

The Police Interaction Research Project:

**A Study of the Interactions
that Occur Between the
Police and Survivors
Following a Sexual Assault**

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The Police Interaction Research Project was prepared by the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault, an independent not-for-profit organization whose mission is to provide leadership in creating a society in which rape and sexual abuse are not tolerated and in the improvement of support to rape and sexual abuse survivors. This is accomplished through uniting organizations, influencing policy and through advocacy, education and research. The Alliance is committed to inclusion and responsiveness to the needs of diverse populations in New York City.

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Introduction

The Police Interaction Research Project of the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault represents the first attempt by an organization founded by direct service providers to objectively explore what happens between sexual assault survivors and the Police Officers and Detectives of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). The genesis of this project goes back over two years, when rape crisis programs across the city began hearing anecdotal accounts of survivors having problems with NYPD Special Victims Detectives. These reports represented a change from what had been considered the norm in Police-survivor relations. Programs were concerned that such negative experiences might exacerbate the trauma suffered by sexual assault survivors. In addition, some survivors were choosing to forego utilizing the criminal justice system as a result of these experiences, which might affect reporting levels across the city. The low rate of reports of sexual assault to law enforcement is increasingly recognized as a nationwide problem.

Despite the efforts of the Hospital Rape Crisis Programs Committee and the NYPD Special Victims Liaison Unit, who were working together to find a way to address these issues, rape crisis programs still had some concerns as reports about the poor treatment of rape victims by Special Victims Detectives continued to circulate. One of the main stumbling blocks was that the NYPD felt it had to have specific case-by-case information in order to investigate these reports. Such information could only be provided with the informed consent of the survivor. Unfortunately, most of the survivors involved in these cases did not want programs to advocate with the NYPD in this way. While such a

decision might be made for many reasons, Alliance supporters are bound to respect the confidentiality of their clients and cannot pursue these cases without consent.

The Police Interaction Research Project was designed to take a different approach to this difficult issue. The data collected here represents an attempt to identify trends or patterns without identifying individual cases. The study began with the assumption that documenting these interactions would reveal positive experiences as well as negative experiences between survivors and the Police. With these two points in mind the following research questions were developed:

- 1. What happens when a survivor of sexual assault has a positive experience with the NYPD?*
- 2. What happens when a survivor of sexual assault has a negative experience with the NYPD?*
- 3. Are there any identifiable patterns in these interactions?*
- 4. When a survivor of sexual assault has a negative experience with the Police, are these isolated incidents specific to individual cases or do they represent a more widespread pattern of problems in the NYPD?*

The primary challenge in designing this study was to find a way to collect the information necessary to answer these questions without violating client confidentiality. It was decided that the best way to do this would be to focus on the interactions themselves, avoiding any specific references to individual cases. No survivors would be directly questioned. Instead, the data would be collected from rape crisis counselors, both emergency rooms advocates and social workers, who had witnessed either the interaction itself or its aftermath. The information would consist of the most general

demographics and the questions asked would focus on what occurs during the interaction between a survivor and the Police. In this way, the necessary data could be collected without compromising confidentiality. This study is intended to address problems that may exist for survivors and the NYPD. It will not only help the survivor struggling with the trauma of sexual assault, but may encourage more victims to utilize the resources of NYC's law enforcement community. If we want more rape victims to report these crimes to the authorities we need to understand more about what enhances or discourages this process. A better understanding of this process will enable us to develop a more collaborative approach to dealing with the issue of rape in New York City.

Methodology & Design of Study

The study was constructed in two phases, using a mixed methodology approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was collected with a survey intended to provide a broad overview of the incidence of sexual assault in New York City during which rape crisis counselors are involved in the interactions between survivors and the Police. The qualitative data was obtained by interviewing counselors or social workers and is meant to give a more detailed picture of what is observed during these interactions. Ten rape crisis programs, representing fifteen hospitals across the city, agreed to participate in the project.

The research instruments were designed with two goals in mind. First, to collect as much information as possible about the nature of the interactions that occur between Police Officers and survivors following a sexual assault. Second, to collect this information in a way that protects the confidentiality of both the survivor and the participating programs.

During Phase One of the project, participating programs filled out a brief survey, entitled the Police Interaction Report (PIR), for every sexual assault case where the Police had been involved over an eight-month period. The person filing the report was asked to indicate whether they would summarize the survivor's experience with the Police as positive, negative, neutral, mixed, or unknown. A neutral experience would be one that was neither strongly positive nor negative. An experience was coded as mixed when some elements of the experience were positive and others negative. In some cases, the advocate or social worker did not become involved in the case until after the Police had

left the scene. In such cases, if the survivor had no comment about the experience it was coded as unknown. The project collected two hundred of these surveys.

Phase Two of the project consisted of 48 random telephone interviews with advocates and social workers drawn from the 200 PIR surveys. Only cases reporting a positive, negative, or mixed experience were contacted, as it was believed that in neutral or unknown cases there would be little detailed information to report. Phase Two represented approximately 25% of the entire sample.

The interview is divided into two parts. The first part consists of the interaction (i.e.: where, when, who was present). The main question in the second part of the interview was: "What can you tell me about what happened between the survivor and the Police?" This question was intentionally broad and the interviewees were encouraged to recount whatever they remembered. Emphasis was placed on accounts of specific behaviors and procedures as well as on how the interaction seemed to affect the survivor. Respondents were asked what about the interaction made them feel the experience was either positive or negative for the survivor. For negative reports they were asked if there was anything special about the survivor that they felt might have influenced the behavior of the Police. This last question was added because of concerns that some members of the Police department might hold stereotypical views of certain survivor attributes (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) that might have a negative impact on the interaction.

The data from Phase One was analyzed to see what patterns, if any, exist in the experiences of survivors and the Police following a sexual assault. In Phase Two, we were looking for an understanding of how an advocate or social worker perceives the interaction between a survivor and the Police as having been either a positive or negative experience for the survivor. No specific details on any particular assault were solicited or recorded.

While the design of this study does have its limitations, it also has considerable strengths. In terms of its limitations, the type of data collection proposed here will yield limited results. If patterns exist, we will be able to ascertain the general outlines of the problem, but the lack of any identifying case information may mean that important elements in Police-survivor relations do not become apparent. In other words, we may be able to describe what happens, but not necessarily why.

The study may also be criticized for limiting its subjects to rape crisis counselors. There is no direct input from survivors or Police, and no cases from hospitals without advocate programs. Certainly the lack of a control group is a limitation. We will be unable to compare the experiences of survivors with counselors to those without, or to examine the impact of the counselor's presence. On the other hand, we also believe that the counselor focus is one of the study's major strengths. The primary goal of this study is to systematically document experiences that have heretofore only existed as anecdotal



reports. In addition, in focusing on the issue from the perspective of the rape crisis counselor we are studying the observations of a highly trained and experienced group of people, both professional and volunteer. This type of information can provide a very useful tool in understanding the issues at hand.

Results of Data Collection

Phase One: The Police Interaction Report

During Phase One of the project, 200 Police Interaction Reports were collected from ten rape crisis programs across the city. These reports documented cases of sexual assault that occurred between January 1 and August 31, 2000. Among these cases, 46% were identified as acquaintance rape, 40% as stranger rape, 14% as cases of child sexual abuse or other forms of sexual assault.

Except for children under the age of 10 (7%), the age range of survivors in this study is quite evenly distributed, with 32% between the ages of 11 -20, 32% from 21 - 30, and 29% over 30. In terms of racial or ethnic backgrounds, of the 200 cases reported, 24% were identified as White, 29% as Hispanic, 39% were Black or African American, and 8% were identified as having Asian backgrounds. The majority of survivors in this study (95%) were female.

The largest number of PIR cases came from Manhattan (54%). In the other four boroughs, 16% of the reports came from Queens, 13% from Staten Island, 10% from Brooklyn, and 6% from the Bronx. The information for approximately 60% of these reports came from emergency room advocates, the other 40% from rape crisis program or hospital social workers.

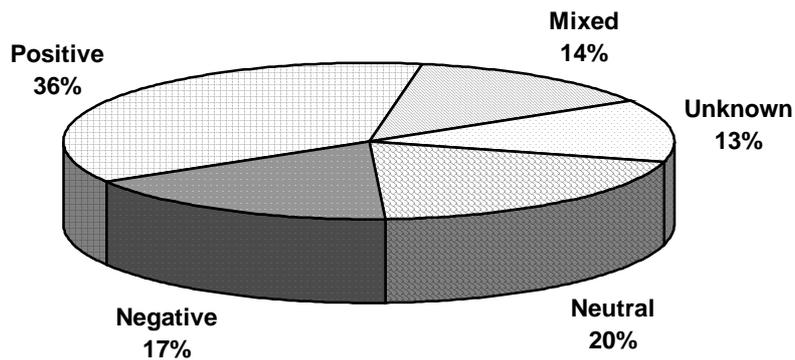
The presence of Detectives from the Special Victims Squad is indicated in 32% of the PIR cases. However, it should be noted that information on the presence of Special Victims Detectives was not always available. Program staff reading advocate reports filled out many of the PIR's, particularly those from Manhattan. While these reports routinely document the presence of the Police, the specific branch of the service is not always recorded. So while the data indicates that Special Victims Detectives were involved in *at least* 32% of the PIR cases, the actual number is probably higher.

Information on the summary of the survivor's experience, a key variable in this study, is summarized below in Table 1:

Table 1: Phase 1 Summary of Survivor Experience During Interaction with Police

<u>Experience</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent (%)</u>
Negative	34	17
Positive	73	37
Neutral	40	20
Mixed	26	13
Unknown	27	13
Totals:	200	100%

Chart 1: Summary of Experience

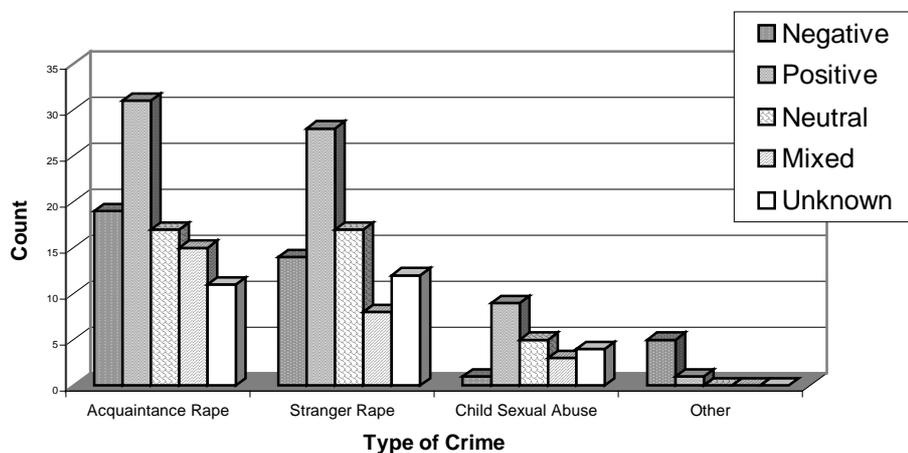


The unknown experience refers to incidents where the Police have come and gone before the advocate or social worker arrived. The fact that only 13% are unknown suggests that in a majority of cases the advocate or social worker is present for at least part of the survivor's interaction with the Police. It is assumed that during a neutral experience nothing occurred to exacerbate the survivor's trauma. For this reason a neutral experience is considered to be a weak positive for purposes of data analysis. A mixed experience includes those cases where the interaction contains both positive and negative elements. As these cases have some negative impact they are considered as weak negatives in the data analysis.

The findings indicate that positive experiences are clearly more frequent than negative experiences in Police-survivor interactions as over half the cases reported in this study (positive + neutral = 57%) describe positive experiences. A significant minority (negative + mixed = 30%) describes cases with negative experiences.

Utilizing SPSS and the chi-square statistic in analyzing the PIR variables, no significant correlations were found between experience and the type of crime, relationship of the perpetrator, age, race or ethnicity of the survivor, or the presence of the Special Victims Squad. However, there is evidence that Special Victims Detectives are heavily over represented in cases reporting a mixed experience with the Police.

Chart 2: Summary of Experience By Type of Crime



The one exception to this involves adolescents between the ages of 14 -21, who were far more likely to have a negative experience with the Police than any other age group, representing over 40% of all negative PIR cases. The data also shows this group to be somewhat less likely to interact with Special Victims Detectives than survivors over the age of 21. This suggests that adolescents are more likely to have negative experiences with Uniformed Police Officers.

In an attempt to identify any possible interaction effects, the location of the crime was compared to age, race, and type of crime. In this case, only age was found to be statistically significant. With a significance level of .05, this analysis showed that over half (62%) of the cases involving survivors over 21 came from Manhattan while over half (58%) of those under 21 came from the other boroughs. Further analysis, including a cross-tab analysis of race by type of crime controlled by age, failed to demonstrate any more significant correlations.

Chart 3: Summary of Experience By Age

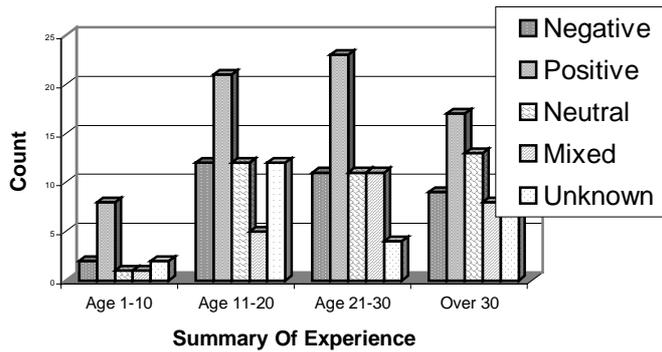
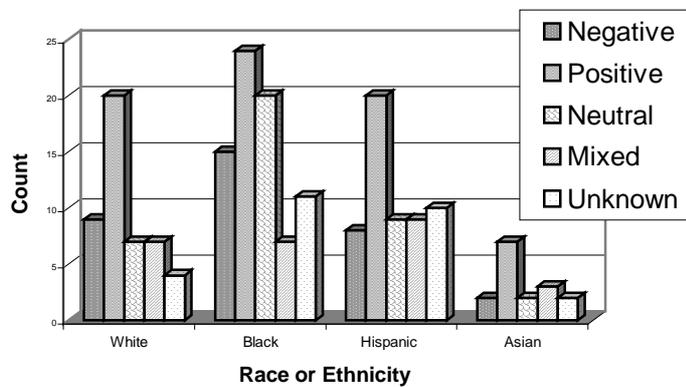


Chart 4: Summary of Experience By Race or Ethnicity



The only other variable in this analysis showing any strong statistical significance involved who was reporting the information for the PIR. At a significance level of .02, it was found that PIR reports from advocates were strongly correlated with both positive and neutral Police-survivor interactions while reports from social workers were very strongly correlated with reports of mixed experiences. Reports from social workers were also very strongly correlated with cases where Special Victims Detectives were involved.

In summary, the statistical analysis of Phase One indicates that over half the cases in this study (57%) describe cases where the Police-survivor interaction range from partially to completely positive while a significant minority (30%) are at least partially negative. The negative minority is large enough to suggest that there may be significant or recurring problems in this interaction process that have not yet been identified. Further analysis shows that there are no significant correlations between the summary of experience and other demographic variables, including age, race or ethnicity, and relationship of the perpetrator. There was also no significant correlation between the type of experience reported and the presence of Special Victims Detectives, except where an interaction was reported as mixed.

Results of Data Collection

Phase Two: Advocate & Social Worker Interviews

Concurrent with the collection of the PIR data, advocates or social workers that reported positive, negative or mixed interactions were interviewed by phone. A total of 48 interviews were conducted, representing 25% of the total PIR sample. Social workers comprised 60% and 40% were emergency room advocates, of the Phase Two sample. Half of these cases involved Police interactions that occurred within 12 hours of the assault. Over 80% had been seen within 24 hours and 90% within 72 hours. In 75% of these cases (75%), the interactions being described took place in a hospital emergency room. Only 10% involved cases of Police-survivor interactions that took place more than 72 hours after the assault. In these cases the issues identified were part of Police follow-up on cases that had been reported earlier, rather than the initial interview.

In the cases included in Phase Two, 60% involved Special Victims Detectives, 58% involved Uniformed Officers, and 15% included regular Detectives. This is consistent with what we know about NYPD procedures in sexual assault cases. The Uniformed Officers are most often the first response Officers, who then in turn notify the Detectives. Where a Special Victims Detective is not available, a regular Detective may respond. In cases where the hospital notifies the Police, the first response Officer may be a Detective.

The range of experience covered in the Phase Two interviews is summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: Experience of Survivor in Interaction with Police

<u>Experience</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>
Positive	18	37
Negative	11	23
Mixed	19	40
Totals:	48	100%

The second part of the Phase Two interviews involved analysis of the qualitative data gathered in response to the open-ended questions. Analysis of this data showed the most salient features of these interactions seemed to sort themselves naturally into three separate categories for both positive and negative experiences. These included the interview, providing emotional support, and what can be described as negotiating procedures. This last item refers generally to any other aspects of the interaction process not directly concerned with the interview, such as the evidence collection kit or filing a Police report. Mixed interactions were evaluated in terms of both their positive and negative elements.

In the interactions defined as positive, the words most often used were helpful and respectful. Officers in positive interactions were also described as appropriate, professional and very nice. For example:

- *I thought the Police Officer was wonderful...he just let her talk. He did ask questions, but he also listened while she went on for a good 15 minutes. He maintained good eye contact and his facial expressions indicated [to me] that he believed her.*
- *They were appropriate, sensitive but not gushing...they weren't skeptical, gave no indications that they disbelieved her story.*

The most salient element in the interview process involved cases where the Police took time to explain the questions they were asking and why they needed to ask them. Police Officers in positive interactions were often described as being patient, giving the survivors whatever time they needed. Uniformed Officers and Detectives were both described as being concerned with the survivor's comfort and making it clear that they believed her, two key elements in providing emotional support throughout this experience. They were often described as informative, able to explain procedures in clear and understandable language. This included explaining the evidence collection process, the investigative process, and what the survivor could expect to happen after the exam in terms of her own case.

In several instances the interviewees seemed especially impressed with the way some Officers handled particularly difficult cases. For example, there was a case where the victim was mentally ill and unable to provide a consistent account of

what had happened or give a clear description of her assailant. The counselor was very impressed with both the Uniformed Officers and the Special Victims Detectives involved in the case. This was not only because of their sensitivity and patience in dealing with the survivor herself but because they were clearly willing to continue the investigation as far as possible despite the fact that it was highly unlikely that they would ever be able to prosecute the case.

Another common element in positive interactions involved cases in which the Police worked well with the counselors. Counselors reported positive experiences where Police respected the role they were there to play and offered no resistance to their presence. Social workers described similar experiences and also talked about cases where they were able to work with the Police to move a case forward or obtain information for a survivor on follow-up.

Positive interactions were reported for both Uniformed Officers and Detectives (regular and Special Victims), although positive reports involving Uniformed Officers were more frequent.

The qualitative data collected on cases where at least part of the interaction was defined as negative included Police behavior described as lacking sympathy, support or empathy. Police were described as inappropriate, intimidating,

disrespectful, skeptical, unprofessional, or dismissive. At their worst, the negative interactions were clearly traumatic to the survivors:

...She noticed that they really didn't want to deal with her, she said so and she was crying... They really didn't want to give her any information. She said, "They're acting as if they don't care, like I don't matter."

The majority of the qualitative data on negative interactions appeared to center around the experience of the interview and on negotiating procedures. The most frequently mentioned problem involved cases in which the Officers involved made it clear, either directly or indirectly, that they did not believe the survivor's story. Survivor reactions to this ranged from visible discomfort to being openly upset. In positive interactions the question of belief seemed to be more or less a background issue, a part of the emotional support the Officers involved were able to provide. A number of advocates and social workers felt this made it easier for the survivor to answer questions. In cases involving negative interactions, the question of non-belief itself often seemed to become a central issue. In some cases, the Police went as far as accusing the survivor of lying about what happened, either directly to the survivor or to the counselor. There were also several cases where Police were described as repeatedly asking what could be called "why not" questions (*why didn't you scream, why didn't you fight back, why didn't you tell anyone, etc.*).

The most salient issues that surfaced in analyzing the data on negative interactions included impatience, pressuring survivors to answer questions, and blaming or judgmental attitudes. In some cases, advocates and social workers reported survivors being pressured to undergo procedures such as evidence collection before the survivor had decided what she wanted to do. In other cases, particularly where non-belief was an issue, Police were either uninterested or resistant to having the evidence collection kit done or even to taking a report. In some cases, these procedures were not done until after an advocate or social worker had intervened.

Other issues relating to negotiating procedures were a mirror image of what happened in positive interactions. In positive interactions, the Police were described as timely and informative. In a number of negative interactions, survivors had long waits for the Police, both at the emergency room and at other locations. There were a few cases where survivors reported feeling they had been given confusing or misleading information. Several cases involved problems with follow-up after the initial report had been made. These most often occurred later in the investigation and tended to involve Special Victims Detectives. The most commonly mentioned problems included phone calls not being returned and difficulty in obtaining information on the status of a case.

As in the positive interaction reports, working with the counselor was also an issue. Here, advocates reported cases where the Police were resistant to their presence, sometimes arguing with them in front of the survivor. Social workers reported cases where the Police, again most often Special Victims Detectives, were uncooperative or avoidant when they tried to advocate for survivors, particularly on follow-up.

In positive interactions, the number of reports involving Uniformed Officers was quite high, while reports involving regular or Special Victims Detectives were more or less even. In negative interactions, however, it was the Special Victims Detectives who were most frequently mentioned, being identified more than twice as often as either Uniformed Officers or regular Detectives. In terms of the mixed experience cases, over half involved a positive experience with Uniformed Officers (and in a couple of cases with regular Detectives) and a negative experience with Special Victims Detectives.

In summary, the data suggests that Police-survivor interactions involving positive experiences with first response Officers and a negative experience with the Investigative Officers happen too often to be considered isolated incidents. Consideration of these findings, along with the findings in Phase One, suggests that this type of negative experience is a frequent enough occurrence to suggest a pattern of response common to a small proportion of NYPD Officers responding to

cases of sexual assault. The evidence also suggests that Special Victims Detectives are over-represented in this small group.

One of the concerns that inspired this study was that certain myths or stereotypes might be influencing Police behavior. For this reason, counselors who reported mixed or negative interactions were asked if there was anything about the survivor they felt might have influenced the Police. It was found that in positive cases counselors would often mention certain types of special circumstances without being asked. In these cases it was usually a matter of the counselor being impressed at how well the Police handled the case, *in spite of* these circumstances. As a result, there were both negative and positive reports involving cases where the survivors were homeless, transgender, adolescent, or suffering from some sort of mental disability.

There were, however, two issues around which some counselors expressed concern about circumstances that seemed to have a negative effect on the survivor-Police interaction. First, there were a number of cases where the fact that the survivor had been drinking alcohol seemed to have a negative influence on the way the Police were handling the case. Second, there were a number of cases where the Police seemed to be influenced by the appearance of the survivor, either by how she was dressed or how she was behaving. In one case, the

counselor reported that the Police Officer did not believe the survivor's story because while her physical appearance was disheveled, she was not visibly upset.

In summary, the qualitative data in Phase Two suggests that there may be a few key elements that are instrumental in whether a survivor's experience with the Police is positive or negative. These would include an interview that is conducted with patience and a great deal of explanation, emotional support in the form of a non-judgmental attitude and reassurance that the survivor's story is believed, and a patient and informative stance when negotiating other necessary procedures. Where these elements are present, a survivor is more likely to have a positive experience when dealing with the Police following a sexual assault.

The data also suggest that positive experiences may occur more frequently with first response Uniformed Officers than with Special Victims Detectives, a finding that supports the quantitative findings in Phase One. This difference appears to be based in the process of the initial interviews. However, there is also data suggesting that a positive or negative outcome in some Police-survivor interactions can be affected by aspects of specific cases which are consistent with certain commonly held stereotypes or myths about rape.

Analysis of the Police Role:

As Defined by the NYPD and the Rape Crisis Center

Although this study was designed to focus on the perspectives of the rape crisis counselors, it was considered important to include the perspective of the Police as well. In order to accomplish this we examined some of the information on sexual assault given to Police Officers during training. To this end, we have included a brief summary of an overview of the Behavioral Science classes regarding the issues of sexual assault and Victimology given to recruits at the NYPD Academy and information from the “Sex Crimes and Child Abuse Investigation Course Guide,” conducted by the Detective Bureau of the NYPD.

According to the NYPD Academy, the role of the first response Uniformed Police Officer in a sexual assault case is not investigative. They are there primarily to provide crisis intervention, what was described as “psychological first aid.” This is accomplished by doing as much as possible to help restore the survivor to a sense of power, dignity and security. For example, recruits are told not to physically touch the survivor and to ask for permission to do things, like sit down next to them. Primary points of concern include the importance of de-emphasizing blame, stressing safety issues, and empathizing with the survivor. Recruits are taught to think in terms of how they would want their own loved ones to be treated in a similar situation. Training even includes a role-play exercise where recruits play victim, relative and first response Officer.

The training also emphasizes using an interview approach rather than interrogation when questioning a sexual assault survivor. An interrogation approach would put more pressure on the victim to answer questions and possibly push them to talk about details of the case before they are ready to. The survivor's comfort is stressed and recruits are encouraged not to ask too many specific questions about the assault because she will be questioned further by many others before the night is through.

In general, the training for Uniformed Officers on how to interview the survivor in a sexual assault case emphasizes style over content. The Officer's approach should be general, non-accusatory and non-blaming. Questions should focus on what happened rather than why. The questions asked would also depend on the state of the victim, who may or may not be visibly upset.

This information explains the role of the Uniformed Police Officer, who is often called in first response on a case of sexual assault. The Detectives, regular or Special Victims Detectives, are called in later and often arrive at hospital emergency room after the survivors' arrival. In cases where Uniformed Officers are not involved, the Police may be notified by the hospital. When this happens the Detectives may be the first response Officers. In either case, the role of the Detective is in many ways quite different from the role of the Uniformed Officer. According to the "Sex Crimes and Child Abuse Investigation Course Guide," the

primary goal in the investigation of an adult sex crime is the identification and arrest of the perpetrator.

This guide, which is the manual for a course conducted by the Detective Bureau of the NYPD, is quite detailed. It describes twenty different types of sexual offenses against adults and children currently active under New York State law. The Detective Investigator is given a list of nineteen procedural points to cover in cases of adult sexual assault. Beginning with the victim interview, four of these points involve some kind of direct contact with the survivor. The other fifteen points are concerned with the proper collection and handling of evidence.

The chapter entitled “Investigative Techniques: Adult Sex Crime Victim” contains “some suggested guidelines” for both Uniformed Officers and Detectives when dealing with a sexual assault case. These guidelines are in many ways similar to those described in the overview of the NYPD Academy’s Behavioral Science class on sexual assault. Issues of safety and restoration of dignity are stressed. Officers are advised to avoid physical contact, attempt to get an accurate description of the perpetrator, advise the victim not to wash, and see that they get to a hospital. While the guide does stress the fact that no law enforcement Officers are to be present during the medical examination, the Sex Crimes Evidence Collection Kit is discussed in detail and the mandatory referral to the nearest rape crisis center is clearly stated.

The issue of counselor presence during Police interviews is also dealt with in this chapter. The laws regarding counselor presence and confidentiality are clearly delineated. However, this is immediately followed by suggestions on how to be in compliance with the law and still avoid the presence of a counselor by convincing the survivor that the interview should be conducted without the advocate being present. This is described as “empowering the victim.”

In summary, when dealing with cases of sexual assault, Uniformed Police Officers are expected to provide emergency crisis intervention to the survivor, see that they get medical attention, and take possession of the evidence collection kit. The Detectives are responsible for the full investigation of the assault and are also expected to provide crisis intervention as needed. While the emotional needs of the survivor are repeatedly emphasized as being of great importance, the primary focus of the Detective is the investigation.

Discussion

In general, the findings of this study suggest that a survivor of sexual assault is more likely to have a positive experience with the NYPD than a negative one. However, a significant proportion of survivors (30%) do have at least partially negative experiences with the Police. In some cases, these negative experiences are clearly the result of isolated incidents involving individual Officers and survivors. This study finds no evidence of significant problems in reference to the age, race or ethnicity of the survivor, or the type of assault. The evidence does suggest that negative experiences may be exacerbated by certain myths or stereotypes, particularly those referring to women who drink or do not behave as expected after a sexual assault. When problems with individual cases do arise, they may involve Officers from any branch of the department, including Uniformed Officers and Special Victims Detectives. A positive experience may also involve an Officer from any branch of the service.

The evidence also suggests a pattern in negative interactions that occurs in the initial interview conducted with a survivor at the beginning of a sexual assault investigation. The Special Victims Squad usually carries out these investigations, so this type of problem will most often involve a Special Victims Detective. However, it is important to note that a bad interview experience can also occur with a Uniformed Officer, especially if the survivor is an adolescent.

In terms of the questions regarding what contributes to a survivor-Police interaction being either positive or negative, the study findings can be summarized in the following three statements:

- 1. A survivor of sexual assault is more likely to have a positive experience interacting with the Police when the Officers involved are adhering closely to what is taught in the training provided by the NYPD regarding the handling of sexual assault cases.**

In the overview of the NYPD academy course, crisis intervention techniques are emphasized. The course guide for Detectives also stresses the need for emotional support during the investigation. In the advocate and social worker interviews, the issues of emotional support, belief, and providing explanations and information were a recurring theme, frequently present in positive interactions and missing where the experience was negative. Basically, the information in the data and the training materials appear to match naturally. This can be clearly seen in the following examples drawn from the Phase Two interviews:

- *The Detective responded immediately, she came in and I felt the questions she asked seemed to be very pertinent. She was patient, explained things thoroughly. I think she was also very realistic with the survivor in terms of what could happen with the case if she proceeded. Explained things in a manner the survivor could understand... The patient herself told me she felt very comfortable with the Detective...*
- *They were just very respectful, very professional. They knew what they needed, but weren't pushy about it.*

2. A survivor of sexual assault is more likely to have a positive experience with Uniformed Police Officers than with Special Victims Detectives

The reason for this may be found, at least in part, in the different roles these Officers play in a sexual assault case. While both Uniformed Officers and Special Victims Detectives are trained in crisis intervention techniques, the goal each Officer must reach is quite different. For Uniformed Officers, interaction with sexual assault survivors usually involves a first response situation. Their role and responsibility, described in training as psychological first aid, consists of providing reassurance, seeing that the survivor gets medical care, and taking custody of the evidence collection kit. While they do question the survivor, their training encourages them to avoid the kind of probing questions likely to exacerbate the trauma of the assault. The responsibility of the Uniformed Officer generally ends when the survivor leaves the hospital emergency room or the case is turned over to Special Victims Detectives.

The one exception to this, as evidenced in the Phase One data, involves adolescents. These survivors appear to have a different kind of experience with the Police, which we could not study further without more case information. The dynamics of these interactions need to be explored further.

The role of the Special Victims Detective generally begins where the Uniformed Officers responsibility ends. While seeing that the victim is taken care of is still of paramount importance, the goal of the Detective is the identification and arrest of the perpetrator. In order to accomplish that goal, the Special Victims Detective must ask the difficult and probing questions the Uniformed Officers were able to avoid. The Sex Crimes Course Guide warns that the interview is likely to be a traumatic experience for the victim regardless of how long after the assault it takes place. The initial interview of investigating Detectives, if not very carefully handled, can be an extremely unpleasant experience for the survivor.

Statistically, the evidence suggests that both Uniformed Officers and Special Victims Detectives are able to provide the emotional support needed for a positive experience in encounters with the Police following a sexual assault. However, Special Victims Detectives are heavily over represented in cases where the survivor-Police interaction is reported as negative. The interviews identify problems with Special Victims Detectives as the most frequent cause for these negative experiences. On the other hand, interviews with counselors involved in positive interactions were often full of praise for the way Uniformed Officers handled first response situations with very recently traumatized survivors. Generally, the findings of this study suggest that Uniformed Police Officers may be more successful than Special Victims Detectives in fulfilling the crisis intervention part of their roles when dealing with cases of sexual assault.

3. When a survivor has a negative experience, whether it is with a Special Victims Detective or a Uniformed Officer, a consistent pattern was found involving the interview process. For the majority of the survivors in these cases, this was experienced as a question of disbelief in her account of the assault.

These points surfaced repeatedly in the interview data as elements that were present in positive interactions and noticeably absent in negative interactions. For example, in accounts of negative interactions there are comments like these:

- *In terms of his attitude towards the survivor, he lacked any sympathy or empathy. He rushed to ask direct questions...told her she would have to take off work to come see him.*
- *[The Detective's] reaction to the events [described by the survivor] was very poor...[They] told both [me and the survivor] that they didn't believe her story. According to them, the case couldn't be followed so they weren't going to report it...Its very upsetting because of the terrible experience she had. I mean, just give her the time of day, listen to her. He just dismissed it after the first conversation...*

Two recurring themes emerged from the data involving negative interactions: impatience and disbelief. It should also be reiterated that this type of problem can surface in cases of stranger rape as well as in acquaintance rape, with older women as well as with adolescents, with women of any color or ethnic background.

In addition to the survivor experiences with the Police, another issue emerged in this study regarding emergency room advocates' experience in working with the Police. In the interviews, positive interaction reports included several accounts of good experiences for advocates working with the Police. In addition, the survey data indicates that advocates generally had a higher rate of positive or neutral interactions than social workers. Negative interactions usually involved a Special Victims Detective who did not want the advocate present during their interview of the survivor.

To some extent, this data can also be understood in terms of the role requirements of the interaction participants. Because their goals are similar, it is not really surprising that advocates and Uniformed Officers usually work well together. As previously mentioned, the goal of the Special Victims Detective is somewhat different. Although many can and do work well with the advocates, there are clearly still some who see the advocate's presence as an intrusion or possible interference in their investigation.

The issue of advocates and Police working together may present problems in some cases, but there is also a long history of cooperation between the Police and rape crisis centers. There is evidence in this study that these problems can be worked out. In several interviews, advocates reported having no difficulty remaining in the room after explaining their role and presence. In a number of interviews from one particular program, advocates reported that they used to have a great deal of difficulty working with the Police until a sensitivity training was done about two years ago. Since that time, their experiences with the Police have been almost universally positive. This is only one example of how interagency cooperation can successfully address this issue.

Conclusion

The Police Interaction Research Project was conducted to document the experiences of sexual assault survivors with the NYPD, as observed by rape crisis counselors. While the results indicate that the most common experiences are positive, the study also shows clear evidence that a significant proportion of sexual assault survivors do in fact have a negative experience with the Police. In some cases these problems are clearly related to isolated incidents involving individual Police Officers and survivors and there may be specific types of problems, as yet unidentified, that exist between Uniformed Police Officers and adolescents. However, the most common problem identified in this study involved a pattern of aggressive interviewing in the initial contact between survivors and Special Victims Detectives. Frequently this pattern of aggressive interviewing appears to be confounded with the issue of non-belief. In other words, the evidence collected in this study suggests that should a Special Victims Detective doubt the veracity of any part of a rape survivor's account of the assault they may take a more aggressive approach in the interview process. The problem was most often found to be a combination of the interview itself and the manner in which the interview was conducted. This resulted in a very negative experience for the survivor.

At its best, the initial interview in a sexual assault investigation is likely to be painful and difficult for the survivor. In some cases, regardless of how careful the Detective is, it can be a negative experience. However, the fact that this type of interview involves some level of discomfort for the victim does not explain the findings of this study. Advocates and Social Workers interviewed in this study describe observing behaviors that clearly contradict the suggested guidelines of the NYPD training.

There has also been some concern among the rape crisis centers that certain types of survivors or cases may be more vulnerable than others to this kind of negative experience with the Police. While the evidence in this study does suggest that, for example, cases of acquaintance rape or cases that involve adolescents may be somewhat more likely than others to have negative experiences with the Police, the differences are not significant. There is some evidence to suggest that certain behaviors, such as drinking alcohol or not being visibly upset, may influence Police perceptions of survivor accounts. On these issues, lack of specific case data makes it difficult to make a more definitive statement.

The major findings of this study can be summarized by saying that the most frequently found reason for a survivor's negative or positive experience with the Police involves the Officer or Detective's perception of the victim's credibility. A negative view of the victim's credibility can lead to an aggressive approach in the initial interview process, especially with Special Victims Detectives.

Taken all together, these factors suggest that problems involving perceptions of victim credibility and overly aggressive interviewing techniques, particularly in the initial interview, occur with some regularity in sexual assault cases. These problems represent a consistent pattern of negative survivor experiences in the investigative process of a certain proportion of sexual assault cases within the NYPD. The evidence strongly suggests that this kind of negative experience can exacerbate the trauma experienced by a survivor of sexual assault. It can also be discouraging in terms of utilizing the resources available in the criminal justice system. In approximately 10% of the cases interviewed, the survivors chose to either drop their cases or not file a report as a direct result of their experiences with Special Victims Detectives. As a social worker described one case:

She decided to go ahead and press charges because of how they responded initially, but decided later not to go through with it because of how the Police were handling the case; afraid it was going to be a horrible experience.

It needs to be emphasized that negative experiences with the NYPD are still not the norm for survivors of sexual assault in New York City. In this study we have seen evidence of what influences shape the experience in a survivor-Police interaction following a sexual assault.

Recommendations

The NYPD Academy tells us that the two most difficult types of cases for recruits are cases where someone has to be notified of a death, and cases of sexual assault. Police Officers working on these cases have a fine line to tread. They must do what they can to provide crisis intervention for the victim while at the same time obtaining the information they need to do their jobs. The evidence in this report suggests that while they often succeed in this delicate and difficult task, a significant proportion of sexual assault survivors have negative experiences with the Police. In some cases, these problems are clearly the result of isolated incidents involving individual Police Officers. However, the most common problem identified in this study involves a pattern of aggressive interviewing in the initial contact between survivors and Detectives from the Special Victims Squad. As a result of this report, the Alliance makes the following recommendations:

- The Alliance will work with the NYPD to develop a Criminal Justice Committee. Membership will include the Alliance, rape crisis and sexual assault examiner programs, NYPD borough Special Victims Squad commanding Officers, NYPD Special Victims Liaison, representatives of the NYPD Patrol Division, District Attorney's offices and Family Court. The purposes will be to improve communication between concerned parties, to increase understanding of each other's roles and to identify issues that require change to improve responses to sexual assault survivors.
- To conduct a collaborative review of the training provided to Special Victims Detectives with rape crisis programs and the Alliance to influence the content and design of the training.

- To support the work of the Criminal Justice Committee through research and systems evaluations. This will entail the ability to survey Officers and Detectives, and potentially to review records.

The Alliance looks forward to working with all stakeholders to improve community response to sexual assault survivors. Together, we have the power to counteract the negative effects of trauma on survivors by making our systems more accessible and responsive to their needs. We also have a responsibility to use that power to the best of our abilities.