measure the antecedents of role overload, they found that “competing demands, the court system, pressures to perform outside one's mandate, understaffing, and nonsupportive organizational culture” were precursors to experiencing role overload (Duxbury et al., 2015, p. 361). While officers in this study did not discuss all of these factors, the narratives of participants demonstrated some markers of role overload, including multiple and sometimes ambiguous demands (competing demands) and work outside of their skillset (performing outside one’s mandate).

Recommendations from the officers themselves and what we can learn from prior research demonstrate ways in which we may work to mitigate the role overload experienced by officers responding to domestic violence. Again, participants shared that more training, coordinated response with professionals, and additional resources for victims and families would improve their response. Although not mentioned by participants in this study, training on trauma may help officers to understand how trauma impacts individuals and how they interpret domestic violence situations (Hickle, n.d.; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

Using this type of approach has the potential to provide positive assistance to officers, specifically in response to domestic and sexual violence. In addition to training on the impact of trauma on victims and families, understanding how trauma may impact them as a police officer and how to enhance their coping skills has also been found to be valuable (Arnetz, Nevedal, Lumley, Backman, & Lublin, 2009). This type of training in methods of resilience, such as mindfulness and meditation, could work to reduce the consequences related to role overload discussed here. Specifically, prior research found significant improvement in self-reported measures of perceived stress, fatigue, anger, sleep disturbance, and burnout, as well as emotional intelligence and emotion regulation (Christopher et al., 2016). This arena shows potential avenues for innovative training efforts that can improve outcomes for both victims and officers themselves.

Improvement of collaboration and coordinated response with other professionals could also bolster outcomes for officers. One potential model for this would be the implementation of a co-responder model for domestic violence response, previously used in both calls for service and investigations and follow-up (Reuland, Morabito, Preston, & Cheney, 2006). Additionally, agency collaboration or coordinated services may minimize the barriers related to officer skill set and limited resolutions, as identified by participants in this study. Partnerships with social workers or mental health professionals on the scene may provide families with needed resources in the immediate situation. The implications for policy and practice also extend outside of the police agency and require that social service agencies, local and state governments support the provision of evidence-based social services. Greater collaboration between professionals within the criminal justice system may address the perceived “revolving door” (Horowitz et al., 2011) and provide greater access to resources for families. Implementing such partnerships and increasing the provision of social services will require resources, such as funding and the personnel to commit to fulfilling these roles. Reuland et al. (2006) found that police sources
discussed the importance of having a genuine partnership with community agencies, which allowed for improved communication and more access to resources for victims. These types of efforts require ongoing evaluation and funding to ensure that they continue to meet the goals and needs of the community. Strong community-based responses that meet the multiple, complex needs of victims and offenders may reduce the burden of role overload for police officers, improving the overall response to domestic violence.

Finally, additional resources for domestic violence survivors are a need from the perspective of officers. Building on this, it is essential to ensure that there are resources for survivors and families outside of the criminal legal system, as the criminal legal response is not desired by all individuals experiencing domestic violence. Ensuring culturally responsive and survivor-centered services are essential and should continue to be a social and funding priority.

As a small, qualitative study, the results are not necessarily generalizable. While the sample size was small, this study was specifically designed to be exploratory as there is little previous work on this subject. As Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora (2016) relay, the purpose within an exploratory analysis “not to cover the whole range of phenomena, but to present selected patterns relevant for the study aim” (p. 1756). For this study, the study aims were small and, therefore, will reach saturation more quickly than a larger study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation in the themes was found when eight interviews were completed. Past research has found that saturation can occur in the first 12 interviews, with the presence of elements of “metathemes” in as few as six interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

That said, the results only represent the views of the participants, and the findings are further qualified by the setting, as Illinois is not a mandatory arrest state, and officer experiences in other states may vary considerably. Additionally, future research needs to look at how individual characteristics of officers (Biddle, 2013) or individual role identification (Grawitch, Barber, & Kruger, 2010) may influence how officers perceive their role or experience role overload. However, the results do provide an initial understanding and themes for exploration in future research. From this study, it is clear that there is much important work to be done by law enforcement as well as other professionals to more adequately respond to domestic violence. Through additional knowledge, resources, and partnerships for both law enforcement and social workers, we can reduce the experience of role overload in hopes of improving our response to survivors of domestic violence.

REFERENCES


**Anjali Fulambarker** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at Governors State University. The focus of her research is on the law enforcement response to intimate partner violence. The aim of this research is to understand and improve experiences for people while also imagining solutions outside of the criminal legal system, specifically focusing on what social workers can do.