

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS AND THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCACY
REFERRAL PROCESS

by

Aaron A. Cabbage

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2023

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence incidents impact the daily activities of the law enforcement agencies responsible for responding to these calls for service. Legislators and law enforcement leaders have expended countless hours, staffing, and finances to adequately protect the victims of domestic violence. In Virginia, an essential component of protecting victims of domestic violence involves the referral process, used by law enforcement officers to connect victims of domestic violence to domestic violence advocacy groups. The Code of Virginia and law enforcement agencies receiving accreditation through the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC) require these referrals. There is available research regarding the referral process at metropolitan law enforcement agencies across the United States. However, there is a gap regarding how Virginia law enforcement officers employed with VLEPSC-accredited agencies serving populations less than 50,000 describe their experiences and the navigation of the referral process. This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews to assess the perspectives of 15 law enforcement officers who served in a full-time capacity and were responsible for investigating domestic violence incidents reported to the Goochland County Sheriff's Office, Greene County Sheriff's Office, King George County Sheriff's Office, Winchester Police Department, and the Woodstock Police Department. This study found the following: (a) rural law enforcement officers struggle with the strict level of confidentiality advocacy services, (b) it is imperative for law enforcement officers to take an active role in their education regarding the domestic violence process, and (c) rural law enforcement officers need extended training regarding domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, law enforcement, victims, advocacy

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Dedication

I am thankful to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for giving me the mental and physical fortitude I needed to complete this manuscript. I thank my wife Melinda and son Gavin for their trust, support, and patience. To my father, Allen: Thank you for your unwavering display of hard work and perseverance throughout my life. To my mother, Shirley: Thank you for your unconditional love and care for our entire family and me. Finally, to my sister Renee, thank you for always being my “ride or die” sibling. I could not have completed this educational journey without your love, trust, support, and patience. I love you all.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank my Chair, Dr. Vincent Giordano, for his patience and guidance. Dr. Giordano agreed to serve as my chair at the eleventh hour. While we worked together, Dr. Giordano was honest, forthcoming, and supportive. He is a value not only to his students but also to Liberty University. I thank my reader, Dr. Kim Miller, for her contribution to my work. I want to thank Dr. Robert England, Dr. Jeffery Rush, and Dr. Ben Stickle for their peer debriefing services. Also, I would like to thank the leadership from the Goochland County Sheriff's Office, the Green County Sheriff's Office, the King George County Sheriff's Office, the Winchester Police Department, and the Woodstock Police Department for allowing me to utilize their law enforcement officers as participants in my study. Finally, I would also like to thank Liberty University for the institution's unwavering proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.

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List of Abbreviations

Enhancing Law Enforcement Response (ELERV)

International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (VDCJS)

Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter One discusses the background of domestic violence in rural communities. This section explores the research gap for this study and the foundation of the study, including an explanation of the victim-oriented policing theory and how the theory correlates with this research. This chapter also provides a thorough discussion regarding the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, definitions, as well as the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Background of the Study

The role of law enforcement can be a turning point for victims of domestic violence cases as law enforcement officers are the first helpful contact victims of domestic violence have with members of the criminal justice system (Barrett et al., 2019; Franklin et al., 2020). Law enforcement officers are responsible for ensuring victims of domestic violence reach domestic violence advocacy services. These services help support victims of domestic violence before, during, and after a domestic violence crisis (Goodson et al., 2020; Wiley, 2020). The Code of Virginia and law enforcement agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC) must fulfill the referral process (U.S. Code of Virginia, 2022; VLEPSC, 2022). Data are available for how law enforcement officers describe their experiences and navigation of the referral process within jurisdictions with populations above 50,000. However, the same data are unavailable for law enforcement officers who serve in more “rural” jurisdictions with less than 50,000 (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Goodson et al., 2020; Ratcliffe et al., 2016).

Research saturation is present in domestic violence as it involves the relationship between law enforcement and domestic violence arrests, advocacy empowerment, and how the legal system impacts victims of domestic violence (Taylor-Dunn, 2016; Wiley, 2020). However, there is a research gap in domestic violence studies because there is no research regarding how law enforcement officers from rural areas describe their experiences and navigations of the domestic violence advocacy process (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Goodson et al., 2020). Studying these experiences and navigations is critical because addressing domestic violence in rural areas is complex and relies on collaboration between law enforcement and advocacy groups (Edwards, 2015). Little (2017) advocated for the need of domestic violence research in rural jurisdictions. Little wrote about conducting critical and theoretical approaches that promote rurality's social and cultural construction. Rural areas are tight-knit and interwoven, holding conservative and traditional ideas of gender, sexuality, and social identity (Little, 2017). Rural communities across the United States struggle to provide adequate resources for victims of domestic violence in the realm of transportation, housing, and social support (Magnus & Donohue, 2021). It is essential for law enforcement and domestic violence advocacy groups to remain versatile and efficient.

The U.S. Department of Justice stated in their Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies that there is a large distribution of smaller law enforcement agencies in the U.S. police agencies with less than 50 sworn officers serving populations of less than 50,000 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). Hyland and Davis (2021) stated that as of June 2016, local police departments make up 80% (12,261) of police agencies in the United States. Currently, the Commonwealth of Virginia requires law enforcement officers to inform domestic violence victims of available domestic violence advocacy services (U.S. Code of Virginia, 2022). Also, police agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission

(VLEPSC) require accredited police agencies to inform domestic violence victims of advocacy services (VLEPSC, 2022). As the researcher, I chose agencies accredited by VLEPSC because they are essential to providing law enforcement agencies in Virginia an avenue of demonstrating compliance with accepted standards for an efficient and effective agency (VLEPSC, 2022). I addressed the research gap using qualitative methods to conduct semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officer participants, asking them to describe their experiences and navigation regarding their referral of victims of domestic violence to advocacy groups.

Victim-Oriented Policing Theory

Victim-oriented policing is the criminal justice process of embedding the victim's interests into the heart of any law enforcement response in daily policing operations (Paterson & Clamp, 2014; Paterson & Williams, 2018). The foundation for victim-centered policing combines criminological thought and police practice to design opportunities to reduce the fear of crime and the crime costs to a community (Clark, 2003). Victim-oriented policing also requires law enforcement organizations to rethink their policing strategies. Law enforcement leaders must think practically about addressing their agency's structure, code of conduct, partnerships, roles, functions, training, and education to prioritize victim needs (Paterson & Williams, 2018; Sashkin, 1985). The change in policing has placed disciplinary power in the hands of crime victims by shifting the priorities of law enforcement. Law enforcement now utilizes formal and codified law while taking on the role of the victim (White & Perrone, 1997).

Victim-oriented policing theory directly ties to this study. The law enforcement response to domestic violence has been a significant part of the strategy to change how the public perceives violence against women (Kelly, 2003). Rural geographical settings present challenges to advocates for domestic violence victims, law enforcement officers, and victims wishing to

leave their abusers (Wallace, 2002; Websdale, 1995). Rural jurisdictions have more restricted healthcare services than metropolitan areas, making it more difficult for women to get the assistance they require (Websdale, 1995; Weisheit et al., 1994). These jurisdictions also require more extended travel to emergency services, and public transportation is rarely available (Hornesty & Doherty, 2001; Krishman et al., 2001; Lewis, 2003; Logan et al., 2004). Rural jurisdictions also emphasize traditional marriage roles where men control their households, there is less anonymity, and people tend to distrust strangers when handling personal problems (Lewis, 2003; Little & Panelli, 2003; Moracco et al., 2005).

The victim-oriented policing theory establishes a foundational strategy for law enforcement agencies as they change their focus toward victims. The law enforcement agency's "rethinking process" mentioned in the first paragraph of this section must be transformative. Law enforcement must work with domestic violence advocates to identify strategies to encourage domestic violence victims to leave their abusers on their terms (Schechter, 1982). It is the responsibility of the entire criminal justice system to raise awareness regarding assistance options for victims of domestic violence attempting to leave abusive relationships (Pence, 2001). Law enforcement agencies must change how they define their agency's policing model. The process occurs by instituting new protocols for field officers to better support victims by establishing immediate victim support upon first contact with the victim (Clark, 2003; Cook et al., 1999). A victim-oriented change in policing requires law enforcement leaders to measure their policing as it relates to victims. The measurement occurs when statistical data include victimization rates and hot areas where victimization occurs (Pease & Laycock, 1999). It is essential to also extend beyond the collection of just mere statistical data gathering. Law enforcement leaders should evaluate reported crime trends, their officers' workloads, crime

surveys, and local crime analysis. These evaluations provide a more transparent and more accurate picture of the true extent of the crime occurring in the respective jurisdictions (Clark, 2003). The application of the victim-policing theory is addressed in more depth later in this manuscript.

Problem Statement

Law enforcement officers encounter many barriers during domestic violence investigations that may impact the referral process. Some law enforcement officers perceive their efforts to arrest domestic violence offenders as futile due to the paperwork and scrutiny encountered during these investigations. Other law enforcement officers are concerned about their limited discretion in domestic violence investigations. Finally, some law enforcement officers have tried to make recommendations to their police agencies regarding domestic violence policy and procedures, only to have their police agencies ignore their suggestions (Ballucci et al., 2017; Grover et al., 2011; Maple & Keibell, 2020). These conditions account for common barriers law enforcement officers encounter throughout their careers. In this study I explore how law enforcement officers from accredited agencies in rural jurisdictions describe their experiences, understanding, and navigation of the domestic violence referral process required by the Virginia code and accreditation standards to improve advocacy services for domestic violence victims.

The general population of interest for the research focuses on Virginia law enforcement officers. The specific population for the research is Virginia law enforcement officers employed by agencies accredited by the VLEPSC for law enforcement agencies. A variety of Virginia law enforcement agencies make up the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and manage the daily operations of the commission (VLEPSC, 2022). Executive board members include

chiefs, sheriffs, and other agency leaders who establish professional standards and administer the accreditation process by which Virginia law enforcement agencies measure, evaluate, and update their standards. The purposeful sample for the research drew from sworn-certified Virginia law enforcement officers who investigate domestic violence cases and serve in rural jurisdictions of Virginia. Rural jurisdictions for the study are Virginia cities, towns, and counties with populations of less than 50,000 (Ratcliffe et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019). This study did not include agencies without patrol divisions, college police departments, conservation and wildlife departments, capital police, airport authorities, the Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages, and law enforcement agencies in the jurisdiction where I resided and worked.

There are 104 law enforcement agencies in Virginia accredited with VLEPSC. Forty-four out of the 104 agencies qualified for the study. I began the study wishing to use 10 agencies, but that number was reduced to five. One agency lost their accreditation, while four other agencies did not respond to my requests for interviews after agreeing to participate in this study. The participants included law enforcement officers from the Goochland County Sheriff's Office, the Green County Sheriff's Office, the King George County Sheriff's Office, the Winchester Police Department, and the Woodstock Police Department. While 143 law enforcement officers were available for the study, I interviewed 15 law enforcement officers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences and navigation of the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions in Virginia. The central phenomenon was the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions.

The phenomenon of the domestic violence referral process is generally defined as the requirement for law enforcement officers to provide victims of domestic assault information regarding legal and community (advocacy) resources (VLEPSC, 2022). Domestic violence advocacy groups include any member of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, a non-profit network of survivors, sexual and domestic violence agencies, and allies working to strengthen how communities across Virginia respond to and prevent sexual and intimate partner violence (Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, 2021). The theory guiding this study was victim-oriented policing, which focuses on how police officers interact with crime victims. Central to this theory is that police officers should provide victims with information and advice pertinent to their particular victimization, the goal of which is to help reduce future victimization.

The study allowed law enforcement participants to individually discuss their thoughts in an open and confidential forum with me. The study was needed because addressing domestic violence in rural jurisdictions is complex, and it is essential for law enforcement agencies and domestic violence advocacy groups to work together (Edwards, 2015). Historically, there has been research into law enforcement perspectives regarding domestic violence advocacy services in metropolitan jurisdictions, but there is a research gap for the same studies in rural jurisdictions (Goodson et al., 2020). This study provides data to fill the research gap and provide new insight into the domestic violence referral process. The Virginia code requires law enforcement officers within the state to refer domestic violence victims to domestic violence advocacy groups. Also, the process requires these steps for accreditation with the VLEPSC (2022). The research value of this study is significant because it provides insight into how these law enforcement officers

describe their experiences of the referral process as they work within the requirements of the Virginia Code and VLEPSC accreditation standards.

This study provides new theoretical and real-world professional information for participating law enforcement agencies. It also provides new information on how rural law enforcement officers view the referral process of domestic violence victims to advocacy groups. In addition, this study adds professional value because law enforcement administrators will have data that provide insight to enact more efficient and effective policies and protocols related to domestic violence referrals. The direct information from this study provides these administrators with real-world insight into how their officers and other officers with similar professional backgrounds perceive the domestic violence referral process. The information collected from this study also enables these administrators to tailor their department's policies and procedures to improve community services.

The process of purposive sampling better matches the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the study's rigor and the trustworthiness of the data and results. For the individual to be deemed appropriate for selection to be a study participant, they must meet the following criteria: (a) the individual must be a certified and sworn law enforcement officer within Virginia; (b) the individual must be tasked to investigate domestic violence cases by their respective law enforcement agency; and (c) the participant must be in good ethical standing with their respective law enforcement agency. Once the participants met the selection criteria, I informed them of their rights and began the data collection process, using semi-structured interviews to collect the data for the study. The semi-structured interviews involved 15 law enforcement officers.

Research Questions

Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews based on the research questions listed below. Virginia-certified law enforcement officers employed by VLEPSC-accredited agencies serving rural jurisdictions represent the secondary data from the demographic screening process. The demographic information identified the background of the officers to provide a clear picture of where the primary data for the research originated. The screening process of the study's participants involved an assessment of their sworn law enforcement officer status in Virginia, their involvement with domestic violence investigations, their ethical standing with their agency, years of law enforcement service, calls for service involving domestic violence, number of domestic violence investigations, and the last time they referred a victim of domestic violence to referral services (Appendix C).

RQ1: How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

RQ2: How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

Definitions

Certified Virginia Law Enforcement Officer: Is defined as any full-time or part-time employee of a police department or sheriff's office which is a part of or administered by the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof, or any full-time or part-time employee of a private police department, and who is responsible for the prevention and detection of crime and

the enforcement of the penal, traffic or highway laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia (U.S. Code of Virginia, 2021a).

Domestic Violence Advocacy Groups: Any member of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance (2021).

Domestic Violence Victim: The state of Virginia defines the victim of domestic violence as a “Family or household member” who is (i) the person’s spouse, whether or not they reside together, (ii) the person’s former spouse, whether or not they reside together, (iii) the person’s parents, stepparents, children, stepchildren, brothers, sisters, half-brothers, half-sisters, grandparents, and grandchildren, regardless of whether they reside together, (iv) the person’s mother-in-law, father-in-law, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law who reside together, (v) any individuals with children in common, regardless of the status of their relationship, (vi) any individual who cohabits or who, within the previous 12 months, cohabited with the person, and any children of either of them then residing in the same home with the person (U.S. Code of Virginia, 2021b).

Referral Process: The requirement for law enforcement officers to provide victims of domestic assault information regarding legal and community (advocacy) resources (VLEPSC, 2022).

Resources/Victim Packet Educational Material: Material provided to the victim of domestic violence by a Certified Virginia Law Enforcement Officer. This material can include information on sexual violence, human trafficking, domestic violence, and legal services (Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, 2023).

Rural: Open countryside, rural towns (places fewer than 2,500 people), and urban areas with populations ranging from 2,500 to 49,999 that are not part of larger labor market areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022).

Rural Jurisdictions for this Study: Rural areas and small towns within non-metro counties with a population of less than 50,000 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019).

Virginia Accredited Agency: Virginia’s law enforcement agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Accreditation Coalition (VLEPSC, 2022).

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Service (VDCJS): VDCJS is an organization comprised of law enforcement personnel directly or indirectly involved in Virginia law enforcement accreditation activities. Virginia law enforcement agencies can apply for membership and are highly encouraged to participate in the VDCJS programs (VLEPSC, 2022).

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Service (VDCJS) Programs: Involves making referrals and providing educational material that may be useful to sexual and domestic violence agencies who are working toward meeting professional standards (VLEPSC, 2022).

Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance: Non-profit network of survivors, sexual and domestic violence agencies, and allies working to strengthen how communities across Virginia respond to and prevent sexual and intimate partner violence (Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, 2023).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Before there is an attempt to conduct a study, researchers must recognize the definitions of terms such as “limitations,” “delimitations,” and “assumptions” for the research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018; Wolgemuth et al., 2017). Research assumptions can come with social, historical, or political assumptions that anticipate framing research problems and formulating solutions (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). The limitations of research represent the potential weaknesses the researcher cannot control. Limitations represent the imposed restrictions that are essentially out of the researcher’s control. These limitations can affect the study design and

results. Delimitations are neither positive nor negative. Instead, they are a detailed accounting of reasoning that enlightens the scope of a study's core interest related to the design and framework of the research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations represent the choices made by the researcher. These deserve mentioning because the researcher provides the boundaries for the research (Simon & Goes, 2013). Finally, the section below describes the research assumptions, limitations, and delimitations applicable to this study.

Assumptions

The following assumptions have been identified for this study:

Assumption One: The researcher assumes answers provided by the participants to the interview questions to be accurate and based on general training and experience from domestic violence investigations.

Assumption Two: The researcher assumes the individuals who participated in the study are sworn law enforcement officers in Virginia investigating domestic violence incidents.

Assumption Three: The researcher assumes the accredited law enforcement agency's policies reflect the accreditation standard that law enforcement officers refer victims of domestic violence to domestic violence advocacy services.

Limitations

The following limitations have been identified for this study:

Limitation One: The descriptive study design cannot statistically test or verify the study's research problem (Dudovskiy, 2016).

Limitation Two: The descriptive study design cannot reflect certain bias levels because no statistical tests exist (Dudovskiy, 2016).

Limitation Three: The observational nature of the research design does not allow for the repetition of the descriptive study design (Dudovskiy, 2016).

Limitation Four: The descriptive design cannot identify the cause behind the phenomenon of the study (Dudovskiy, 2016).

Delimitations

The following delimitations have been identified for this study:

Delimitation One: The research applies only to Virginia law enforcement officers employed with agencies accredited with the VLEPSC.

Delimitation Two: The research only interviewed law enforcement officers from nine of the 44 law enforcement agencies in Virginia accredited with the VLEPSC.

Delimitation Three: The scope of the research only used law enforcement agencies in Virginia accredited by the VLEPSC.

Delimitation Four: The research only included towns and cities with less than 50,000. The scope of the research only used jurisdictions with populations less than 50,000.

Summary

Law enforcement officers play an essential role in domestic violence incidents because they are often the first to help victims of domestic violence in various ways, including the referral process to advocacy groups (Barrett et al., 2019; Franklin et al., 2020; Goodson et al., 2020; Wiley, 2020). There is research saturation into domestic violence with data involving the

relationship between law enforcement and domestic violence arrests, advocacy empowerment, and how the legal system impacts domestic violence victims (Taylor-Dunn, 2016; Watkins, 2005; Wiley, 2020); however, there is a research gap regarding domestic violence in rural areas because rural officers' experience navigating referrals with advocacy groups has not been a research topic (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Goodson et al., 2020). Studying these experiences and navigations is critical because addressing domestic violence in rural areas is complex and relies on collaboration between law enforcement and advocacy groups (Edwards, 2015; Little, 2017).

A significant portion of the relationship between the domestic violence victim and the law enforcement officer falls on the officer's shoulders because of his/her ability to legally influence the incident (Growette Bostaph et al., 2021). Officers are also responsible for being aware of how victim emotions can influence the misperception of officers (Franklin et al., 2020; Peirone et al., 2021). Officers are responsible for attending to the needs of children in domestic violence events. The officers must be able to shed all stereotypical beliefs about domestic violence to build trust with the victims (Bates et al., 2019; Elliffe & Holt, 2019; Peirone et al., 2021), which can only be done through training and education (Ballucci et al., 2017; Birdsall et al., 2017).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated intimate partner violence (domestic violence) is a significant public health problem. The 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Breiding et al., 2014) provided the most recent data regarding the problem. The survey indicated over 10 million women and men in the United States experience physical violence annually by a current or former intimate partner; furthermore, over 22% of women and 14% of men have experienced significant intimate partner violence during their lifetime. Intimate partner violence impacts approximately 29 million women and 16 million men in the United States (Breiding et al., 2014). Domestic violence is a global pandemic that requires the dissemination of information to prevent further violence against victims. Law enforcement and advocacy groups can use the information to manage these cases better (El Morr & Layal, 2020).

U.S. law enforcement tasks include addressing domestic violence cases, as these matters form a significant portion of police work. Research has indicated increased police accountability, clear and consistent procedures, proactive intelligence-led approaches, and the dedication of time and resources as ways law enforcement can better manage victims of domestic violence (Hamilton et al., 2019). While studies have shown mixed results, research has also indicated that victims of domestic violence respond satisfactorily to law enforcement assistance when they feel fairly treated (Koster et al., 2016). Another significant component for law enforcement officers to consider is the role of the domestic violence advocate. Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of these partnership models associated with domestic violence advocates and law enforcement. Their effectiveness has produced varied results. Broader conclusions require additional program development regarding law enforcement and advocacy interventions. Each

jurisdiction should identify appropriate modeling and collaboration efforts that best suit the communities they serve (L. Johnson & Stylianou, 2020). This study qualitatively examined how law enforcement officers perceive the referral process of domestic violence victims to advocacy services in hopes of providing further insight into appropriately and effectively helping victims of domestic violence.

Background of Problem and Need for Study

The home is still the most dangerous place for women due to gender-based victimization during domestic violence incidents. These violent acts are not random actions but rather the culmination of prior related violence (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). Law enforcement officers play an essential role in domestic violence incidents because they are often the first point of contact for victims of domestic violence (Barrett et al., 2019; Franklin et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2020). Due to their initial contact with these victims, law enforcement officers are responsible and burdened to ensure they reach domestic violence advocacy services (Goodson et al., 2020). The research gap mentioned above extends further to domestic violence research in rural areas (Eastman & Bunch, 2007). There is a current gap in how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences and navigate domestic violence advocacy services (Goodson et al., 2020).

Researching these experiences and navigations is critical to addressing domestic violence in rural areas. Domestic violence in rural areas is complex, and collaborative efforts between law enforcement and advocacy groups are necessary to intercede for victims of domestic violence (Edwards, 2015). Little (2017) supported the need for domestic violence research in rural jurisdictions, arguing that critical and theoretical approaches are required to understand social and cultural construction in rural areas. Rural areas are tight-knit and interwoven, holding

conservative and traditional ideas of gender, sexuality, and social identity (Little, 2017). Rural communities across the United States struggle to provide adequate resources for victims of domestic violence in the realm of transportation, housing, and social support (Magnus & Donohue, 2021). Therefore, it is essential for law enforcement and domestic violence advocacy groups to remain versatile and efficient.

While domestic violence continues to be a problem, there is little information regarding how law enforcement officers perceive domestic violence. Due to the critical role law enforcement officers have in managing domestic violence cases, it is essential to study law enforcement officers' attitudes toward domestic violence to create better policies and protocols for how law enforcement generally manages these events (El Sayed et al., 2020). Law enforcement officers' perceptions of domestic violence are scarce and outdated (El Sayed et al., 2020). The officers face many barriers that can affect if and how they inform victims of domestic violence of these services (Goodson et al., 2020). Also, paralleled assessments are needed between law enforcement, local government agencies, and victims' services across different jurisdictions at the city and county levels (Jennings et al., 2020). The literature review below discusses some of these barriers and thematic issues present in problems related to law enforcement officers coordinating efforts with domestic violence victims and advocacy groups.

Conceptual Framework

There is limited research on law enforcement officers' provisions of services for domestic violence victims after they formally report domestic violence incidents to law enforcement officials (Goodson et al., 2020). My approach to the problem is two-fold. First, this study provides research to fill the knowledge gap by evaluating law enforcement officers' perceptions of the referral process for victims of domestic violence to advocacy services. Second, this study

does not stop at identifying law enforcement officers' perceptions of domestic violence referrals; instead, it delves more specifically into the same issue within rural jurisdictions (Eastman & Bunch, 2007). There is a current gap in how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences and navigate domestic violence advocacy services (Goodson et al., 2020). Researching these experiences and navigations is critical to addressing domestic violence in rural areas. Due to its complexity, collaborative efforts between law enforcement and advocacy groups are necessary to intercede for victims of domestic violence (Edwards, 2015).

Little (2017) supported the need for domestic violence research in rural jurisdictions by stating that critical and theoretical approaches need to play out to understand rural areas' social and cultural construction. Rural areas are tight-knit and interwoven in nature, holding conservative and traditional ideas of gender, sexuality, and social identity (Little, 2017). Rural communities across the United States struggle to provide adequate resources for victims of domestic violence in the realm of transportation, housing, and social support (Magnus & Donohue, 2021). Therefore, it is essential for law enforcement and domestic violence advocacy groups to remain versatile and efficient.

Research by Lorenz et al. (2019) found that law enforcement officers can hold adverse opinions of domestic violence victims. Some officers respond to domestic violence incidents with disbelief, exhibiting judgment toward a victim's clothing and sexual history and raising or harboring questions regarding the victim's moral character (Lorenz et al., 2019). Fortunately, researchers have also identified law enforcement officers who were more likely to provide referral services and have somewhat favorable attitudes toward advocacy groups when adequately trained (Goodson et al., 2020). This study aimed to gather information from Virginia's rural law enforcement officers employed with accredited law enforcement agencies

regarding the referral process. Understanding these law enforcement officers' perceptions of the referral process to advocacy groups may help identify ways law enforcement and advocacy groups can collaborate to improve services to victims of domestic violence.

Law enforcement officers have noted barriers and frustrations with repeat calls for service involving the same individuals. In these cases, officers can become very frustrated because repeat calls for service can waste time and resources. Officers have stated these calls for service are commonly problematic and challenging to resolve. They have also noted that the high amount of paperwork associated with domestic violence investigations negatively impacts their perspective of these cases. Studies have shown that while officers are proficient in managing domestic violence investigations, there is concern regarding their limited discretion during these investigations (Grover et al., 2011). A study conducted by Maple and Kebbell (2020) found that law enforcement officers' interpersonal skills and objective decision-making can improve, but developing the necessary skills to manage domestic violence cases properly takes time.

Maple and Kebbell (2020) noted law enforcement officers generally view themselves as professional and empathetic, but Loftus (2009) found that research has indicated that officers sometimes feel the burden and pressure from the government and the public. The burdens from these groups leave officers feeling limited regarding effecting change and unappreciated for their work during these investigations. These frustrations extend to the shifts law enforcement officers work (Loftus, 2009; Maple & Kebbell, 2020). In some areas, Maple and Kebbell (2020) said these officers experience little rest, and their goals of resolving domestic violence issues go unresolved because of rejected services. Furthermore, some officers feel they are not adequately supported. They feel they cannot cope with these cases as they manage high frequencies of domestic violence cases (Maple & Kebbell, 2020).

Many officers are negatively affected by the stressors associated with domestic violence investigations. Cotton et al. (2016) found that law enforcement officers who feel the effects of chronic stress are sometimes overlooked. Additionally, many law enforcement officers do not engage in help-seeking initiatives to help themselves manage the stressors of the profession. These stressors tend to cause officers to wear down as their careers continue. Some officers exhibit signs of apathy, desensitization, and cynicism. Ongoing issues can be attached to inadequate support from within the agency, the nature of domestic violence, how these cases can be disempowering towards law enforcement officers, other pressures and flaws, and a lack of ability to cope with varying levels of success while investigating these cases (Cotton et al., 2016).

Underreporting occurs in the reporting of domestic violence cases. In 2016, only 49% of domestic violence incidents and 23% of rape and sexual assault incidents were formally reported to law enforcement, leaving most of these incidents unaddressed by law enforcement services (Morgan & Kena, 2017). Due to the problem with a victim reporting to law enforcement, law enforcement officers should be aware of the myths and misperceptions towards domestic violence cases. Dispelling myth about law enforcement officers is vital because the perceptions can exacerbate trauma in victims of domestic violence (Franklin et al., 2020). Dispelling myths and misconceptions is also crucial for focusing on real issues. For instance, domestic violence advocates have identified obstacles to following up with victims of domestic violence. These advocates stated that initial police reports, unfinished police reports, victims' addresses, and phone numbers sometimes change, even when the phone number links to a relative or the victim (Regoeczi & Hubbard, 2018).

Law enforcement and domestic advocacy stakeholders should emphasize client and public input. Their input promotes principles and practices of social equity, care ethics, compassion, and empathy (Rauhaus et al., 2020). Proper service referral is also needed. The importance of service referral underscores the benefits of advocate involvement, which has improved relations between police and victims, enhanced cooperation, augmented investigative progress, and increased guilty case dispositions (Regoeczi & Hubbard, 2018). The continued assessment of law enforcement officer attitudes relating to domestic violence incidents, victims, and offenders can assist in discovering needed information associated with police perspectives, both negative and positive. Law enforcement attitudes toward domestic violence have changed over time, and research has shown law enforcement officers generally perceive domestic violence as a severe problem in their communities (Grover et al., 2011).

Victim-Oriented Policing: Theoretical Underpinnings

The study of the relationship between the crime victim and their offender is victimology. While there is no agreed-upon definition for victimology, the overall discipline of victimology continues to evolve as it has over the previous 80 years (O'Connell, 2008; Sarkin, 2019). According to Sarkin (2019), victimology studies the process, issues, and patterns victims face as subjects of criminal acts. Victimology studies the issues, patterns, and processes victims face as victims of crime. The field of victimology has grown and spread into criminal law, criminal justice, other legal sciences, social science, sociology, and economics (Sarkin, 2019).

Victimology connects with victim-centered policing. The basis for victim-centered policing is the criminal justice process of embedding the victim's interests into the heart of any law enforcement response in daily policing operations (Paterson & Clamp, 2014; Paterson & Williams, 2018). The victim-centered process combines criminological thought and police

practice to design opportunities to reduce the fear of crime and the costs of crime to a community (Clark, 2003). The field of criminology initially focused on the criminal offender rather than the victim of crime. This sentiment did not change until the latter part of the 20th century when the crime problem grew. Crime surveys identified the needs of victims as an area of improvement for the criminal justice field. Information regarding the fear of crime, demographics associated with crime, and the feminist issues of domestic violence, rape, and incest began to turn the focus back to victims (Hough & Mayhew, 1983; Jones et al., 1986; Maxfield, 1984; Rock, 2002).

Crime prevention now aligns more with the needs of victims. At one time, victims received low priority during the criminological research examinations. Victims now receive mainstream academic attention and support (Antilla, 1974; Zedner, 1997). The study of criminology has shifted toward how law enforcement officers should police. The change in policing has removed the retribution for harm once placed in the victims' hands. Law enforcement now utilizes formal and codified law while taking on the role of the victim (White & Perrone, 1997). Victims of crime were once forgotten and only used to provide criminal complaints and to testify in court; now, victims are becoming more valued and utilized in criminal justice (Clark, 2003).

Victim-Oriented Policing: Foundation and National Legislation

Victim rights intersect with criminal justice because when a victim's rights are violated, an outcome is expected to remedy a debt or what a victim is owed. In the *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) case, it was determined where there is a legal right, there is a legal remedy (Holder et al., 2021). The practice of "rights" and how they apply to an individual's everyday life is considered by how individuals talk about their rights and how they use them (Gogul, 2020). Throughout

history, victims' rights involving criminal acts have been separately classified from victims' rights in other domains, such as human rights, citizen rights, and defendants' rights.

In 1984, the U.S. Congress established the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). Congress created the VOCA to establish a fund using federal support. The federally created fund established a means of financial support to state and local victims of crimes to help them rebuild their lives after being a victim of crime. Today, millions of dollars are dedicated to victim compensation and assistance. Every U.S. state and territory utilizes these funds for training, technical assistance, and other programs to improve services designed to support victims of crime in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, 2022).

In 2014, the U.S. Congress passed the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act. The Act defined a victim as someone who has suffered direct physical, emotional, or financial harm due to the commission of a crime. The Act defined crime victims as those killed during the commission of a crime, their families, those physically injured, those injured while trying to escape harm, those who are suffering emotional harm, those who are potential targets of crime, those who are witnesses to a violent crime, and businesses or individuals who suffer financial harm. Law enforcement plays a significant role when interacting with victims of crime. It is the responsibility of law enforcement to build trust with victims of crime because law enforcement is the victim's first point of contact with the criminal justice system, and these interactions can have a lasting effect on victims of crime (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2020).

The Victim's Rights and Restitution Act requires victims to know where they can receive medical and social services. The Act requires victims to be informed of private and public counseling and other support services. The Act also entitles the victim to reasonable protection from the offender(s), the status of the criminal investigation into their case, and to have their

personal property held for criminal evidence to be kept in good condition. The Crime Rights Act provides more extensive rights to the victim. These rights include reasonable protection from the accused, reasonable notice of court hearings and proceedings, the right to exclusion from court proceedings unless they are needed for evidentiary purposes, the right to be reasonably heard during court proceedings, the right to confer with the attorney for the government in their case, the right to timely restitution, protections against unreasonable delays in court proceedings, the right to be treated with respect, the right to be reasonably informed of plea deals, and the right to contact the Office of the Victim's Rights Ombudsman (U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, 2022).

Victim-Oriented Policing: The Transformation of Policing

Implementing victim-focused policing requires law enforcement leaders to rethink the organizational structure of their agencies. The restructuring requires law enforcement leaders to move toward a victim-centered model as a law enforcement component. The new component requires these leaders to change documentation, plans, and actions to symbolize the shift toward victim-centered policing (Sashkin, 1985). These changes also occur in terminology, codes of conduct, strategic planning, training, and performance evaluations so new disciplines match the philosophy of the law enforcement agency. Leaders in law enforcement can transition to these changes using unique high-profile investigative teams who enjoy a celebrated status within the agency and community (Clark, 2003).

The transformation also requires a policing approach encompassing law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, corrections, and community resources to ensure a seamless transition for victims (Bucqueroux, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1989). Moving these services will significantly contribute to the restorative process victims need (Wilson et al., 2001). The reinforcement of

mediation, community conferencing, and other diversionary measures empower victims and their feelings of confidence in their criminal justice system (Hunt, 1996). Van Ness and Strong (1997) also proposed changing statistical measurements regarding victimization. They said measured victim rates focusing on revictimization, hot spots for crime, and hot activities could be a way for law enforcement to prevent crime to support further victims (Pease & Laycock, 1999; Van Ness & Strong, 1997).

Weis (2022) claimed an accurate victim-centered approach adds the victim to the center stage of involvement in the processes affecting them and as guests to public policies within local governments and international organizations. The role of the victim-centered model should speak to the stakeholders, allowing the victim's participation to claim their rights, which the state should guarantee and not be discretionally removed from the process (Weis, 2022). The United States defines the victim-centered approach to policing at the federal level. The U.S. Department of Justice defines the victim-centered approach to policing as the effort of law enforcement and the criminal justice system to prioritize the victim's wishes, safety, and well-being at the highest level during all procedures. The core of the victim-centered approach to policing seeks to refrain from retraumatizing the victim as they proceed through the criminal justice process. Using this approach requires law enforcement to support crime victims by utilizing victim advocate services, empowering victim survivors during their interactions with the victim, and allowing the victim to play an active role in bringing their offenders to justice (U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, 2022).

The component of victim-centered policing still requires work on the part of law enforcement. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports victims of violent crimes report these instances to law enforcement less than half of the time (Morgan & Oudekerk, 2019). Cases of

sexual violence provide a poignant example. While there are benefits to reporting sexual assaults to law enforcement for potential crime deterrence, few report these cases (I. D. Johnson & Lewis, 2022). When victims have established trust in law enforcement, the probability of their reporting and participating in the investigation increases. Victim cooperation is essential because it helps law enforcement remove violent offenders from the streets to increase public safety. When victims trust law enforcement, their collaborative efforts also increase. The efforts then inspire community trust and publicly showcase the core values of law enforcement (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2020).

Victim-Oriented Policing Implementation: Challenges and Problems

Paterson and Williams (2018) noted that there had been a shift in the criminal justice field to incorporate and highly prioritize police strategies to support victims of crimes. There has been little scholarly discussion, however, regarding how victim-oriented policing should look, and the absence of the discussion is due to the misplaced assumption in the community policing model (Mehozay, 2018; Paterson & Williams, 2018). Many see the community policing model as a system already placing the needs of victims of crime as the highest of priorities, which is not the case according to Paterson and Williams. The gap in assisting victims is caused because the community policing model dominates the realm and actions of the criminal justice system. The consequences of this dominance places victim-oriented policing in the mixed bag of other mandated law enforcement activities, public opinion, and crime prevention. Victim-oriented policing also feels the weight of the general police culture in many law enforcement agencies, where the prioritization of victim-oriented policing shifts and moves depending on the agency's service climate (Paterson & Williams, 2018).

Paterson and Williams (2018) acknowledged the criminal justice field works to support victims of crimes, but there are still struggles they generally face. Weis (2022) argued that victims are better suited to develop a network of victims to address particular atrocities committed against them instead of leaving these matters to the government, especially at an international level. While Weis's (2022) comments were geared toward an international level of human rights violations, the challenges he listed for victim participation in how they are identified can still apply to victims of crime in the general sense of the definition of victims. Weis said victims mainly receive passive assistance. The problem of victim support exists because victims are not looked after by the parties responsible for the victims. Weis proposed that victims face five challenges. These challenges include (a) victims not controlling how they are identified, (b) most victim-centered processes are rarely victim-centered, (c) victims playing a submissive role in political environments, (d) good intentions by governments being well placed but unattainable, and (e) victims going unheard even when things are going well. Weis argued that due to the victim's submissive role, their governments often overlook them.

While the U.S. Department of Justice's comments come from the perspective of supporting victims of violent sex crimes, they build on Weis's comments stating victims wait too long for critically needed services. The wait is due to law enforcement having to service many clients with limited resources. When law enforcement officers are overloaded and overburdened, case priority can change. Even prosecutor's offices can lose focus, and shortcuts can cause the services victims need to fall short of their desired goals. All law enforcement service providers are responsible for keeping the victim's needs as the highest priority. Specialized services and social resources are vital for the victim from a trauma-informed perspective. These services help

victims construct skill sets to assist them in creating safe and secure lives as they move forward (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, n.d.).

Victim-Oriented Policing: Law Enforcement Perspective

Paterson and Williams (2018) said victim-oriented policing requires law enforcement agencies to consider how they interact with victims. The consideration requires law enforcement to revisit how they conceptualize how they establish policy and manage their daily activities, including routine law enforcement services, functions, training, and education on victim-oriented policing (Paterson & Williams, 2018). Some law enforcement agencies are also working on establishing collaborations with victim service organizations within their communities. Larger communities have established family justice and child advocacy centers to help victims. These programs assist victims of crime in navigating the complex nature of the criminal justice system and enable law enforcement organizations to better collaborate with the resources available to them at their local levels (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2020).

While more extensive law enforcement agencies can sometimes collaborate with community services like those mentioned above, large and small agencies require a grassroots strategy. Federal reports in the United States indicate many law enforcement agencies have improved their relationships with victim service organizations to respond appropriately to victims' needs. Some of these agencies have used the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) model of Enhancing Law Enforcement Response (ELERV) strategy to improve victim-oriented policing. The initiative has four core principles: leadership, partnership, training, and performance monitoring to focus on victims' needs. The design begins with creating departmental policies that precisely specify the expectation of the agency's law enforcement officers. Once the victim-oriented policing policy is established, trauma-informed training

continuously begins at the department and academy levels, becoming a regular process. The design of the ELERV program helps law enforcement agencies change their agency culture to serve victims of crime better by increasing crime reporting by victims, improving law enforcement efficiency, improving law enforcement morale and job satisfaction, and increasing community confidence in law enforcement (IACP, 2022).

To introduce programs such as the ELERV, law enforcement agencies must evaluate the culture of their agencies. Scholars underscore the importance of cultural change within law enforcement agencies for establishing a victim-oriented policing strategy. Scholars underscore the impact police culture has on a law enforcement agency. Spencer et al. (2020) found that the "dirty work" or the potentially traumatizing and emotionally draining aspects of being a law enforcement officer can impact law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement officers impacted by the dirty work of their jobs causes cynicism, reaching beyond interacting with offenders and into the organizational and operational aspects of their respective law enforcement agency (Spencer et al., 2020).

Goodson et al. (2022) took the matter further by applying law enforcement perceptions to domestic violence incidents. Goodson's research evaluated domestic violence-related service referrals by law enforcement officers versus having embedded domestic violence advocacy members involved in the process. The research did not argue that embedded advocacy is better than law enforcement service referrals. The research, however, did suggest law enforcement perceptions of how they view the services mentioned may be influenced by how they view victim advocacy groups. The view of these victim advocacy groups can be influenced by the law enforcement officers' experience within their own organizational culture, academy training, and prior experiences (Goodson et al., 2020, 2022).

Law enforcement has more work to focus on regarding victim needs; the struggle is real. The negative experiences law enforcement officers endure during their careers cause them to develop regular and warped perceptions of the definition of a victim (Spencer et al., 2020). Ricciardelli et al. (2021) said law enforcement officers recognize children as "true or ideal victims," while law enforcement officers perceive youth and adult victims to be "less than ideal victims." The study by Ricciardelli et al. found the victims' capacity to be able to protect themselves was the determining factor in how law enforcement officers within the study identified victims. Law enforcement officers perceived adults as capable of protecting themselves, making them less likely to be victims. These perceptions of law enforcement officers are also rooted in how they feel the success rate of adult cases is lower because of their chosen lifestyles or other stereotypes involving victims of sexual assault. These law enforcement officers believe less ideal victims sometimes place themselves in vulnerable situations causing them to be victims of crime (Ricciardelli et al., 2021).

Victim-Oriented Policing: Victim Perspective

Victim cooperation is vital for the successful investigation and prosecution of crimes. Lorenz et al. (2021) conducted an open-ended survey about sexual assault victims' decision not to report to the police (Lorenz et al., 2021). The research conducted Lorenz et al. identified patterns of concerns for victims of sexual assault as to why they did not report their crimes to law enforcement: fear of disbelief or blame, mistrust of police, and expectations of insensitive treatment, mistreatment of the victim, and mistreatment of the perpetrator. Victims feared law enforcement would not believe them. The victim's fear was more specifically centered on the concern that law enforcement would not believe their story because of their relationship with the perpetrator or because they had been consuming alcohol before the attack while in the

perpetrator's company. Other participants had a general mistrust of law enforcement and did not believe law enforcement could protect them from sexual violence. These participants had concerns regarding their belief law enforcement officers would be insensitive to the effects of sexual trauma, leaving them unable to respond to the victims in a way that makes them feel comfortable enough to share their experience. Some of the younger participants feared law enforcement would not take them seriously because of their age at the time of their assault. The participants also feared law enforcement and the legal system would not appropriately respond to their perpetrators. The participants said the legal system does not take domestic violence seriously. Some participants stated concerns regarding how the system would respond to their perpetrators, being law enforcement officers or illegal aliens. The final group of participants did not wish to report to law enforcement because of their prior negative experiences or experiences they have seen others face while working with law enforcement (Lorenz et al., 2021).

The design of the strategies of the IACP works to profoundly impact communities by prioritizing victim-centered philosophies. Properly developing these policies will build the public's confidence and engagement with law enforcement. A significant aspect of this goal ties directly to increasing the probability of the victim's willingness to report crimes and participate in investigations with law enforcement. Without victim cooperation, the difficulty of the level of effective policing will rise (IACP, 2022).

Victim-Oriented Policing and this Study

This qualitative, descriptive study explored how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences, understanding, and navigation of the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions in Virginia. Victim-oriented policing played a crucial role in this study because it

gleaned information from the participants to identify thick descriptions of how they interact with victims of domestic violence during the domestic violence advocacy referral process. Weis (2022) stated that the victim-centered policing approach should speak to the stakeholders, allowing victims to proclaim their rights, which is at the core of this study. Weis's comments regarding victim-centered policing directly correlate with the synthesized data from the study. The findings from this study can serve a two-fold purpose. The data can assist leaders of law enforcement agencies as they develop departmental policies as well as help train law enforcement officers investigating domestic violence cases at the field level.

The core of the victim-centered approach also emphasizes the importance for law enforcement officers to avoid retraumatizing victims of crime (U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, 2022). Re-traumatization is an essential consideration for law enforcement officers. Victims of domestic violence have said they experienced retraumatization during their interactions with law enforcement post-domestic violence abuse, especially in rural jurisdictions. The failure of law enforcement to protect battered women living in domestic abuse environments has historically precedence (Pence, 2001; Schechter, 1982). The victim-centered approach and this study are again parallel due to focusing on domestic violence cases in rural jurisdictions.

The final way victim-oriented policing correlates with this study is by setting the stage for domestic violence victims to report the crimes against them to law enforcement. Victims of domestic violence actively bring their offenders to justice when they feel comfortable with law enforcement. When law enforcement establishes trust with victims of domestic violence, the probability of victim reporting increases. When victims and law enforcement work together, they inspire community trust and showcase the efforts of law enforcement (Ballucci et al., 2017; Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2020; Peirone et al., 2021; Swerin et al.,

2018). Victim cooperation is an essential part of this study and victim-oriented policing because they depend upon victim involvement and engagement to succeed.

History of Research

Numerous studies have explored domestic violence abuse as a global phenomenon that includes economic, social, and health effects on survivors and society. These studies have explored the different aspects of domestic violence in preventing, managing, and supporting domestic violence victims who experience intimate partner violence (Hinsliff-Smith & McGarry, 2017). The primary focus of research for this study examines the attitudes and perceptions of law enforcement officers regarding the referral of domestic violence victims to domestic violence advocacy groups. There has been an assortment of scholarly research on the above topic since 2016 that evaluates lethality assessment protocols, police and advocacy attitudes toward these protocols, help-seeking amongst female domestic violence victims, male perpetrators, and how victims of domestic violence can live beyond their trauma (Dutton et al., 2019; M. A. Evans & Feder, 2016; Grant & Cross-Denny, 2017; Machado et al., 2017). Neither the current research nor research conducted before 2016 explores the attitudes of law enforcement officers toward the referral process for victims of domestic violence to advocacy groups. There has not been any research exploring the above phenomenon in rural jurisdictions.

Previous research shows how police-advocacy teams could better assist minority communities in smaller cities like New Haven, Connecticut. There has been no examination of the law enforcement perception of the advocacy referral process. There is research concerning domestic violence advocacy service practices, how emergency departments can better assist with safety planning for victims of domestic violence, and how advocacy groups can provide quality services, such as the promotion of national hotlines to help victims of domestic violence

(Kulkarni et al., 2012; Macy et al., 2013; Stover et al., 2008). Also, there are studies from the law enforcement officers' perspectives regarding gender sensitivity, rape, and intimate partner (domestic) violence (DeJong et al., 2008; Mennicke et al., 2014; Muftić & Cruze, 2014; Valentine et al., 2012). No older research examines law enforcement officer perspectives on the domestic violence referral process in rural American jurisdictions.

Search Strategy

The research strategy represents a comprehensive and systematic literature review using the Jerry Falwell Library and other databases located within the library. The research process included vital "keyword" searches on the library's home page. EBSCO and Proquest searches included general and specific government, sociology, and criminal justice searches. The research process used professional journals covering various professions and practices, providing data from various practices and professions. For instance, the study uses journals involving *Interpersonal Violence, Family Violence, Policy and Practice, Research, Police and Criminal Psychology, Criminal Justice Policy Review, BMC Public Health, Crime and Delinquency, Violence Against Women, International Journal of Capital Police Strategies and Management* and the United States Federal Government statistics. Some of the research terms included the following: *domestic violence, domestic violence advocacy, intimate partner violence, police perceptions of domestic violence, police perceptions of domestic violence advocacy, police attitudes toward domestic violence, police and domestic violence advocacy groups, law enforcement and domestic violence, law enforcement and domestic violence advocacy, and rural domestic violence.*

History of Domestic Violence Law in the United States

Approximately 8% of police calls for service include domestic violence (Police Executive Research Forum, 2015). Not all victims report instances of domestic violence to law enforcement. The Bureau of Statistics reported that in the United States, police are only notified of half of their jurisdictions' non-fatal domestic violence incidents because victims commonly perceive these matters as private (Reaves, 2017). To remedy the problem, in 1994, the U.S. Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act. The act is also known as Title IV of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The legislation caused a historic shift in how the U.S. criminal justice system would address gender-based violence. Acts of family violence changed from being simply a private issue; instead, law enforcement would begin to treat the particular form of violence as a criminal act worthy of investigation. The act resulted from an accumulation of advocacy initiatives to treat gender-based violence as a criminal act (Gover & Moore, 2021).

The Violence Against Women Act provided direct and punitive action against gender-based violence. The act directed the U.S. criminal justice system to respond to domestic violence against women by supporting the offender's arrest, prosecution, and adjudication through the U.S. court system. The act aimed to reduce and prevent violence against women, hold offenders criminally responsible, and provide safety and well-being for victims of these cases. The act also provided research and evaluation funding to understand domestic violence better and identify new ways to address the problem (Moore & Gover, 2020). The Violence Against Women Act gained bipartisan support in 1994, and the U.S. Congress elected to reauthorize the Act in 2000 and 2005 with almost unanimous support; however, the act's reauthorization in 2013 lacked bipartisan support, causing it to expire in February 2019 (Gover & Moore, 2021).

The Violence Against Women Act provided a multifaceted approach by addressing gender-based violence and the need to hold offenders accountable and provide efficient and effective services for victims. The act has encouraged an aggressive approach toward domestic violence cases by providing collaborative opportunities between law enforcement, victim services, and researchers. These collaborations have enabled law enforcement to better address domestic violence by developing innovative programs, expanding investigative capabilities, adding specialized units and personnel, and integrating trauma-informed approaches to domestic violence investigations, but the overarching effectiveness of these efforts is still unknown. There is a need for more methodological evaluations for proper assessment. These assessments are needed among stakeholders to evaluate the act's effectiveness (Jennings et al., 2020).

Comfortability of Victims Reporting Violence

It is essential that victims of domestic violence feel comfortable reporting these cases to law enforcement (Peirone et al., 2021). Recent studies have shown these victims are less confident in the actions of law enforcement, which reaffirms the importance of the relationship between the victim and law enforcement officer (Ballucci et al., 2017; Peirone et al., 2021; Swerin et al., 2018). A significant portion of the victim–law enforcement officer relationship falls on the shoulders of law enforcement since relevant legal factors often influence the outcomes of domestic violence cases. Law enforcement officers are responsible for identifying the criminal elements of these cases, interviewing, collecting evidence, and determining the immediate outcome by deciding if a domestic violence offense has occurred (Swerin et al., 2018). Therefore, law enforcement officers need to be fully aware of their impact on victims of domestic violence to build trusting and confident relationships with victims they may encounter.

Law Enforcement and the Victim Perception

Women represent the majority of domestic violence victims. Law enforcement officers' perceptions of female victims can impact how they view domestic violence victimization and case processing. Unfortunately, many law enforcement officers misperceive female domestic violence victims because of the impact on victims' emotions and well-being after the event. Many female victims are emotionally flat, numb, and have difficulty remembering the details of the domestic event (Franklin et al., 2020). The behavior often displayed by victims of domestic violence is exhibited because of their history of abuse. These abusive experiences can have a varied impact on victims psychologically and physiologically. These symptoms of abuse can lead victims to have abnormal or unexpected experiences with law enforcement officers during domestic violence investigations. Also, officers can have experiences that cause flawed perceptions of the domestic violence event and victims (Venema, 2016). Furthermore, Twis et al. (2018) stated that some law enforcement officers miss the subtle indicators of domestic violence. Female victims exhibit emotions and feelings; Twis et al. referred to the phenomenon as the "hysterical woman." In these instances, law enforcement officers become blinded by the raw emotion and stress of the domestic incident, which negatively influences their judgment (Franklin et al., 2020; Twis et al., 2018).

While many jurisdictions have attempted to respond to domestic violence cases more effectively, some victims still hold a negative attitude towards law enforcement that may not be associated with law enforcement's performance. Peirone et al. (2021) conducted a recent study in Canada assessing male and female victim attitudes toward law enforcement officers. Peirone et al.'s study evaluated law enforcement performance based on responding to calls. The study evaluated the enforcement of the law, ease of communication with public members, supplying

information to reduce crime, treating individuals fairly, keeping individuals safe, and overall confidence in the police. While the officers performed well during these activities, the negative attitudes of domestic violence victims persisted. Many of the negative attitudes displayed by these victims were not associated with the officer's performance during the domestic violence investigation. Instead, the negative attitudes were a result from public criticism of the police. The problem may be that victims in these cases have negatively internalized their view of police from previous experiences, observations, or cultural influences that control their perceptions. These issues seem to overwhelm the victim's perception of law enforcement even when the victim has positive interactions with them (Peirone et al., 2021).

Victims of domestic violence have negative perceptions of law enforcement associated with socio-demographics and how they perceive violence. Peirone et al. (2021) stated perceptions of social disorder were related to law enforcement responses to domestic violence. Law enforcement's first encounter with these victims is the first step in building trust throughout their interaction. The most effective way to build said trust is by law enforcement officers demonstrating confidence while speaking with victims. Officers can use these interactions to show respect, dignity, fairness, honest motivations, and neutrality regarding the decision-making aspects of the incident (Peirone et al., 2021). They must establish open communication with victims to improve victim honesty regarding the event. However, research suggests law enforcement officers hold conflicting attitudes toward domestic violence victims. Law enforcement officers have expressed sympathy and powerlessness when managing domestic disputes. They feel they cannot always fulfill their roles properly because victims fail to disclose injuries, argue against the offender's arrest, and decline medical assistance. Officers feel the victims do not help themselves and are often unwilling to change their lifestyles. These barriers

cause officers to feel anxiety about domestic violence cases and stress over the outcomes because they would rather be “safe than sorry” (Richards et al., 2021).

Another reason victims of domestic violence do not report their victimization is because they feel a lack of support from law enforcement (El Sayed et al., 2020). Law enforcement perceptions of domestic violence are largely unknown. A recent study has indicated that law enforcement officer perceptions have evolved from these cases being considered private to requiring law enforcement’s attention in cases involving severe crimes. Law enforcement perceptions of domestic violence are also influenced by gender, rank, age, and years of law enforcement experience. At the same time, victim-related factors are considered less noticeable in the view of law enforcement officers. For instance, female law enforcement officers are less likely to believe victims can quickly leave abusive relationships than their male counterparts. Female officers are also more likely to consider evidence of trauma significant in determining the credibility of a domestic violence incident. The research evidence suggests female officers generally tend to have a strong understanding of the influencing factors of domestic violence cases (El Sayed et al., 2020).

Law Enforcement Perception of Domestic Violence Involving Children

Many law enforcement officers train in the traditional model of domestic violence enforcement (i.e., adult male vs. adult female), which focuses on investigating the incident and not the impact on the children who may be affected by the incident (Elliffe & Holt, 2019). Traditional models associated with policing domestic violence often fail to recognize the needs of the children who are commonly secondarily involved in these cases (Ballucci et al., 2017). Law enforcement officers are aware of the children’s needs in these cases, but many officers struggle in preparing for domestic violence complexities as they relate to children. The

traditional approach often leaves the children themselves unseen during the domestic violence investigation. Law enforcement officers commonly miss serving the needs of children in these cases because of the high levels of emotion associated with domestic violence cases (Elliffe & Holt, 2019). Therefore, the policing profession needs to conceptualize how law enforcement views children in domestic violence cases to repair services. Advocacy groups can examine these needs and develop ways to help domestic violence victims and their children (Sullivan, 2018).

In some cases, children are not the bystanders to domestic violence but the perpetrators. Law enforcement officers' understanding of situational and individual factors influences how they respond to domestic violence incidents, especially when dealing with children as offenders (Armstrong et al., 2021). Armstrong et al. (2021) found most law enforcement officers in their study were more likely to arrest a child if they were male and had injured their parent. Generally, law enforcement officers were unlikely to arrest children when they did not cause injury to their victims. As it pertains to arresting child perpetrators of domestic violence, law enforcement officers often choose to deescalate the parties instead of detaining juvenile offenders. Some officers will choose to arrest a juvenile offender when they discover an injured victim, but they still examine the relationship between the victim and the juvenile offender regarding the sex of the offender. In these instances, juvenile male offenders were more likely to be arrested when they victimized their female mother. On the other hand, the same juvenile offender was less likely to be arrested for victimizing their father (Armstrong et al., 2021).

Domestic violence cases involving children require detailed attention from law enforcement officers to meet the child's needs. Sullivan (2018) researched how to improve domestic violence advocacy needs for children and provided a framework that could be used by law enforcement when interacting with children after an incident of domestic violence. All

framework steps involve the individual's attitude, in this case, the assisting law enforcement officer. First, the adult victim and child should receive advocacy services information. Second, there should be a tailored safety plan for their needs that reminds them of the alternative routes away from abuse. Third, building skills involving instruction and modeling is essential for improving self-identity. Fourth, offering encouragement and respect helps calm them down and build their confidence. Fifth, law enforcement officers should offer counseling services through domestic violence advocacy services. Sixth, law enforcement can help victims locate advocacy services that may be challenging. Seventh, law enforcement can help victims build social support with the community and family members. Finally, law enforcement can engage in social change to better the circumstances for victims of domestic violence and their children (Sullivan, 2018).

Law Enforcement Officers and Gender Perception

Stereotypical beliefs are still associated with domestic violence (Bates et al., 2019). The findings from Bates et al. (2019) indicated that participants implicitly held stereotypical beliefs about women being weaker than men. Although law enforcement officers in the study identified domestic violence as unacceptable behavior, there were clear implications that violence between male perpetrators and female victims was deemed more unacceptable in reverse roles. The issue could be that gender stereotypes are ingrained in the law enforcement culture, which indicates the requirement of attention to potential biases associated with their decision-making (Bates et al., 2019; Russell & Sturgeon, 2019). Domestic violence risk assessments have also identified potential stereotypes of how law enforcement officers perceive male victims in domestic violence incidents. These assessments involve gathering information about domestic violence incidents by evaluating the domestic event's nature, severity, frequency/duration, imminence, and likelihood. Law enforcement can then use the information to help determine the risk of

further abuse. Storey and Strand's (2016) study revealed police were more than twice as likely to omit vulnerability factors for male victims. The omissions were unclear, but the researchers theorized they were due to the male victim's reluctance to discuss their vulnerability or the officer's assumption that domestic advocacy support was unavailable to them because of their gender (Storey & Strand, 2016).

Males primarily represent law enforcement, which can cause issues during domestic violence investigations since most victims are female (MacQueen & Norris, 2016). Research has shown gender association problems concerning recording domestic violence offenses. The recording of domestic violence offenses by law enforcement is not standard in cases where the assailant was female rather than male. Law enforcement officers in the research were also more likely to provide information regarding support services for female victims than male victims of domestic violence. Therefore, barriers to men seeking help led to less identification of male victims than female victims. Male victims tended to receive increased support services when a female law enforcement officer was involved in a domestic violence investigation. On the other hand, women received more support than men during domestic violence investigations by male law enforcement officers (Fagerlund, 2020).

Domestic violence incidents involving same-sex relationships also present navigational challenges for law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies have improved domestic violence policies and training in recent years, but there are still problems with law enforcement officers managing domestic violence investigations with same-sex partners (Russell & Sturgeon, 2019). During these investigations, research has shown that law enforcement officers may choose non-arrest options for females and same-sex perpetrators because they perceive it as fairer. Law enforcement officers sometimes feel it is more appropriate to provide informal advice to the

parties and mediate the events to resolve the dispute. Law enforcement officers sometimes allow males in same-sex relationships to leave the residence for a “cool-down period” in more cases than when dealing with heterosexual relationships (Russell & Sturgeon, 2019).

Law Enforcement Officer Buy-In

One of the most significant challenges in the domestic violence discussion is changing law enforcement officers’ negative attitudes toward domestic violence cases while simultaneously encouraging positive attitudes toward domestic violence investigations. Ballucci et al.’s (2017) successful strategies, including evaluating law enforcement officers’ attitudes, knowledge, and perception of domestic violence, can be challenging for police administrators. The primary way to change the perspective of law enforcement is through training and education (Ballucci et al., 2017; Birdsall et al., 2017). One training example involves risk assessment. For instance, researchers recently studied how law enforcement officers could use domestic violence risk assessment tools during investigations (Ballucci et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2018). Ballucci, et al.’s (2017) study used a questionnaire to assess law enforcement’s roles in dealing with these cases. The law enforcement participants expressed less than positive attitudes regarding the study because they did not perceive their opinions implemented any real change within their police agency. Ballucci et al. stated there is a delicate balance between implementing domestic violence policy because risk assessment tools and information gathering from the law enforcement officers influenced their buy-in for the project. Law enforcement officers described limitations and challenges in using risk assessment tools. These perceptions were related to officers wishing to hold traditional perspectives regarding domestic violence versus adopting a more progressive approach (Ballucci et al., 2017).

Robinson et al. (2018) found common themes among law enforcement officers from the United States and the United Kingdom regarding their perceptions of using risk assessment tools to identify re-abuse and lethality when investigating domestic violence events. Most law enforcement officers in both countries shared common ground regarding perceiving risk assessment as a significant way of preventing future abuse, but British law enforcement has proven more sensitive to identifying these risk factors than their U.S. counterparts regarding the more subtle characteristics such as jealousy, controlling behaviors, spying, stalking, and other non-violent behaviors. Law enforcement officers identified these subtle characteristics of domestic violence when they received training rather than those who had not (Robinson et al., 2018). On the other hand, some police agencies have introduced innovative law enforcement officers to assess domestic violence cases, but research is scarce regarding how law enforcement officers perceive these tools. A recent Canadian police study assessed law enforcement officer participants' attitudes regarding implementing domestic violence risk assessment tools. The participants in the sample primarily used risk assessment tools, found them helpful, and indicated they would use them after adequate training. The study revealed that law enforcement officers embraced the key to implementing the risk assessment tools after proper training (Campbell et al., 2018; Li et al., 2021). Determining law enforcement buy-in and the overall success of risk assessment programs relies on property training, so officers have a formidable understanding of tools that might help resolve adverse perceptions and attitudes (Ballucci et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2018; McPhedran et al., 2017).

Some solutions for resolving most law enforcement officers' attitudes and perceptions of domestic violence are associated with training and education. For the gap between traditional policing and progressive approaches that work to remedy domestic violence incidents, practical

strategies are essential to foster the support of law enforcement officers on the front lines of community service. These strategies are needed to prevent backlash from within the rank and file of law enforcement agencies (Ballucci et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2018). Birdsall et al. (2017) noted that law enforcement officers should be more involved in engaging victims of domestic violence to help them become more empowered (Birdsall et al., 2017). Contemporary approaches are needed to update police procedures to ensure victim engagement and satisfaction (Ballucci et al., 2017; Birdsall et al., 2017). Birdsall et al. proposed that police procedures should include specific steps for reviewing body cam footage, other available video footage, photography, audio recordings, neighborhood canvassing, and family interviews to reach realistic prosecutorial goals. Birdsall et al. stated that domestic violence research should empower victims by utilizing emerging disciplines, victim theories, and gender orientation studies (Birdsall et al., 2017). Segrave et al. (2018) offered an option to move beyond training and education. Segrave et al. researched law enforcement officers' attitudes toward domestic violence in Australia and concluded it was potentially impossible to change the perceptions of law enforcement officers who viewed domestic violence cases negatively. Segrave et al. proposed establishing domestic violence specialty units to manage these cases better instead of fighting a no-win battle. Segrave stated police agencies could identify the law enforcement officers who would be the best "fit" for these teams by evaluating their previous domestic violence investigative records and evaluating the law enforcement officer's interest in specialized training (Segrave et al., 2018).

The Impact of Police Culture, Supervisors, and Peers

Diemer et al. (2017) researched how law enforcement officers managed domestic violence incidents in Victoria, Australia, determining to what extent law enforcement officers

should be mandated to take action during domestic violence investigations. The research focused on law enforcement officer decision-making and exercising discretion and compulsion regarding domestic violence cases. While Diemer et al.'s study collected data for assessment purposes for Australian police, a connection was found that could relate to all law enforcement officers. The researchers interviewed 125 law enforcement officers to explore their attitudes toward domestic violence policing practices. When asked where they would seek advice if unsure how to manage a domestic violence incident, lower-ranking law enforcement officers would only refer to the codebook 10% of the time but speak with their supervisor (sergeant) 82% of the time. This finding is novel because it confirms that law enforcement officers seek guidance from their supervisors instead of other authoritative sources (Diemer et al., 2017). Together, these law enforcement officers and supervisors establish a significant portion of the police agencies' culture.

Law enforcement officers not only seek guidance from their supervisors, but their supervisors also influence their discretion in domestic violence investigations (Diemer et al., 2017; R. R. Johnson & Dai, 2016). R. R. Johnson and Dai (2016) stated that police managers could affect law enforcement officers' attitudes toward these cases because they commonly represent how the police agency prioritizes law enforcement efforts. When police leaders prioritize domestic violence arrests and training initiatives, subordinate officers respond by making more arrests (R. R. Johnson & Dai, 2016; Li et al., 2021). When police agencies offer specialized training for domestic violence, law enforcement officers recognize their police agencies see these incidents as a priority. Subordinate officers respond to these priorities because they expect to meet the standards set forth by their agency leaders. R. R. Johnson and Dai found law enforcement officers' preferences did not get in the way of domestic violence arrests as they

followed the perceived wishes of their police agencies. The researchers argued the followership of these law enforcement officers was due to the cultural and social norms of the agency. Finally, a complete lack of congruence between law enforcement officers and their supervisors sometimes exists regarding domestic violence cases. As subordinate officers watched their supervisors perform, they observed their personal preferences and departmental regulations regarding domestic violence cases on display. These influences were sometimes in conflict with one another, leaving subordinate law enforcement officers confused about managing some domestic violence cases (R. R. Johnson & Dai, 2016).

Van Craen (2016) said the other significant influence of law enforcement officers is their peers. Unlike R. R. Johnson and Dai (2016), Van Craen stated their fellow officers influence a police officer's identity. Law enforcement peers impact many fellow officers based on their commitment to the traditional policing culture: how they assess situations, what police styles they use, and how they react to confrontations. Their peers influence them more than their supervisors because they are with them, but peer and supervisory influences still impact law enforcement officers (R. R. Johnson & Dai, 2016; Li et al., 2021; Van Craen, 2016). Peacock et al. (2021) conducted a Croatian law enforcement study with similar results regarding officer attitudes and supervision. Peacock et al. found that fair treatment by supervisors leads supervised officers to have positive expectations regarding citizens in general. These positive attitudes make officers more inclined to follow departmental procedures when encountering various citizens. The positive bond between officers and their supervisors is essential for policing efficiency because officers can grow pessimistic due to their interactions during their daily activities in policing (Peacock et al., 2021).

Fleming and Franklin (2021) noted that law enforcement officers often endorse myths and misconceptions about domestic violence. These feelings permeate how law enforcement officers deal with these victims, leaving them stigmatized, invalidated, and blameworthy and limiting their participation in domestic violence cases (Fleming & Franklin, 2021; Gill et al., 2021). For instance, law enforcement officers can overlook certain domestic violence risk factors. While many studied law enforcement cohorts agree using weapons, strangulation, and physical assault resulting in injury and escalation of violence were indicators of high-risk factors for victims, some law enforcement officers in the same cohort did not rank the victim's fear level equally high. Inexperienced and untrained law enforcement officers can miss the passive characteristics of domestic violence associated with actions of jealousy, controlling behaviors, spying, stalking, and other non-violence behaviors, sometimes deemed less significant than cases involving physical violence (Robinson et al., 2018).

Some law enforcement officers perceive domestic violence as not a "real crime," requiring no official policing. Fleming and Franklin (2021) found that many law enforcement officers become frustrated with how these victims respond to their abusers by continuing relationships with them. Many law enforcement officers become cynical of domestic violence cases because victims refuse to leave their abusers (Fleming & Franklin, 2021; Gill et al., 2021). Law enforcement officers can subtly blame victims for their circumstances since they refuse to help themselves out of the abusive relationship and begin to view domestic violence victims as calculating and manipulative regarding their lifestyles, which causes officers to perceive them as deceitful, just like their abusers. Law enforcement officers can then become uncomfortable in dealing with domestic violence cases, and in some instances, they see the abuse as justified because the victims remain in abusive relationships. For instance, some officers perceive victims

who abuse alcohol and drugs as adding to their volatile environment and abusive relationships (Fleming & Franklin, 2021).

Law enforcement officers must shed any myths or preconceived notions regarding domestic violence because of how important they are as individuals to the process of investigating domestic violence cases. While abusers can negatively impact their victims, victims can also be negatively impacted secondarily by the law enforcement officer's response to domestic violence. For instance, Franklin et al. (2020) said officers' perceptions of a victim's self-presentation could cause case processing problems and attempts to protect the victim. Law enforcement officers must understand that many victims present themselves as emotionally numb, flat, unaffected, or having problems remembering their abuse. Victims may show forms of hysteria, expressive emotionality, and observable despair may originate from misinterpretations surrounding the physiological trauma response from the victim. While these can be normal responses by victims to law enforcement officers, law enforcement officers cannot let those attitudes sway their professionalism during the interaction (Franklin et al., 2020). Therefore, how law enforcement officers perceive domestic violence victims depends on their attitude.

Barriers to Domestic Violence Support

There is an inconsistency regarding how law enforcement officers manage and investigate domestic violence incidents. These issues could be related to systematic challenges, organizational hindrances, and individual barriers (Saxton et al., 2020). In Saxton et al.'s (2020) study sample of Canadian law enforcement, the thematic analysis revealed barriers to the coordination of services, relationship conflicts, and an overall lack of available services. Organizational barriers included problems related to the implementation process of programs, limitations within the officer's role, and a lack of domestic violence resources within police

organizations. These barriers were not entirely relevant for all of the cohorts in the study. Individual barriers varied amongst officers. For instance, one barrier included how law enforcement officers responded to victims' complexities, including mental health and addiction (Saxton et al., 2020).

Law enforcement attitudes toward domestic violence are evolving. A recent study conducted by Gill et al. (2021) revealed over 90% of officers in the study viewed domestic violence as a severe matter for law enforcement to address and not to be left as a private matter. Officers in the study shared a conventional perspective on domestic violence, focusing their investigations mainly on physical violence. Officers held a more progressive perspective understanding the complexity of these cases and victims' fear of their abusers. The mixed view of law enforcement officers can make these investigations confusing for themselves and their victims because of the diverse perspectives officers have regarding domestic violence (Fleming & Franklin, 2021; Gill et al., 2021).

While many law enforcement officers recognize domestic violence as severe, there are still ways officers attempt to circumvent their departmental systems in some instances to avoid an arrest. Myhill (2019) found that law enforcement officers were more likely to arrest if they perceived the domestic violence event as severe and thought the victim was in danger of future harm. When officers perceived the harm and future danger as minimal, they used shortcuts to avoid making arrests by minimizing the cases (Myhill, 2019). To prevent officer shortcuts, police agencies should identify ways to change the perceptions of their law enforcement officers toward advocacy referrals. A recent study revealed that most officer participants viewed domestic violence victims and advocacy services favorably when advocacy services and police efforts align (Goodson et al., 2020). The more favorable the officers viewed advocacy services, the

more likely they would refer victims to those services (Goodson et al., 2020). Officers are also more willing to support advocacy intervention when mandated and when the officers perceive the domestic violence incident as a significant crime (Goodson et al., 2020; L. Johnson et al., 2021).

These findings suggest law enforcement officers' motivation for implementing intervention strategies was affected by their perceived benefits. These benefits are related to the response and investigation into domestic violence matters, perceived benefits to victims, the need to comply with rules and regulations, and the recognition of domestic violence as a severe crime (L. Johnson et al., 2021). Law enforcement officers with high school diplomas versus 4-year college or graduate degrees were likelier to refer victims to advocacy services. It is essential to note that the reasoning was likely due to the non-college graduates having longer tenure and experience in the police agencies surveyed. Finally, female law enforcement officers referred victims to advocacy groups more than their male counterparts and were less tolerant of domestic violence incidents (Goodson et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Female officers effectively investigate these incidents because of their perspective and how victims perceive them. Female victims are more likely to report domestic violence to female officers in domestic violence sexual assault cases (Miller & Segal, 2019).

Law enforcement involvement in deploying lethality assessment programs has also been a research point. The research has provided deeper explanations of barriers between law enforcement officers and their services to victims of domestic violence. In a study involving the deployment of a lethality assessment program (LAP) in police agencies in Connecticut, Grant and Cross-Denny (2017) found that individual law enforcement officers generally supported the program, but several obstructions and barriers existed: Some police agencies struggled to launch

the LAP program due to the timing of the implementation. Other agencies complained victims did not adequately cooperate with the program. Finally, the general culture (attitude toward domestic violence) prevented the program from becoming fully useful for domestic violence investigations (Goodson et al., 2020; Grant & Cross-Denny, 2017). Grant and Cross-Denny (2017) found that supervisors and leaders were the most significant influencers in police agencies that controlled and influenced the general culture. Therefore, they must be on board with domestic violence programs to succeed (Grant & Cross-Denny, 2017).

Summary

Law enforcement officers are essential in investigating domestic violence incidents (Barrett et al., 2019; Franklin et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2020). There is a research gap in rural jurisdictions regarding how law enforcement officers perceive the referral process of domestic violence victims to advocacy services (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; El Sayed et al., 2020; Goodson et al., 2020). Researching these experiences is critical to addressing domestic violence in rural areas due to their complexity. A strong relationship between law enforcement and advocacy services is vital for proper intercession in domestic violence incidents (Edwards, 2015). Little research is available that gives insight into how law enforcement officers perceive domestic violence, yet law enforcement officers have an essential role in managing domestic violence incidents. Understanding law enforcement officers' perceptions of these events is necessary to create better policies for how law enforcement generally manages these events (El Sayed et al., 2020).

The foundation for victim-centered policing combines criminological thought and police practice to design opportunities to reduce the fears associated with crime (Clark, 2003). The change in policing has placed disciplinary power on crime victims by shifting law enforcement

priorities. Law enforcement now helps victims using formal and codified law (White & Perrone, 1997). Implementing victim-focused policing requires law enforcement leaders to change their agencies' operations. The changing process requires leaders to develop documentation, plans, and actions to symbolize the shift toward victim-centered policing (Clark, 2003).

In 1994, the U.S. Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act. The legislation caused a historic shift regarding how the U.S. criminal justice system addressed gender-based violence (Gover & Moore, 2021). While the legislation helped narrow how law enforcement addressed these incidents, there are still problems and barriers associated with domestic violence investigations. For instance, law enforcement officers often believe myths and misconceptions associated with domestic violence. These feelings directly impact how they deal with these victims. Officers who believe these myths can stigmatize and invalidate domestic violence victims (Fleming & Franklin, 2021; Gill et al., 2021). Also, there are still stereotypical beliefs associated with how officers perceive victims of domestic violence (Fleming & Franklin, 2021). Some stereotypical beliefs involve the belief that women are weaker than men. These stereotypes leave some officers perceiving men cannot be victims in domestic violence cases (Bates et al., 2019; Russell & Sturgeon, 2019). Most law enforcement officers train in the traditional model of domestic violence enforcement (i.e., adult male vs. adult female), which can often leave unaddressed the needs of children involved in or witnessing these incidents (Elliffe & Holt, 2019). Women represent the majority of domestic violence victims. Officers often fail to identify women as "real victims" because they can be emotionally numb and non-communicative (Franklin et al., 2020).

The above issues reinforce the evidence that victims of domestic violence need to feel comfortable interacting with officers during domestic violence investigations (Peirone et al.,

2021). Current studies show these victims can be less confident with officers during these instances (Ballucci et al., 2017; Peirone et al., 2021; Swerin et al., 2018). A large portion of the victim–law enforcement officer relationship is the officer’s responsibility. The burden of responsibility falls upon officers because they are responsible for identifying the criminal elements of these cases and then determining the immediate outcome by deciding if a domestic violence offense has occurred (Swerin et al., 2018). Therefore, law enforcement officer administrators should continually assess the attitudes and perceptions of their officers to ensure appropriate domestic violence investigations are being completed (Ballucci et al., 2017). Law enforcement attitudes and perceptions change through the completion of training (Ballucci et al., 2017; Birdsall et al., 2017). Officers’ assessments can also be done through direct supervision, as many officers rely on guidance from their supervisors instead of administrative leaders (Diemer et al., 2017). Together, these law enforcement officers and supervisors set a significant portion of the police agencies’ culture.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This qualitative descriptive study explored how law enforcement officers serving accredited agencies from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences, understanding, and navigating Virginia's domestic violence referral process. The study allowed law enforcement participants to individually discuss their thoughts in an open and confidential manner with me, the researcher. Historically, there has been research into law enforcement perspectives regarding domestic violence advocacy services in metropolitan jurisdictions, but there is a research gap for the same studies in rural jurisdictions (Goodson et al., 2020). This study provides data to fill the research gap and provides new insight into the domestic violence referral process. The Code of Virginia requires law enforcement officers within the state to refer domestic violence victims to domestic violence advocacy groups. Also, the process requires accreditation with the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC, 2022). The research value of the study is significant because it provides data regarding the referral process from a rural perspective.

Chapter Three examines the research questions and the main points of the study's phenomenon. There is a discussion of how the study applies to the population and sample sections, including the sampling method, sampling criteria for participation, and the number of participants. This chapter also discusses research data, instrument development, and construction resources. The information includes data collection and management (from start to finish), the data analysis procedure method, and coding development. Next, the trustworthiness and credibility of the research's internal validity process are described, including a well-established data collection plan, member checking, and a thick description. This chapter also covers

dependability, which refers to the reliability of evidence, records analysis, and peer debriefing. The information includes the study's transferability, including the policy, practice, future research, and degree to which the context applies to the study. The research confirmability discusses the objectivity to corroborate findings through coding, evidence to support claims, the researcher's beliefs or assumptions, and recognition of shortcomings. The section discusses ethical issues per the Belmont Report and IRB guidelines related to the study's procedures for obtaining consent, privacy, strategies to prevent coercion, potential conflicts of interest, and a description of the data management plan. Finally, the section concludes with a summary of Chapter Three.

The Rationale for a Qualitative Methodology

The methodology for this study included qualitative research. Park and Park (2016) and Ward et al. (2018) stated the qualitative descriptive methodology has been considered an evolutionary process that addresses an investigated phenomenon that identifies a connection to the research questions. The qualitative approach is subjective, unstructured, and uses a personal voice for data collection and analysis, often leading to additional questions or findings (Park & Park, 2016; Ward et al., 2018). Comparatively, quantitative research is objective and structured and uses an impersonal voice to quantify data and generalize results from a sample to the population of interest (Park & Park, 2016). This study acts upon the qualitative approach using subjective semi-structured interviews to collect data. The unstructured nature allowed me as the researcher to develop interview questions using my style and reflections to provide conclusive results from conversations with participants in the interview setting.

The qualitative methodology is appropriate for my study instead of the quantitative method. The qualitative method applies theoretical findings and discoveries based on research

questions through a field study in natural conditions. The study utilizes open-ended questions to gather subjective information from participants during interviews. The quantitative method aims to predict and control a social phenomenon to achieve research goals in a controlled setting. The nature of the research here is not controlled but open to the participants' perceptions (Park & Park, 2016). Second, the qualitative method's validity centers around obtaining a complete picture of the data captured through participant interviews. I did not use the quantitative method because that method seeks to infer the behavior of the whole from evaluating different parts of the data and isolates specific variables to seek correlation, relationships, and causality (Park & Park, 2016). Finally, this study required multiple interviews and thematic analysis to gather data. This qualitative method emphasized observation and interpretation needed to collect data in the law enforcement officer's natural setting (workplace environment and field operations). A quantitative method, on the other hand, emphasizes collecting numerical data for the measurement of variables to rule out other variables impacting the research (Park & Park, 2016), which was not an option for this study.

This research study required a holistic and original approach; therefore, a qualitative design was required. The current research gap calls for original data because VLEPSC-accredited police agencies navigate the process of referring domestic violence victims to advocacy services (Goodson et al., 2020; Park & Park, 2016; VLEPSC, 2022). The holistic approach focuses on collecting data from participant interviews. The holistic approach also treats the phenomenon as a system. The approach searches for patterns within data, which is required for the study to be viable. Second, domestic violence is a stigmatized topic that requires in-depth descriptive research (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021; Twis et al., 2018). Qualitative research is better suited to understand such topics because the methodology allows the exploration of a

phenomenon. Qualitative research is also participatory and offers opportunities for meaningful communication, addressing and reducing stigmatized imbalances (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). Finally, qualitative research is exploratory and investigative. Qualitative research findings are inconclusive and cannot be used to generalize a researched topic. Instead, the research develops an initial understanding and sound base for future research (Park & Park, 2016). The exploratory nature of qualitative research allows for and promotes meaningful community engagement and agency empowerment. The research type provides underlying characteristics of participation, collaboration, reciprocity, accountability, transparency, and reflexivity (Kalio et al., 2016; Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021).

Rationale for the Research Design

Descriptive design research describes individuals, events, and conditions in nature. The researcher who uses descriptive design does not manipulate any of the variables. Instead, the researcher only describes the sample or variables (Siedlecki, 2020). The study here uses a qualitative descriptive design. The design describes the specific population of participants used in the study. The study's participants are Virginia-certified law enforcement officers serving accredited agencies in rural jurisdictions. The participants were limited to those from the specific population of participants who investigate domestic violence incidents working for law enforcement agencies accredited through the VLEPSC.

The chosen design allowed law enforcement officers to describe how they perceive and experience the process of referring victims of domestic violence to domestic violence advocacy services through individual semi-structured interviews. As the researcher, I did not control or manipulate any variables in the research questions. I observed the participants, recorded the participant's statements, and then thematically organized those statements.

Other designs available to quantitative researchers include correlational, experimental, quasi-experimental, and causal-comparative research designs. These designs are not appropriate for the researcher's study for various reasons. The correlational research design is a form of nonexperimental research. The research facilitates the prediction and explanation of variable relationships that predict and explain variables' relationships (Seeram, 2019). Correlational research would not be appropriate for the researcher's study because predicting the participants' (law enforcement officers') actions are not relevant to the study regarding their perceptions of the referral process for victims of domestic violence. Experimental design refers to the study's use of participants within the different groups of an experiment; most commonly, these are the experimental group and the control group (McLeod, 2023). The design for the researcher's study is not appropriate because a control group is not needed. Quasi-experiment research design is the non-researcher-induced variation in the primary independent variable of interest that mimics experimental conditions where only some participants are randomly exposed (Gopalan et al., 2020). Quasi-experiment design is inappropriate for the researcher's study because of the exposition of all participants to the same semi-structured interviews. Causal-comparative research design seeks to find relationships between independent and dependent variables after an event has already occurred (Salkind, 2010). A causal-comparative research design is inappropriate for the researcher's study since the study has no dependent or independent variables.

Research Questions

This study aimed to gather viable information from the sources. Semi-structured interviews collect primary data from Research Questions 1 and 2. Virginia-certified law enforcement officers employed by accredited agencies serving rural jurisdictions represented the

secondary data from the demographic screening process. The demographic information identified the officers' backgrounds to provide a clear picture of where the primary data for the research originated. The screening process of the study's participants involved an assessment of their sworn law enforcement officer status in Virginia, their involvement with domestic violence investigations, their ethical standing with their agency, years of law enforcement service, calls for service involving domestic violence, number of domestic violence investigations, and the last time they referred a victim of domestic violence to referral services (see Appendix C). This study answered the following research questions:

RQ1: How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

RQ2: How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

Procedures

Population and Sampling

The general population of interest for the research focused on Virginia law enforcement officers who were full-time or part-time employees of police departments or sheriff's offices administered by the Commonwealth or any political subdivision. These officers are responsible for preventing and detecting crime and enforcing the penal, traffic, or highway laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia (U.S. Code of Virginia, 2021a). The specific population for the research focused on Virginia law enforcement officers employed by agencies accredited by the VLEPSC. The VLEPSC views accreditation as an ongoing process where law enforcement

agencies review departmental guidelines. The goal of accreditation is to enhance service delivery (VLEPSC, 2022).

This study used nonprobability purposive sampling to select 15 participants. The study required participants to be Virginia-certified sworn law enforcement officers, in good ethical standing with their respective law enforcement agency, who investigated domestic violence cases. Nonprobability convenience sampling was the backup if the purposive sampling process was unsuccessful. Convenience sampling is also known as availability sampling. Researchers use convenience sampling to gather data from whatever cases happen to be convenient (DeCarlo, 2018). This research requires site authorization because I interviewed law enforcement officers at their respective agencies.

To collect data, I utilized video conferencing for participant interviews. At every stage of the research process, confidentiality was the highest priority. The study utilized the “accredited agencies” list noted on the website home page of the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission. I contacted Todd Clingenpeel, the Program Manager for the VLEPSC, who stated that permission for research was not required. According to the list, 104 law enforcement agencies have accreditation through the VLEPSC (2022). Forty-four of those agencies qualify for the study. The study narrowed the 44 law enforcement agencies to five: Goochland County Sheriff’s Office, King George County Sheriff’s Office, Green County Sheriff’s Office, Winchester Police Department, and Woodstock Police Department.

Sources of Data Sample Section

The research used semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method for this study. The interview protocol included six open-ended questions per research question (Appendix A) developed through an extensive literature review, and the interviews lasted

approximately 60 minutes. The interviews consisted of questions designed to gather information from the participants regarding their experiences with the domestic violence referral process. Before data collection began, I obtained the consent of the participants to audio record for transcription. Once the interviews were complete, I used the NVIVO transcription software to transcribe the research participant's verbal responses into text. The software provides verbatim audio and video transcription with 90% accuracy (NVIVO, 2022). I then listened to the audio of the interviews and edited the transcription as needed to ensure accuracy, using the edited data from the participant interviews to develop themes.

The data source was derived from a deductive approach where the researcher developed questions for analyzing data (Williams & Todd, 2016). The participants included sworn Virginia law enforcement officers employed by law enforcement agencies who receive accreditation through the VLEPSC. Open-ended questioning yielded the necessary data for the research. A recording device physically obtained the data in a digital format. The process allowed the researcher to categorize the data thematically to satisfy the qualitative standards of research.

Sources of Data

Although I originally sought approval from 10 of the 44 qualifying agencies in Virginia (see Appendix G for sample request letter), one agency lost its VLEPSC accreditation and four others failed to respond after initial approval; thus, five agencies in total were included in this study. See the following appendices for each participating agency's site approval: Goochland County Sheriff's Office (Appendix H), Greene County Sheriff's Office (Appendix I), Winchester Police Department (Appendix J), and Woodstock Police Department (Appendix K), and King George County Sheriff's Office (Appendix L).

Screening Instrument

I selected a survey to act as the screening instrument for the data collection (Appendix C). The screening survey identified participants with the highest probability of providing thick descriptions for data samples. The first two questions asked the participant if they are a sworn law enforcement officer in Virginia and an officer who investigates domestic violence cases. The participants had to answer these questions in the affirmative to qualify for research participation. If the candidate answered questions one and two affirmatively, they were allowed to complete the survey. The candidate then became a participant in the study.

Question 3 asked the participant how many years of law enforcement service they have to determine their level of experience as a general law enforcement officer. Questions 4 and 5 asked the candidate how many domestic violence calls for service they had answered in the previous 3 years and how many of those calls they investigated themselves. This information was essential because it provided insight into the participant's "first-hand" investigative experience. Question 6 asked the participant how many domestic violence arrests they had made during that time. I used the requested information to determine the participant's recent experience in domestic violence investigations. The information was needed because it provided insight into the participant's familiarity with domestic violence investigations leading to the referral process. Finally, the last question asked the candidate how many domestic violence advocacy referrals they had conducted in the previous 3 years. This information was essential because the participant's department requires them to advise victims of domestic violence about available advocacy services (VLEPSC, 2022).

Demographic Survey

Demographic analysis measures population phenomena and a broader interpretive component of population studies to explain patterns and differences found in demographic data (Carmichael, 2016). I provide participants with a demographic survey with five questions relevant to the study (Appendix E). Question 1 asked for the participant's age. The participant's age provided insight into the participant's general life experience level. Question 2 asked for the participant's gender. The known gender of the participant is essential to the study because of assumptions associated with male and female officers. Female officers weigh the impact of their actions upon others more than men because of their nurturing socialization. In contrast, male officers are socialized to focus on justice (Sun, 2007). Question 3 asked for the participant's racial background. The participant's race is important because domestic violence is one of the most underreported crimes, and understanding the factors that motivate police reporting by race and ethnicity is not entirely developed (Holliday et al., 2020). Finally, the survey requested the participant's general education and specified education regarding domestic violence. These questions provided a baseline for general education and specialized training in domestic violence investigations.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I used six interview questions to answer both research questions. As I asked each of the interview questions of the participant, I used additional probing questions as needed. Appendix F contains the two research questions, the six interview questions, and the six probing questions. The field test was completed using three law enforcement officer participants (Appendix M). The test settings varied from the researcher's home office and kitchen to one of the participant's home kitchens. The average test duration time was 58:00:34, and the total test duration time was

174:01:03. An average of 18 transcription pages were created, totaling 54.5 pages. An average of five codes were created, totaling 15 codes (Appendix A). The researcher inductively coded the interviews using a line-by-line technique. The researcher identified five main themes: the referral process, advocacy group assistance, law enforcement involvement, successful experiences, and problem experiences. An extensive list of subthemes was identified as well (see Appendix N).

Data Collection

Before data collection began, I received approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research (see Appendix A). I also sought approval from each law enforcement agency head listed in the section above. Each law enforcement officer participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D) to participate in the study and to have their interviews recorded. I used surveys, interviews, and reflexive memos to collect data for this research project. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I redacted all sensitive data from the manuscript and controlled all of the data to actively protect the rights and privacy of the participating officers. I will securely store the data for 3 years after the study is complete, destroying it once the time period expires.

The following section lists data collection steps from the starting point of agency site approval to the endpoint of ethical considerations:

1. Agency Site Request (Appendix G)
2. Agency Site Approval (Appendices H–Q)
3. Approval of research from the Liberty University IRB (Appendix A)
4. Recruitment Flyer (Appendix B)
5. Participant Informed Consent (Appendix D)
6. Sample Selection: Demographics Survey (Appendix E)

7. Sample Selection: Background Screening (Appendix C)

8. Data Collection:

- Interview Guide (Appendix F)
- Two Research Questions
- Primary Interview Questions
- Six Probing Questions per Research Question

9. Data Analysis:

- Transcription
- Naïve Reading
- Memoing
- First and Second Cycle Coding
- Thematic Analysis
- Synthesis

10. Ethical Considerations

- Pseudonym Creation and Assignment
- Informed Consent
- Confidential Interviews
- Independent Storage (3 years)

Survey

The surveying process involves interviews for qualitative research (Babbie, 2017). Research surveying has historically provided data regarding participants for decades and is a valuable and legitimate approach to research (Ponto, 2015). Surveys can use open-ended questioning so that study participants can provide their answers (Maxfield & Babbie, 2018). This

study use open-ended questioning to explore the perceptions and experiences of law enforcement officers involved in the domestic violence referral process. The semi-structured interviews were informal, allowing the participants to expand upon their experiences while engaging in an organic conversation. The length of the interviews was 60–90 minutes.

Interviews

Edwards and Holland (2020) said the interview is likely the most used method for research in social science, and it is essential for qualitative research as it is used heavily by researchers. Bhattacharya (2017) said qualitative interviews are conversations between the interviewer and interviewee that can take different forms. While there are various forms of qualitative interviewing, I used formal, semi-structured interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017) prepared in advance (see Appendix F) to understand the participants' perceptions of the domestic violence referral process to advocacy services. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and provide confidentiality.

Reflexive Memos

Qualitative research is contextual as it occurs in time and place between two or more people. When researchers clearly define the contextuality of a research project, the study's credibility and findings deepen the understanding of the project. Reflexivity in qualitative research is best understood when researchers understand their research by “doing it” (Dodgson, 2019). As the researcher for this project, I was a professional insider regarding the domestic violence referral process. I directly related to the participants' experiences on the front lines of law enforcement domestic violence investigations and used shorthand techniques to memo during participant interviews reflexively. To complete the research, I conducted two interviews

with the participants, utilized member checking, and maintained an audit trail (Buetow, 2019; Dodgson, 2019).

Data Analysis

I used NVIVO software to collect and analyze the study participants' data, coding the data for interpretive accuracy. NVIVO is a program for qualitative and mixed-methods research. The software analyzes audio data from interviews for thematic categorization. I used transcription guidelines for expression and formatting when comparing the transcriptions to the audio files. The electronic files were secured and password-protected using NVIVO 12 Plus. After data collection, I used thematic analysis to analyze the research data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method for identifying, organizing, and describing themes found in datasets and includes the following steps: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining names and themes, and producing a report to ensure a correct data assessment (Creswell, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). The sections below discuss the development of the coding process, initial and secondary coding cycles, development of coding themes, coding examples, and coding relationships. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations made for the study at the end of the section.

First and Second Cycle Coding

The coding phase of thematic analysis allows the researcher to become familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding phase of research also connects the qualitative data and data analysis phase by assigning a word or short phrase in a summative form (Rogers, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). Coding is an essential step in the process. Coding involves aggregating data into small categories and assigning a code. During the first coding cycle (Appendix N), I used NVIVO codes to represent the participant's exact wording in the semi-structured interviews.

These codes also represented names that best described the information I expected to find during the study and any surprising or interesting information (Creswell, 2013). After the first coding cycle, data were reorganized and reanalyzed in the second coding cycle. The goal of the second coding cycle was to identify themes in the data (Rogers, 2018).

Synthesis

The synthesizing of information in written form involves selecting, organizing, and connecting information to create new text from one or more sources of information (Spivey & King, 1989). The first step of the synthesis process is selecting the information from each text for the summary. Second, the researcher must organize and arrange the selected information to develop logical relationships. The final step of the synthesis process involves connectivity. Connecting involves the researcher writing and combining information from various sources (Spivey, 1991). I used software coding to accomplish the proper synthesis needed (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009), deploying interviews and reflexive memos for the synthesis process. I then developed a textual description from the analysis of the participant's descriptions of their events to capture the ethos of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transcription

The transcription process is another essential step in qualitative research. Transcription transforms spoken words into written text (Oluwafemi et al., 2021). I transcribed the interviews using NVIVO software, which allowed me to collect notes and voice conversations using an AI speech-to-text assistant. The software allows for data downloads in TXT, DOC, and PDF formats. I then listened to the recordings to ensure correct documentation. The NVIVO software collects and stores all recordings on the system's cloud storage in a safeguarded manner.

Naïve Reading

The process of transcript reviewing allows the researcher to review the data and improve the accuracy and clarification of the data (Hagens et al., 2009). Gellweiler et al. (2018) said the transcription process begins with building subthemes to the overarching themes, or the process can be reversed (Gellweiler et al., 2018). I used naïve reading to understand and recognize the interview transcripts as a whole, maintaining an open mind while approaching the text review. I read the text line-by-line to ensure the best analysis of the text through repetition and paying close attention to details and themes. I also used structural analysis to split and examine the units of meaning (Gellweiler et al., 2018).

Memoing

I utilized memoing to analyze the data in the study continuously. Memoing allows qualitative researchers to engage with their research more significantly and to feel a greater sensitivity to the meaning of the data collected. Memos can help researchers clarify their thinking and subjective perspectives about the research (Birks et al., 2008). Glaser (1978) said researchers should consider memoing a paramount way to collect ideas. Proper data collection prevents the data from being lost (Glaser, 1978). For this study, I took notes by hand and used NVIVO software to review the data.

Trustworthiness

One of the main challenges this study faced was collecting data from different law enforcement officers, all of whom had differing years of service in law enforcement, different levels of training in domestic violence, and different perceptions regarding the topic of domestic violence. The sections below discuss how this study handled those issues to ensure trustworthiness (White et al., 2012).

Credibility

Participant recruitment is the most crucial part of the credibility assessment for the study because of the intricate role played by the participants in the study. First, the participant selection required the participants to be law enforcement officers investigating domestic violence cases. I used probability purposive sampling to select the law enforcement agencies, but the participants' agency commanders were responsible for soliciting participating officers for the study. Once the officers agree to participate in the study, I individually interview them. Second, the consistency of the data is essential to ensure data credibility. Therefore, multiple agencies provided participants for the research. Third, I allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions of the domestic violence referral process (White et al., 2012).

Member checking is a high-quality way of developing trustworthiness in a qualitative research project. The process involves using the research participants for validating the research's credibility. Member checking involves returning the interview transcripts to the research participants, re-interviewing using transcripts or interpreted data, and returning the final synthesized data from the researcher for review (Birt et al., 2016). Each of these steps ensures the proper documentation of the participant's answers to research questions. The member-checking process for the research involved my reviewing the participant's answers after the initial questioning phase. I noted any revisions the participant made to the answers they provided.

In 1949, Gilbert Ryle was the first to use thick descriptions. Ryle (1949) stated some qualitative research only used descriptions of observations providing only surface explanations. Instead, Ryle argued qualitative research requires an in-depth interpretation of interactions that provides observation, description, interpretation, and an analysis of the interaction. The research

data from the semi-structured interviews with participants provided the interaction context. I captured the intentions and meanings of the participant's responses and traced their evolution and development. Finally, I presented the participant's response as text that can be interpreted (Denzin, 1989). As mentioned above, I used the NVIVO transcription software to transcribe the research participants' verbal responses into text. I then listened to the audio of the interviews and edit the transcription as needed to ensure accuracy (NVIVO, 2022).

Field testing is used in qualitative research to check the validity of the data collection instrument. During qualitative research, the researcher collects data using open-ended items to test the reliability of the research. Field testing involves taking the instrument into the field to detect potential problems participants could experience during the actual study. I selected three individuals with expert knowledge in the field of study related to the research project and asked them to check the appropriateness of my questions. Field testing allows for quality assurance in fields of study, such as medical technologies, to identify consensus on specific medical standards (R. Evans et al., 2007). This study used field testing for quality assurance. Three individuals took part in the field testing, two men and a woman from the following three departments: Woodstock Police Department, Luray Police Department, and Stanley Police Department. The field test participants were veteran officers with experience in domestic violence investigations and the domestic violence referral process.

Dependability

The importance of data consistency between the interview and transcription process is paramount to accurate data recovery (White et al., 2012). Therefore, all semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transferred to the appropriate codifying software. I followed transcription guidelines for expression and formatting when comparing the transcriptions to the

audio files. A dependability assessment included peer debriefing of mentor consultation and study feedback before, during, and after the study. The same assessment included member checking so the participants could review and approve their final answers to the research questions.

The peer debriefers were Dr. Robert England, Dr. Jeffery Rush, and Dr. Ben Stickle. Dr. England began his criminal justice career in 1987. He has worked with various police agencies in several roles and functions. Dr. England has served as a police chief, patrol supervisor, investigator, and communications supervisor. He is a sworn and certified law enforcement officer, enabling him to bring real-life experience to administrative and leadership matters to criminal justice agencies. In addition to his criminal justice career, Dr. England has been a full-time educator for the past 25 years. He is a former high school teacher responsible for founding many of Virginia's high school-level criminal justice programs statewide. Dr. England was responsible for developing state standards and writing the state training curriculum, and he has served on several state-level committees and advisory boards. Dr. England served as a high school principal before leaving K–12 education and becoming a college professor nearly 18 years ago. He served as Dean at the college before becoming program director of the Police Science, Corrections Science, and Private Security School. In addition, he also serves as the Campus Crime Prevention Coordinator and works very closely with campus police in their daily duties. Dr. England has received numerous awards for innovative leadership, teaching, and community service. Over the past 12 years, he has owned and operated the England Consulting Group and trained thousands of officers throughout the United States (R. England, personal communication, March 17, 2022).

Dr. Jefferey Rush has a Doctor of Public Administration degree from the University of Alabama. He has a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, a State of Alabama Class B Teaching Certificate, and a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Finally, Dr. Rush has a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. Rush's areas of expertise include online learning, human trafficking, gangs, private and public security, law enforcement, and terrorism. His accomplishments include online teaching for more than 10 years and more than 40 years of professional experience in criminal justice in roles including law enforcement, private security, and juvenile justice. For 7 years, Dr. Rush has served as a department chair, ensuring quality education for criminal justice majors. He has maintained more than 40 annual hours of professional development in the fields of human trafficking, gangs, active killers, terrorism, and law enforcement. Dr. Rush is a certified forensic scientist who conducts numerous training sessions, lectures, and presentations. He has multiple publications. He has served in teaching and administration roles at the West Georgia Department of Civic Engagement and Public Service, Troy University, Austin Peay State University, and University of Louisiana Monroe (J. Rush, personal communication, March 30, 2022).

Dr. Ben Stickle is an Associate Professor at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He began his teaching career at Campbellsville University in Kentucky before joining the Department of Criminal Justice Administration faculty at MTSU in 2016. Dr. Stickle teaches courses on policing, investigations, and qualitative research methods. He also serves as the online undergraduate criminal justice program coordinator and is a curriculum committee chair. He completed his undergraduate degree at Cedarville University in sociology and his MS and PhD in Justice Administration at the University of Louisville. He has

dozens of academic publications as an expert on policing, metal theft, and porch piracy. He has spoken at numerous national and international conferences on those topics (including the United Nations in New York and Geneva). Dr. Stickle is actively involved in several federal grants as a Scientific Consultant and Program Evaluator, funded at over one million dollars. Dr. Stickle has over 20 years of experience in criminal justice, including serving as a Sheriff's Deputy, Advanced Police Officer, and Advanced Crime Scene Processor. He is a two-time President of the Kentucky Peace Officers' Association and a council member of the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council (the governing body of Kentucky law enforcement). He has also served as a firearms instructor and private security officer and is a graduate of the National Forensics Academy (Session XXII). Dr. Stickle has been the recipient of numerous academic awards, including MTSU's Outstanding Faculty Award (2018) for his excellence in teaching, the Stanford M. Lyman Distinguished Book Award (2019), and the McGraw Hill Distinguished Scholar Award (2020). He has been featured widely in the media, appearing on television (CSPAN), in radio programs (WTOP Radio News, MTSU's On the Record, and the Crime Science Podcast), and in print media (Readers Digest, NBC Investigative Reporting; Stickle, 2021).

Dependability includes the analysis process to verify the acceptable standards and consistency of research. The dependability of research relies on the interpretation process in research analysis. The process must not include the preferences and viewpoints of the researcher. The strategy to maintain dependability requires an audit trail. I maintained a complete set of notes regarding the research process, meetings, reflective thoughts, sampling, research, findings, and data management (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The collection of records included the data analysis process, codebooks, the development of coding schemes, and all recordings.

Additionally, documentation will include peer debriefing of mentor consultation and study feedback before, during, and after the study.

Transferability

Transferability is the recruitment and selection of a sample based on the expert knowledge of the participant's knowledge of the phenomenon under study to apply to other groups of people (Forero et al., 2018; Houghton et al., 2013). I gleaned thick descriptions from participants to ensure the transferability of the participant's worldviews and real-life settings. Also, thick descriptions bridge the gap between the researcher and the participant (Ospina et al., 2018). I garnered the specifics and details of participant examples of their experiences dealing with the domestic violence referral process, gathering enough detail from the participants for data saturation to make more meaningful results (Ospina et al., 2018). Finally, I considered the saturation level as another form of transferability. Guest et al. (2020) stated that data saturation includes evaluating the base size, run length, and the new information threshold and suggested that saturation levels reach six interviews in a recent study after identifying 37 unique themes. Guest et al. also stated that identifying the saturation point is a subjective determination per the field of study and based on the researcher's experience. I interviewed 15 people to reach saturation and used peer debriefing to reach transferability (Guest et al., 2020).

This research design may apply to other rural criminal justice studies, including non-domestic violence cases. These cases can include the element of law enforcement referrals to the Magistrate in Virginia when officers decline to make arrests in misdemeanor assault and battery cases. Ospina et al. (2018) said sample sufficiency refers to the appropriateness of the participant sample providing data regarding a phenomenon. The challenge for qualitative researchers is to ensure their research contains robust enough data to address their research claims. The

participant sample for the study was 15 participants. While the sample for the study is considered small compared to more extensive studies, growing research into the sufficiency of small qualitative sampling argues size does not always matter (Young & Casey, 2019).

Confirmability

Confirmability requires the researcher to demonstrate the process of reaching conclusions and how those conclusions show the final data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). A significant step in the confirmability process is to ensure the study represents the participant's words instead of the researcher's biases; however, member checking and peer debriefing helped confirm the research data. Member checking is the process researchers use to interact with their participants to ensure an agreement and understanding of their accounts before publishing (Caretta & Pérez, 2019). I member checked with each participant regarding the participant's answers to the semi-structured interviews before publishing. I also used peer debriefing for confirmability. During the peer debriefing process, I met with an impartial peer to preplan and discuss the findings of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Outside experts from Liberty University's Helms School of Government who were not involved in the research process examined the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers have an ethical responsibility to safeguard their participants' confidentiality (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Therefore, participants in the study were assigned pseudonyms to provide confidentiality (Edwards, 2020). Since the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the research was critical to ethical considerations regarding the participants, I completed all IRB training and obtained permission from the Liberty University IRB before conducting any research. Once IRB approval was attained, I individually obtained informed consent from the study's participants. The consent document ensured the participants that they could withdraw

from the study anytime. I also took steps to protect the participant's identity and the research data from outside access by using a pseudonym codebook on a separate computer. An independent storage drive will keep the research data for 3 years.

Summary

This qualitative, descriptive study explored how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences, understanding, and navigation of the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions in Virginia. The chapter examined the study's population and sample, a substitute sampling method, research data, instrument development, and resource construction. The chapter explained data collection management, validity, and the data collection plan. The chapter discussed the dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the research. Finally, the chapter discussed potential ethical issues and prevention methods.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative study explored how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences, understanding, and navigating the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions in Virginia. The objective of this chapter was to focus on the research findings. Chapter Five will discuss the interpretation of the data, the implications of the research, and recommendations for future research. There are two research questions guiding the study: How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence? How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

Chapter Four contains the background and demographic screening of each participant who participated in the study. A discussion of the results of this study follow the screening process. Chapter Four concludes by addressing the research questions. The participants' thick and rich descriptions of their lived experiences answer the research questions.

Participants

Fifteen participants were included in this study. The participant demographics included 14 males and one female. Five participants had high school diplomas, one had an associate's degree, seven had a bachelor's degree, and two had master's degrees. The exact ages of the participants were not collected to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. The most common demographics in the study were males, Whites between the ages of 31–40, and those

who had completed a bachelor's degree. The most common experience levels were distributed between 0-5 years of experience (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Race/Ethnicity	Highest Level of Education	Specialized Training
Bob	Male	31-40	White	High School	Yes
Phil	Male	31-40	White	Master's Degree	Yes
Pam	Female	31-40	Multi-racial	Master's Degree	Yes
Sam	Male	21-30	White	High School	Yes
Tom	Male	41-50	White	Bachelor's Degree	Yes
Rick	Male	31-40	White	Bachelor's Degree	Yes
Cal	Male	41-50	White	High School	No
Val	Male	31-40	White	Bachelor's Degree	No
Mac	Male	21-30	White	Bachelor's Degree	No
Art	Male	21-30	White	Associate's Degree	Yes
Dob	Male	41-50	White	Bachelor's Degree	Yes
Pat	Male	21-30	White	Bachelor's Degree	Yes
Trey	Male	31-40	White	High School	Yes
Rex	Male	31-40	Hispanic/White	Bachelor's Degree	Yes
Wim	Male	21-30	White	High School	No

The background of the participants regarding their involvement in domestic violence investigations was diverse. Seven participants had 0–5 years of experience, four had 6–10 years of experience, two had 11–15 years of experience, one had 16–20 years of experience, and one had 21–25 years of experience. The participants' response to total calls for service regarding domestic violence over the previous 3 years yielded various answers. Three participants said they had responded to 11–20 calls for service in the previous 3 years regarding domestic violence, while two reported they had responded to 45–50 of the same call type. Only one participant represented each of the following categories for calls for service regarding domestic violence over the previous 3 years, and they are as follows: 0–5, 6–10, 20–40, 35–40, 40–45, 40–50, 50–75, 75–100, 90–100, and 200. Two participants personally investigated 0–5 domestic violence cases within the last 3 years. In the same category, five participants investigated 6–10, three investigated 11–20, two investigated 40–50, one investigated 45–50, one investigated 50, and one investigated 70–80 of those calls for service. Regarding domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, five participants made 0–5 arrests, six made 6–10, three made 11–20, and one made 30–40 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years. The final category was the total amount of domestic violence referrals to advocacy groups within the last year. Eight of the participants had made a referral within the last month. Two made referrals within the last three months, one within the last six months, and four made referrals to domestic violence advocacy groups within the last year (see Table 2).

Table 2*Background Screening*

Participant	Years of law enforcement experience	Calls for service (last 3 yrs)	Domestic incidents personally investigated (last 3 yrs)	Domestic violence arrests (last 3 yrs)	Most recent referral to advocacy
Bob	6–10	11–20	6–10	0–5	within 1 month
Phil	6–10	11–20	6–10	6–10	within 1 month
Pam	6–10	45–50	45–50	6–10	within 1 month
Sam	0–5	35–40	11–20	11–20	within 1 month
Tom	16–20	45–50	11–20	6–10	within 1 month
Rick	6–10	40–50	40–50	6–10	within 3 months
Cal	11–15	11–20	6–10	0–5	within year
Val	0–5	20–40	11–20	0–5	within 3 months
Mac	0–5	200	50	11–20	within 1 month
Art	0–5	90–100	70–80	30–40	within 1 month
Dob	21–25	0–5	0–5	0–5	within year
Pat	0–5	75–100	40–50	11–20	within 1 month
Trey	11–15	6–10	0–5	0–5	within 6 months
Rex	0–5	50–75	6–10	6–10	within year
Wim	0–5	40–45	6–10	6–10	within year

Bob

Bob is a White male between 31 and 40 years old. He serves in the patrol division of his law enforcement agency. Bob has served in a law enforcement capacity for 6–10 years. Bob has answered 11–20 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years, and he has

investigated 6–10 of those incidents. Bob has made 0–5 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last month. Bob's highest level of education is high school, and he received specialized training in domestic violence from Response Incorporated in 2021.

Phil

Phil is a White male between the ages of 31–40. He serves in the patrol division of his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 11–15 years. He has answered 11–20 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 11–20 of those incidents. Phil has made 6–10 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last month. Phil's highest level of education is a Master's Degree in Public Administration, and he has received specialized domestic violence training in properly handling children. He has also attended school resource officer training regarding domestic violence in the home.

Pam

Pam is a multi-racial female between the ages of 31–40. She serves as a special victims investigator for her law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 6–10 years. Pam has answered 45–50 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years, and she has investigated 45–50 of those incidents. Pam has made 6–10 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and her most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last month. Pam's highest level of education is a Master's in Public Administration/Criminal Justice. Pam has received specialized training in interviewing victims of domestic violence. More specifically, Pam has received training on how to evaluate

domestic violence cases of strangulation, support management of victims, hospital evaluation of victims, and proper interviewing techniques for children.

Sam

Sam is a White male between the ages of 21–30. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 0–5 years. Sam has answered 35–40 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 11–20 of those incidents. Sam has made 11–20 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his highest level of education is a high school diploma. He has received specialized domestic training with his law enforcement agency’s partnered domestic violence advocacy group regarding “what to look for,” but he does not recall the name of the class.

Tom

Tom is a White male between 41–50 years old. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 16–20 years. Tom has answered 45–50 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 11–20 of those incidents. Tom has made 6–10 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last month. Tom’s highest level of education is a bachelor’s degree. He has received specialized domestic training with his law enforcement agency’s partnered domestic violence advocacy group, but he does not recall the name of the class.

Rick

Rick is a White male between the ages of 31–40. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 6–10 years. Rick has answered 40–50 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 4 years and has

investigated 40–50 of those incidents. Rick has made 6–10 domestic violence arrests, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last 3 months. Rick’s highest level of education is a bachelor’s degree. Rick has received specialized training regarding sexual abuse cases involving children.

Cal

Cal is a White male between 41–50 years old. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 11–15 years. Cal has answered 11–20 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 6–10 of those incidents. Cal has made 0–5 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last year. Cal’s highest level of education is a high school diploma. He has received no specialized training regarding domestic violence.

Val

Val is a White male between the ages of 31–40. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 0–5 years. Val has answered 20–40 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 11–20 of those incidents. Val has made 0–5 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last 3 months. Val’s highest level of education is a bachelor’s degree. Val has received no specialized training regarding domestic violence.

Mac

Mac is a White male between the ages of 21–30. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 0–5 years. Mac has

answered 200 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years, and he has investigated 50 of those incidents. Mac has made 11–20 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last month. Mac’s highest level of education is a bachelor’s degree. He has received no specialized training regarding domestic violence.

Art

Art is a White male between the ages of 21–30. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 0–5 years. Art has answered 90–100 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years, and he has investigated 70–80 of those incidents. Art has made 30–40 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last month. Art’s highest level of education is an associate’s degree. Art has received specialized training in strangulation incidents.

Dob

Dob is a White male between 41–50 years old. He serves in law enforcement and holds an administrative role for his law enforcement agency. He has served in a law enforcement capacity for 21–25 years. Dob has answered 0–5 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 0–5 incidents. Dob has made 0–5 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last year. Dob’s highest level of education is a bachelor’s degree. Dob has received specialized training in sexual assault incidents.

Pat

Pat is a White male between the ages of 21–30. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 0–5 years. Pat has answered 75–100 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 40–50 of those incidents. He has made 11–20 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last month. Pat's highest level of education is a bachelor's degree. He has received specialized training in domestic violence and strangulation.

Trey

Trey is a White male between the ages of 31–40. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 11–15 years. Trey has answered 6–10 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 0–5 of those incidents. Trey has made 0–5 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last 6 months. Trey's highest level of education is a high school diploma. He has received specialized training in domestic violence but cannot remember the class title.

Rex

Rex is a Hispanic-White male between the ages of 31–40. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 0–5 years. Rex has answered 50–75 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years, and he has investigated 6–10 of those incidents. Rex has made 6–10 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last year. His highest level of education is a bachelor's degree, and he had "roll

call” training regarding when to arrest the predominant physical aggressor in domestic violence cases.

Wim

Wim is a White male between the ages of 21–30. He serves as a patrol officer for his law enforcement agency and has served in a law enforcement capacity for 0–5 years. Wim has answered 40–45 calls for service regarding domestic violence within the last 3 years and has investigated 6–10 of those incidents. Wim has made 6–10 domestic violence arrests within the last 3 years, and his most recent referral for a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group was within the last 3 months. Wim’s highest level of education is a high school diploma. He has received no specialized domestic violence training.

Results

I used three data collection methods in this study: an open-ended qualitative questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and reflexive memos. I reviewed 291 raw pages of interview transcripts to analyze the participants’ data. The data analysis and coding revealed five themes, which will be discussed in this chapter: (a) the referral process, (b) advocacy services, (c) law enforcement services, (d) successful experiences, and (e) unsuccessful experiences. The analysis of these themes will address each research question for this study.

Table 3*Interview Duration and Transcription Length*

Participant	Interview Duration	Transcript Length
Bob	1:00.28	16 pages
Phil	1:01:06	17 pages
Pam	1:10.14	21 pages
Sam	1:00:48	20 pages
Tom	56.23	18 pages
Rick	1:12:33	24 pages
Cal	55:48	20 pages
Val	54:40	16 pages
Mac	1:01.19	20 pages
Art	56:24	17 pages
Dob	55:24	18 pages
Pat	58:36	20 pages
Trey	57:48	17 pages
Rex	56:20	27 pages
Wim	54:07	19 pages
Average	59.27 min.	19.3 pages
Total	14.81 hrs.	290 pages

Theme Development

I used three data collection methods, which provided perceptible data for analysis: an open-ended qualitative questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and reflexive memoing.

Participant interviews provided the primary data sources as the questionnaires were necessary to ensure trustworthiness regarding data confirmation. I deployed the use of reflexive memos as a means to collect data and analyze each of the participant interviews. Zoom web-conferencing

software recorded all of the participant's interviews, while NVIVO software transcribed each after recording. I reviewed each participant's audio-recorded interviews and transcripts to ensure accuracy. I also coded all questionnaires and interviews to identify themes and subthemes. After these steps were completed, I contacted each participant and provided the opportunity to review my analysis using the member-checking process. Through member-checking, each participant could review the analysis for verification. I verified the data coding accuracy by reading transcripts provided by NVIVO and made corrections during the theme coding process to ensure accuracy.

First Cycle Coding

NVIVO software was utilized in the first cycle of coding. The NVIVO software allows researchers to transcribe and code data to increase research productivity (NVIVO, 2022). I used NVIVO to identify the participant's words and phrases, which provided insight regarding their experiences with referring victims of domestic violence to domestic violence advocacy services. Qualitative research uses at least one or more broad research questions, which narrows down to the researcher's aim and purpose (Denny & Weckesser, 2022).

Second Cycle Coding

I identified several subthemes from the themes while reviewing the interview transcripts. Saldaña (2016) proposed that second-style coding methods can reorganize and reanalyze data from the first coding cycle. The main goal of second-cycle coding is to categorize and identify themes from the first coding section. I used focused coding during the second-cycle coding section. Focused coding is also known as selective and intermediate coding to search for frequent codes and develop rich study categories (see Table 4).

Table 4*Themes and Related Codes*

Themes	Subthemes	Frequency	
		# of participants	# of times mentioned
RQ1			
Successful Experiences	Professional Advocacy Assistance	12	27
	Professional Law Enforcement Assistance	13	43
	Victim Compliance	9	19
Unsuccessful Experiences	Advocacy Shortcomings	12	44
	Law Enforcement Shortcomings	11	44
	Victim Shortcomings	15	60
RQ2			
The Referral Process	Law Enforcement Rapport with Victim	10	17
	Law Enforcement Initiating Investigation	13	26
	Law Enforcement Referral Process Steps	15	51
Advocacy Services	Advocacy Process to Help Victims	8	19
	Community Outreach in Various Forms	6	12
	Teaching Services to Law Enforcement	11	20
Law Enforcement Services	Connecting Victims to Services	11	15
	Service Referral Follow-Through	10	30
	Training Law Enforcement Officers	12	49

Research Questions Responses***RQ1***

How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

RQ1 focused on how the specified law enforcement officers described their experiences with referring victims of domestic violence to advocacy groups. Two of the five themes applied to the first research question: (a) successful experiences and (b) unsuccessful experiences. The data analysis of the participants' statements yielded six subthemes. These subthemes were (a) professional advocacy assistance, (b) professional law enforcement assistance, (c) victim compliance, (d) advocate shortcomings, (e) law enforcement shortcomings, and (f) victim shortcomings.

Successful Experiences. The first significant theme identified in this study was the theme of successful experiences. The study participants detailed several accounts and examples of the successes they experienced during the domestic violence referral process. This category had three subthemes: professional advocacy assistance, professional law enforcement assistance, and victim compliance. The theme of professional advocacy assistance received input from 12 participants with 27 references to the topic. The theme of professional law enforcement assistance received input from 13 participants with 43 references to the topic, and the theme of victim compliance received input from nine participants with 19 references to the topic.

The participants provided data regarding successful experiences while interacting with advocacy group representatives within their jurisdictions. The participants generally noted they had good working relationships with those representatives. Phil stated there was a hero across the street as he discussed the benefits of advocacy services next door to his law enforcement agency. He said, "It helps give them that security as they're going through their trial and then to the point where, you know, usually sometimes these cases are felonies, they're not even heard for 6–8 months." The participants discussed professional experiences within their respective law enforcement agencies regarding policy and procedures. The participants also discussed their

successes in assisting victims of domestic violence. While the participants noted victim compliance in domestic violence investigations is rare, the participants described an event where victims could end the violence they experienced by leaving abusive relationships. Below, the subthemes are discussed in more detail with quotations from the participants.

Professional Advocacy Assistance. Twelve participants discussed their experiences where they received or witnessed the delivery of professional advocacy services. Phil discussed the relationship he observed between his law enforcement agency's leadership and the leadership of their jurisdiction's local advocacy group:

And that relationship was very good between the directors and the chiefs of police. That [advocacy shelter next door to the police department] kind of brought it to the forefront for the police department and because they had cases from around the county.

Cal echoed Phil's statement: "Typically, I think we have, we have a pretty good relationship with our groups here." Cal added the proximity of the police station with the advocacy shelter also gives confidence to the victims of domestic violence. He explained,

The . . . proximity of the police station . . . and the shelter can give them [victims of domestic violence] . . . that time to build that confidence that they need to then face this individual in court and testify against them to what he did. And so I think it has a lot to do with helping them build their confidence, helping them build their feeling of safety and security for not only them, but a lot of times their children are with them, too.

Tom discussed how he felt the advocacy group he works with has been reliable and consistent. He said,

The success I've seen with them is just . . . when you call them . . . they always answer the phone. And if they don't, they call you right back. There's no second-guessing and

waiting. . . . Once they verified that they're if you meet your criteria, it's usually within a very short amount of time that they have the resources available.

Rick supported Tom's notion of efficiency. Rick discussed how the advocacy groups he serves appear to be cohesive: "Oh yeah, it [advocacy group] . . . it does seem efficient. It doesn't seem like everybody is apart from each other. It seems everybody is connected. We have all these different agencies that really work in tandem really well." Art added internal efficiency enables advocacy groups to better serve victims of domestic violence: "It seems that means that they're [advocacy groups] effective in reaching out to people and good at convincing them to get out of those bad relationships."

Professional Law Enforcement Services. Thirteen participants provided data regarding professional law enforcement services. Bob said, "We're pretty squared away with helping victims get a hold of . . . resources outside of the department." Phil noted the younger generation of law enforcement officers who are beginning their careers are also providing professional law enforcement services for victims of domestic assault. Phil gave an example by saying, "One [new officer] in particular who's just out of the academy . . . got to go with me on one on a domestic violence call . . . where the neighbor saw the violence happen." Phil described how the event left a lasting impression on the younger officer, motivating him to perform at a high level when investigating domestic violence incidents. Phil said,

He [new law enforcement officer] joined law enforcement to help people, and he has seen her now. She's [the victim] no longer with that guy that we were getting calls for every night or every other night, and the neighbor [the witness of the event] wrote the same. He got to see those effects. And so, it resonated with him.

Pam provided a heroic account of professional law enforcement services when she described how a patrolman at her agency responded to a call for service involving a male beating the mother of his child in front of their son. Pam said,

He beat her with his fists, and their 2-year-old son stood in the doorway and watched it.

One of our patrol officers was a block away, and I credit him with saving her life because it stopped at that point.

Pam also discussed one of her domestic violence investigations regarding a mother who maintained relationships with sex offenders. Pam said, “He was physically abusive to the daughter, emotionally abusive to her, and through her [child] own disclosure and getting that out, we are able to get her out of the home. And mom got charged under child abuse.”

Tom provided insight into training young officers to ensure victims of domestic violence received professional services, even if the victim declined assistance from law enforcement. Tom said, “He [new law enforcement officer] did a really good job. Granted, that she may not take advantage of the services, but someone took the time to go over the services, and that’s a big deal.” Mac provided an account of professional law enforcement services when he noted how an advocacy member partnered with him during a shift and utilized the opportunity to bridge understanding between himself and the advocate. Mac said, “I took her on a ride around the county, and we spoke about domestic violence . . . while she was doing a ride along . . . so she can see what we're doing as patrol.” Mac highlighted how domestic violence circumstances could move the advocate quickly: “Things run a lot quicker than what they might expect.” He added the encounter allowed him to provide his opinions regarding domestic violence while accepting mistakes that can be made during domestic violence investigations: “They can get our

opinions, maybe there are things overlooked, and maybe there are questions we aren't asking or didn't even think to ask."

Dob added the professional law enforcement services narrative by saying the job of law enforcement is problem-solving when he has been able to arrest the offender. He said,

Investigating and locking up an offender like that was my right. So, I felt like I was a hero because I solved the problem. I took care of the bully . . . doing what's right for the victim and making that arrest.

Victim Compliance. Nine study participants discussed aspects of victim compliance regarding follow-through during the domestic violence referral process. The majority of the participants separately concurred that victim compliance during the domestic violence referral process is a rare occurrence. Bob explained, "I have had a handful of people that said they would actually use the resources that were on the paper that we provided to them." Cal added, "I have, I guess, some of the effectiveness . . . where a few of the victims have actually . . . had a protective order extended to . . . the preliminary protective order." Mac agreed with both Bob and Cal: "There has been . . . a handful of women who . . . have been like, I've got no option but to get out of here [living conditions with their abuser]."

Most participants noted the rarity associated with victim compliance, and victim compliance was found in severe circumstances and for short periods. Phil said, "I think . . . what finally got her to call for help was when he had gone after her son, who was 2 years old, and when he was choking the life out of her." Sam commented he had worked with a victim who wanted to get advocacy help, but she quickly relapsed into her relationship with her abuser. Sam said,

I was able to get in contact . . . to get her to a hotel for the night, . . . provide transportation, and get her there safely to where she was by herself. Two days later, she invited the guy back over to the hotel room.

Unsuccessful Experiences. The study participants provided data on unsuccessful experiences while maneuvering through the domestic violence referral process. Several participants noted a lack of interaction between themselves and advocacy services. Some of them discussed how they lacked understanding regarding the referral process after the victim is linked to advocacy services. Tom described an experience where law enforcement allowed contact between the offender and the victim subsequent to the arrest of the offender for domestic assault. Tom said the incident occurred at the local jail when the couple crossed paths: “As soon as he showed up, all that went out the window, and it was . . . I love you, and I want to be with you.” Wim complained victims often “don’t get it” when understanding the importance of obtaining charges against the offender. He explained that after a week or two passes, the victim sometimes wishes to follow through, making the investigation more difficult for law enforcement. Wim said, “Then you never hear from them until you get that call in the next day or the next week.” The study participants detailed several accounts and examples of failures they experienced during the domestic violence referral process. Three main themes surfaced during the data analysis: advocacy shortcomings, law enforcement shortcomings, and victim shortcomings.

Advocacy Shortcomings. Twelve of the participants discussed advocacy shortcomings during their interviews. Bob said advocacy services in his jurisdiction would randomly be unavailable: “It’s kind of hit or miss someone who’s on call who we speak with.” Phil added the advocacy shelter for his jurisdiction has limited beds available for victims: “They don’t have any beds or availability. That’s one, the one issue I found.” Tom talked about how advocacy shelters

cannot help individuals with special needs: “We had a young lady . . . in her early 20s . . . and she is autistic. We had arrested her boyfriend for domestic violence. He was a sex offender, and she had nowhere to go.”

Bob talked about how he has seen advocacy personnel be “pushy” with victims of domestic violence. He observed, “It almost seemed like that representative was pushing to get this victim to go and that we had an obligation . . . to help her [victim] get there to get that protective order.” Pam referenced stubbornness with advocacy representatives. She recalled a conversation with an advocacy leader who seemed offended when Pam mentioned victims sometimes lie during the referral process. Pam said, “They [advocacy representatives] look down on me as an officer for victim shaming, if you will, for lack of a better term.”

Tom said he has experienced limited interaction with advocacy members, stating, “My interaction with her is kind of limited.” Cal explained the limited interaction law enforcement has with advocacy members can sometimes correlate with adherence to their privacy standards: “They're very private with the information they keep there.” Pam said advocacy privacy policies are sometimes frustrating because law enforcement does not receive feedback regarding the victims they refer to advocacy services. She explained, “The frustration with it is that I never know if they [victims] receive help because . . . our domestic violence shelter has a very strict confidentiality policy.”

Law Enforcement Shortcomings. Eleven study participants commented on the shortcomings of law enforcement officers during the domestic violence referral process. Bob said when the offender's arrest concludes, he has almost no contact with the victim. Bob said, “If there was an arrest made, a handful of times the victim witness representative at the courthouse has remained in contact with that victim on helping them out, come into court. I don't.”

Some officers apply their definitions of domestic violence to cases, even when those definitions are not supported legally. Phil said,

I've had two and what I call true forms of mystic violence . . . women that have been beaten for years and hit for years and made to feel like it's their fault and they're the that's the reason why they've been hit, and their spouse has done so in a way that the marks are on parts of the body that are covered with clothing.

Pam discussed her department's shortcomings regarding law enforcement, especially the Commonwealth Attorney's, to properly advocate for legislation to punish false victims of domestic violence who unjustifiably use the legal system to punish their significant others. Pam said, "Obviously, the state of Virginia has not got smart. You got victims that will go . . . and get the protective order . . . and then they go and violate it." Pam stated the victims in these instances know when they contact the offender, he will likely face charges for violating the protective order.

Cal explained some law enforcement officers go through the steps of the referral process without delving into enough detail: "They don't dig deep enough. They just go there . . . scratch the surface, run through the motions." Bob echoed Cal's statement saying some senior officers do not cover details on each call because they have engaged with the parties many times: "I've noticed sometimes, especially with the more senior officers who have been out to the same house 15 times over the course of a year, they just don't offer that explanation again because they've offered it . . . 10 times in the past, and they've not done anything with it."

Trey talked about how law enforcement officers become robotic during the domestic violence referral process. He observed, "You know, we are kind of like a robot. You gave your victim the packet. You make sure you read it, then they comprehend the best they possibly can."

Pat expanded upon Trey's statement by discussing how law enforcement officers detach during domestic violence investigations. He said,

You know, we're kind of detached from . . . it. We don't have that emotional tie to it the same way that the people who are suffering from it do. Right? So we're a little more quick to give the advice on the case and get out of there, get on to the next call type of thing.

Victim Shortcomings. Fifteen participants discussed the shortcomings they have experienced when interacting with victims of domestic assault. Bob said, "I've seen people, once we start the process . . . back out of wanting help." Bob added that sometimes victims do not want assistance because they fear the consequences of being alone. He said, "They did not want to go because they were afraid of . . . retaliation, and that suspect was like the sole provider for the victim." Mac said in his experience, a low percentage of female victims follow through with getting help: "I would say it's probably on the very low single-digit percentage of women who actually follow up with that [getting help]." Val agreed with Mac: "I think really the problem is getting people to want to reach out to an advocacy group."

Phil explained that he has seen victims of domestic violence recede into their former lives of abuse. He said, "A lot of times, they'll just fall back into that same cycle of violence. Believe it's their fault they are. It's almost like repetition has allowed them to develop the mindset that it's okay that they're being beaten." Rex said he has seen victims simply fail to report instances of domestic violence: "The issue that comes up with victims is there is a lot of domestics, especially out in the rural ones . . . with lack of reporting on their part." Trey and Pat discussed how victims recant their statements regarding the events or simply change their version of the events. Trey said, "Your victim doesn't want to cooperate, so either they recant their statement." Pat added, "I

have noticed that sometimes the victim comes in and completely changes the story on what happened that night or day.”

RQ2

How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

The analyzed data for this study identified three main themes that applied to RQ2: (a) referral process, (b) advocacy services, and (c) law enforcement services. I conducted a detailed analysis of the data provided by the participants, and a thorough assessment identified three subthemes for the referral process theme. The following subthemes emerged: law enforcement rapport with victims, law enforcement initiating the investigation, and law enforcement referral process steps. The second central theme identified was advocacy services; subthemes supporting this theme were advocacy process to help victims, various community outreach, and law enforcement teaching services. Three subthemes also supported the third theme of law enforcement services: connecting victims to services, referral service follow-through, and training law enforcement officers.

The Referral Process. One central theme identified in the study was the domestic violence referral process. All participants described their experiences with the domestic violence referral process from various perspectives from different law enforcement agencies in Virginia. Phil described the process as a cycle for the victim, the first step in breaking the cycle of domestic violence. He said, “They're just in that cycle where they'll strike each other.” Art discussed linking victims of domestic violence with the advocacy shelter in his jurisdiction using a representative who has information for the victim. He explained, “We have a representative

that . . . has a position in our office and our administration staff. She sends out emails and flyers, brochures, business cards, whatever it is for officers or deputies to have to hand out to potential victims.” The officers then disseminate those resources to victims of domestic violence. Sam expanded the details of the disseminated information by saying, “It has resources, phone numbers, businesses . . . domestic violence advocacy places that can help them out while we're not around or not there.” The theme of the domestic violence referral process was divided into subthemes: law enforcement rapport with the victim, law enforcement initiating the investigation, and law enforcement referral process steps.

Law Enforcement Rapport with the Victim. Ten participants in the study described their experiences building rapport with victims of domestic violence so that they could properly investigate these cases and connect victims to advocacy services. Bob stated:

We are usually seen as an authority figure, so somebody who's sitting down or laying down, they might lock up and be hesitant on speaking with us, especially if it's a female talking to a male. She might not want to. She might be afraid of authority. She might be afraid of getting the alleged suspect in trouble. So by me, getting down on her level was explaining to her that everything you know, I could help her with the issue that was going on. I establish eye contact with her down on her level.

Sam's statement aligned with Bob's opinion on establishing rapport with the victim of domestic assault. He said,

They'll remember you if you treated them well. And that's one thing about I always tried to teach when I have to show people that you treat people like they're humans, rather you deal with them one time or deal with them 100 times, treat them like they're humans

because they're going to remember you and remember how they were treated. And if you're a robot to them, they're going to remember that, and they're not going to like it.

Tom described the process of establishing rapport with the victim by “talking to whoever the whole person is . . . and getting a, you know, sort of back story to what's going on and starting the referral process as far as they meet the criteria to be accepted into the program.” Dob noted the importance of avoiding treating calls for service involving domestic violence as just checking a task list. He explained,

As I've progressed throughout my career and what I've tried to do . . . it seems to be a different level of empathy with victims of domestic violence. And that's the, that's the culture we want to create here is it's not a check-the-box. It's not just a matter of handing a package to someone; it's meeting them where they are and understanding what they've just experienced. And they need that connection with someone who they know is there to take care.

Law Enforcement Initiating Investigation. Thirteen participants in the study described their experiences during the initiation of the domestic violence investigation. Pam stated her department's officers have 24 hours to initiate and complete a domestic violence investigation. She stated,

They have to initiate and complete a report along with the narrative. All victim and parties involved have to be uploaded into our system. If it's a major case, I will potentially be called out on call to go on scene and assist with the victim's needs or help with the investigation. It's not the typical punch you in your face kind of domestics anymore. They've upped the ante tremendously. So I've been called out for those. But initially, patrol will take the initial report. If they make the arrest that'll be documented. I

review all of the narratives associated with that call and then I immediately make contact with the victim within 24 hours, depending on the weekend or that sort of thing. But within the next business day, I make contact with that victim. I ask them how they're doing. Do you need medical help? Did you go to the hospital? If not, how are your injuries? Do you have any significant changes to your bruising pattern that wasn't there the night before? That's shown up today? Try to get them to go see the forensic nurse.

Mac stated,

We actually have to do like a full-on narrative, and that gets submitted to like the state and everything. Any time a call goes, and it's domestic violence, it automatically our policy is go ahead and assign a report. We got to go in, put in who's the victim. Who is the suspect.

Art described the most critical part of the process as the investigation: "So the biggest thing that we do is we go, we investigate. Any time we get called for domestic." Pat stated the investigative part of the process involves separating all parties to obtain a clear picture of what happened at the scene:

I will then have a one-on-one with the victim. If there is the victim or if the case of if there's, if it's mutual that I'll speak with both parties in the case of a single victim, I will pull them aside away from the offender.

Law Enforcement Referral Process Steps. All 15 participants described the steps in their domestic violence referral process to connect victims to advocacy services. Rick described the importance of utilizing the referral process properly because of state accreditation and departmental guidelines. He commented, "It is a blessing to have a policy that not only defines

what the different aspects of domestic policies but also defines what we need to do as officers and first responders to effect an arrest.”

Trey described his department’s referral process, where the department uses a packet of information to provide victims of domestic assault. “We have a package that we give our victims that provides them with multiple different resources, depending on the specific situation that they’re in. We can also provide them with places to go.” Wim talked about the lengths he goes to ensure the victim of the domestic assault has a safe place to stay away from the offender. He said, “ I usually try to offer them . . . a safe place to go tonight . . . a hotel or parent's house, a place you can go.” Trey stated he provides the victim with a detailed list of the advocacy services available to the victim. He said he tells the victim about their jurisdiction's essential resources, which include a women’s shelter, social services team, and the court system. He describes those resources as “the basic go-to resources that someone who has been a part of domestic violence would potentially need.”

Mac expanded on the referral process by explaining how advocacy services are structured and the extent their services can reach. “They're a non-profit organization . . . literally branded as a women's health organization where they get them in touch with all these other services and stuff.” Mac explained he tells victims that advocacy services can help them with housing and transportation:

They may be able to get you into . . . housing services. They may be able to pay you . . . for a taxi or pay you for a hotel room or something tonight just so you can get away . . . and do whatever you need to.

Advocacy Services. A second central theme in the data review centered on how domestic violence advocacy services provide other community resources. Sam described advocacy

services as a group of representatives trying to remove domestic violence victims from danger. Sam said, “They [advocates] house them [victims], provide them resources . . . try to get them back on their feet.” Advocacy assistance comes in various forms to help victims of domestic violence. They discussed other community resources available to help victims of domestic violence. He added, “The victims can get reimbursed for medical bills or if they're going to therapy or things along that lines.” The subthemes of how these advocacy services provide other community resources were divided into subthemes: advocacy process to help victims, community outreach in various forms, and teaching services to law enforcement officers.

Advocacy Process to Help Victims. Eight participants described how the advocacy process design is to assist victims of domestic violence. The participants discussed how those advocacy services apply to victims during the domestic violence referral process. Sam said,

They assist . . . domestic violence victims, either they house them, provide them resources, try to get them back on their feet. They take into consideration if they have kids or whatever their family situation is. With my experiences, I've referred a couple of people. . . . Once we get to that point, they [the advocacy group] do an interview on the phone with the victim . . . to see if they qualify for services.

Tom described advocacy services as a “supermarket” for victims of domestic violence who are in need. He said,

They [advocacy group] allow people to come in. It's almost like a small supermarket where they can grab and go what they need. They're always accepting donations for food and whatnot. . . . If they [the victim] don't have housing right there . . . they'll figure out some way to access the funds . . . to at least put them in a hotel for a night if need be.

Cal expanded on how advocacy services in his jurisdictions work to assist victims of domestic violence and children who tend to be affected collaterally by domestic violence incidents. He described an added safety feature of his jurisdiction's shelter since the shelter neighbors his law enforcement agency. Cal said, "But it's also good for their children as well, and it's located right here . . . beside the police department, and they usually have representatives in court when the juvenile investigation days when children are victims of domestic violence." Dob added that the proximity of his agency and the advocacy shelter are advantageous for victims of domestic violence because everyone can meet in a parking lot where advocacy and law enforcement services share real estate. Dob explained, "When we get our police cars and they're [advocacy representatives] getting out of their cars to go to work, you know we have . . . that relationship."

Community Outreach in Various Forms. Six participants mentioned how advocacy services reach out to community members in various ways because domestic violence reaches beyond married couples. Phil said,

I was . . . the president of . . . an initiative . . . a nonprofit group, and it's a collection of different community entities response to assist the sheriff's department and a whole bunch of . . . community-based entities. . . . The goal was education and prevention and helping not only domestic violence, and substance abuse . . . because sometimes they can all intertwine.

Pat added how her community assists the advocacy process by providing legal services to victims of domestic violence. Pat said the pre-designated legal services

advise them on protective orders . . . the protective order process, if they need further details about that. I think, feel like they need a lawyer when they go to court, even though

the law enforcement agency is the one that obtained the charges . . . and the legal services will provide that.

Tom made a statement regarding how his community connects with the advocacy process in the medical realm. Tom said his jurisdiction's medical facility has a vetting process to provide medical care for families impacted by domestic violence. He added his agency also utilizes a multi-discipline approach with advocacy services. He said, "We're part of a multidisciplinary team . . . to our crimes against children and sexual assaults on children. We have a M.O.U. [Memorandum of Understanding]...where Commonwealth meets with the Sheriff's Office..., . . .our social services, . . . and the schools, if need be."

Cal described some of the advantages of utilizing a small community for helping victims of domestic violence by describing the general access community members share. He explained, "You just see these people roundabout in town . . . you don't necessarily go to their family functions, . . . but you could call them . . . 2:00 in the morning." Phil expanded on Cal's comment by stating how he works closely with advocacy members because domestic violence is not simply relegated to spouses: "I got to work very closely with members [advocacy], and we would discuss things like domestic violence, but not only domestic violence among spouses, domestic violence amongst youth and siblings. . . . Domestic violence goes beyond just husband and wife. It could be father-son, . . . sister-brother, brother-sister."

Teaching Services to Law Enforcement. Eleven participants discussed how their advocacy services provide their [advocacy] perspective regarding how to train law enforcement officers on valuable techniques for managing domestic violence incidents. Bob talked about his relationship with the advocacy members he encountered during his shift: "We've had a pretty good working relationship with the . . . shelter there. Like I mentioned before, we actually had a

representative come in and teach us more about what they do and what they want to see from us.” Phil noted the importance of the “training” interactions between advocacy services and law enforcement officers because many law enforcement officers do not receive specialized training regarding the topic of domestic violence. Phil said, “Unfortunately, . . . a lot of law enforcement hasn't had specialized training. . . . They've had the academy training, they've had their FTO [field training] training, and that's about it. They don't understand the domestic violence cycle.”

Sam was among the few participants to receive training from his jurisdiction's local advocacy group. Sam said, “They put that training . . . on a year ago, and that's when they taught what to look for, sexual assault victims and different stuff like that.” Sam's comments supported the notion advocacy training is available for law enforcement officers in his jurisdiction because his jurisdiction's advocacy group is vested in assisting law enforcement. Sam said, “If we ever need to contact them . . . they've always been very cooperative with . . . trying to help out with what we need or getting in touch with the person to be able to help them.” Sam explained while law enforcement training focuses on the criminal aspect of domestic violence, advocacy services teach law enforcement to look for specific cues. Sam said, “They're teaching this training to you versus the position that you may have as a law enforcement officer and how it may coincide or how they differ [from the advocate position].”

Law Enforcement Services. The data analysis of the participants' statements identified another significant focus on law enforcement services and how those services connect to the subject of domestic violence. Pat described how he could sense if he was going to connect a domestic violence victim to needed services successfully: “I can gauge whether or not that person is going to utilize the services or not. Kind of just by the way that they respond.” While agencies use different techniques to follow through with the referral process, Wim stated his law

enforcement agency uses a commonwealth attorney's office representative and an advocacy group representative. He noted the use of a victim witness coordinator by saying, "We have a victim witness coordinator that works out of the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, and then we have a domestic violence advocacy group shelter that's separate." For these tools to work, law enforcement officers have to be trained. Rick explained, "All of our officers are trained, and we have . . . a ton of resources that are great and work hand-in-hand." I divided these services into three subthemes: connecting victims to services, service referral follow-through, and training law enforcement officers.

Connecting Victims to Services. Eleven of the participants discussed how law enforcement works to connect victims to the advocacy services they require. The connection process these participants discussed grew from the Referral Process – Law Enforcement Developing Rapport section earlier in the manuscript.

Pat talked about the difficulty of connecting victims of domestic violence to advocacy services. He said victims either want services or they do not want services:

They're almost disgusted that I handed him a card and offered the services. And then other people are actually ask me for services before I have even got the chance to give up the card. So some people are very receptive, where others are not. There's a, there's not much in between us either.

When the participants in the study found victims were interested in the advocacy services offered, the participants went to great lengths to connect the victims to advocacy members. Bob explained, "The representative from the shelter to show up at the hospital would actually take the victim to the shelter via a back door so that the suspect didn't see anything and didn't know anything was going on." Bob added,

We actually called the rep for them and put them on the phone with the victim, and they would talk, and we would basically be that third party involved with the interaction. And if they would, you know, maybe have a room at the shelter, then we would actually take them to the shelter.

Pam took the process of connective victims of domestic violence further by maintaining contact with the victim. Pam explained,

I've even gotten to that point with my victims trying to keep them involved in the process, so that they see if they get to that point right, then they might wake up and realize that this is not okay and that . . . the system does care. And that's the hard part, because oftentimes they'll come back, and they'll say the system failed.

Rick echoed Pam's efforts. He said his law enforcement agency ensures all necessary domestic violence paperwork is immediately sent to the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, so the victim witness coordinator can contact the victim the day after the incident. Rick said, "We send that report straight up to the Commonwealth's office, which houses the victim witness services with all the contact information. That way, victim witness can make their contact on that next day if need be."

Service Referral Follow Through. Ten of the participants discussed the process of ensuring there is a follow-through regarding service referrals for victims of domestic violence victims. Phil described the importance of service referral follow-through since county law enforcement officers commonly refer victims of domestic violence to the advocacy shelter in the town he serves. Phil said, "Having to see it [advocacy shelter] more often than county officers and understood the importance of that, why it was important, why it was important to give these women this avenue of support." Phil explained the law enforcement officers in his town

understood the importance of referral follow-through because they could see domestic violence referrals from the beginning (call for service) to the end (connecting victims to advocacy groups). Phil said, “They [town law enforcement officers] were seeing the beginning [domestic violence referral process], but they were also seeing the middle stages of the domestic violence when the woman made the choice to leave and go to the shelter.” Phil said since the advocacy shelter was in the town he served, town officers became accustomed to dealing with angry partners arriving at the shelter hoping to make contact with their victims. Phil said, “They were seeing the spouse show up to the shelter, having to deal with that scenario if they were violating some sort of protective order. And then they were seeing the end result.”

Pam discussed the effort involved with efficient referral service follow-through. She also discussed how important the follow-through process is for the Commonwealth Attorneys prosecuting cases. Pam said,

I think the Commonwealth Attorney's Office was having a really hard time getting the victim to follow through because the victim wasn't being followed or followed up with and checked on. My work cell phone is on me all the time. . . . I'll tell a victim, “Look, I know that you're going to have moments of weakness, and he's going to call you from the jail. And if he does, you don't answer that phone. You call me, and I will talk you through your anxiety. He's not the one. I will be that person for you.”

Pam explained further how she helps victims. “I've gone and got offered to get furniture for victims when they get a new apartment . . . I will find the furniture. I will find funding. I will do whatever I need to so that they can be independent again.” Dob explained he has noticed that the follow-through of services has become more critical because he has seen an increase in the number of victim services staff in his jurisdiction. Dob said,

We are starting to see more services. I know for Commonwealth Attorney's Office had a part-time coordinator for a long time. All of a sudden, that part-time person became a whole person. And now that full-time person has one or two staff.

Training Law Enforcement Officers. Twelve participants discussed the importance of agency leaders training their law enforcement officers. The participants noted the importance of educating law enforcement officers on appropriately responding, managing, and investigating domestic violence cases at varying levels of their careers. Pam's responsibility for domestic violence cases extends from caring for the victim to training the law enforcement officers in her agency. She explained,

I follow up with every victim to assess whether or not there are more and any more charges that need to be obtained or patrol division. I've worked with them [law enforcement officers] one-on-one and in group settings, trying to educate them on what code sections they can go after. Like, there are so many that they can apply. They didn't realize that they could get multiple domestic assault charges in one incident. I said if you can articulate that it stopped and it [domestic violence] restarted, that's another charge. I do a lot of hand-holding, and I use that term.

While Pam discussed how she explicitly trains law enforcement officers in her agency, Sam talked about how law enforcement officers train one another during the domestic violence investigation: "Basically, they [law enforcement officers] come together and try to come up . . . with what we're going to do. And that's, that's the way I've always tried to operate as a law enforcement officer." Sam explained he uses members of other law enforcement agencies whom he has trained to come to final resolutions over domestic violence calls for service. Sam said, "I do know those people. I work with them, help train some of them, and we do the same thing."

Mac discussed the importance of law enforcement officers understanding their role while investigating domestic violence cases. He said it is essential for law enforcement officers to understand that they are sometimes used to remedy short-term domestic violence problems instead of long-term ones. Mac explained, “They [victims of domestic violence] don't want us to kind of fix the problem in the long run. They just want that short-term solution of us being there.” Art added that law enforcement officers need to understand that some relationships are simply toxic and will likely never end:

Most of the time is just a toxic relationship, and two people should not be together. They are forcing themselves to be together because they'd rather be miserable than lonely. So that's the biggest thing I've seen in the majority of domestics. They will continue, and they refuse to separate from each other, with the occasional one being the actual victim. One of the classes I took gave the statistics. I think it actually takes like eight or nine actual encounters before they [victims of domestic violence] decide to leave.

Dob talked about the importance of training as meeting with law enforcement officers to review their work. He said, “When you're able to sit down with your staff [law enforcement officers], and you review his cases, you see where they are.” He said officers who are struggling with burnout or personal issues might not show the needed empathy for victims of domestic assault during these times. He said their attitudes are better when officers understand the complexity of domestic violence cases. Dob stated, “And I know that he gets even catches the case in a domestic assault case. He's going to do what he can for the victim, and that's the message we send in this case.”

Member Checking

All participants were allowed to review the information they provided during the semi-structured interviews and data collection. The following participants asked for and received a copy of the information they provided the researcher: Sam, Rick, and Val. Each of the participants received the data for their analysis via email, but none of them amended any of their transcripts.

Peer Debriefing Information

Dr. Robert England Peer Debrief

Dr. England provided a peer-review of Chapter Four of this study. He noted the chapter was well-written and organized with plenty of information, and he did not find any of the information troublesome. Dr. England identified two weaknesses in this study: (a) the study did not account for the perspectives of non-accredited agencies, and (b) there was a lack of female participants. Dr. England said the lack of non-accredited agency participation might be worth addressing to identify a correlation between the differences between accredited and non-accredited agencies regarding the subject matter. He suggested the non-accredited agency participants could be a control group for this study. He also suggested that the study should explore a more representative sample of female officers if possible.

Dr. England noted the manuscript needed to identify themes and subthemes in the research. He said themes were discovered but not identified. He suggested identifying those themes and expanding on them in more detail after the theme development section but before the first cycle coding section. Dr. England noted it could be more beneficial for a more explicit discussion of each section, the training standards in more detail, and the mitigating factors in the success and failure of each experience. He added that providing clarity in each section regarding

the themes, why they matter, and the desired outcome could be beneficial. He also suggested that a discussion of basic training versus advanced training could be beneficial as well as a discussion of the mitigating factors of training, education, relationships, and accreditation regarding indicators of successful outcomes.

Dr. Jeffery Rush Peer Debrief

Dr. Rush said Chapter Four was overall a solid and well-written chapter, commenting it is good to know that what is happening in other states, like his home state of Alabama, is the same as Virginia. Dr. Rush added it is also good to know “cops are cops” almost everywhere. While the similarities in law enforcement officers may surprise many of his academic colleagues, it did not surprise him. Dr. Rush identified some things that bothered him as a reader and dissertation thesis chairman. He said the research design and methodology were solid. Dr. Rush said knowing law enforcement officers in Virginia have the same problems (internally and externally) as law enforcement officers in other states. He added it was unfortunate victims of domestic violence are the same no matter where they reside. Dr. Rush said the storytelling of the chapter was “right on.”

Dr. Rush added that storytelling was one of the best ways to learn, which is why parables, movies, and television shows have a prominent impact on many people. In summary, Dr. Rush said the chapter was well-written, with a solid design and a methodology producing significant answers to the research questions. He concluded by saying the laborious process of collecting information on this subject matter can change to better services to the victims we are to serve.

Dr. Ben Stickle Peer Debrief

Dr. Stickle asked me if there was a chapter on data and methodology. He said if these sections did exist, he would reduce the discussion of those topics in the findings chapter. Dr.

Stickle said it was not clear to him if the questions presented were answered with Chapter Four. He acknowledged since he only had access to Chapter Four, the questions could have been answered later in the manuscript. However, he said in the current manuscript form, the questions were presented and grouped but were not answered.

Dr. Stickle said the discussion of the domestic violence categories confused him. He stated the categories should be introduced before explaining how many participants were discussed. He noted he thought a transition was needed from demographics to each summary. He said a more careful read with transitions between topics was needed, and he provided an example. He said there is no transition between establishing themes and subthemes in the findings. Instead, Dr. Stickle said there was just an end table with a new title. He noted this type of formatting was repeated throughout this chapter. He said a summary of each section was often missing from the manuscript. Dr. Stickle believes there needs to be some conclusion between the presentation of the data. For example, he said the conclusion of the advocacy process to help victims does not contain a summary, conclusion, or transition to the next topic. He said while Chapter Four is only one chapter, some level of analysis will probably help the reader.

Dr. Stickle said the abstract mentioned 30 participants, but there were 15 participants in Chapter Four. This problem has been corrected. Dr. Stickle said the three methods used were not straightforward. He added he did not understand the use of the “reflexive memo.” He asked what the research was reflecting upon if the researcher was using verbatim interviews. He stated he could see the value of the complex fieldwork but not in the structured environment of questioning participants being recorded. He said there is no need for reflexivity to record the researcher’s thoughts when there is access to the recordings. Dr. Stickle said the section “Answering Research Questions” does not answer the research questions. Instead, the section

lists themes and subthemes. He said those are not answers but tools used to group data to describe the research answers. Dr. Stickle said the researcher must draw a conclusion based on the data grouping and how to answer the questions. For example, he said, “It is like asking which is the fastest vehicle, and you answer there are trucks, passenger vehicles, and SUVs.”

Summary

Chapter Four discussed the data analysis and subsequent findings of the study. The study overview reiterated RQ1 and RQ2, an introduction of the participants, and a thorough discussion of the research findings. The data analysis identified themes and subthemes from the semi-structured interviews. The research themes were successful experiences, unsuccessful experiences, referral process, advocacy services, and law enforcement services. Each research theme yielded three subthemes. The themes of successful experiences and unsuccessful experiences answered RQ1. The subthemes of unsuccessful experiences were professional advocacy assistance, law enforcement assistance, and victim compliance. The theme of unsuccessful experiences included advocacy shortcomings, law enforcement shortcomings, and victim shortcomings. The themes of the referral process, advocacy services, and law enforcement services answered RQ2. The subthemes of the referral process were law enforcement developing rapport with the victim, law enforcement initiating the investigation, and law enforcement referral process steps. The subthemes of advocacy services included the advocacy process to help victims, various community outreach, and law enforcement teaching services. The final theme of law enforcement services contained the subthemes of connecting victims to services, referral service follow-through, and training law enforcement officers. Chapter Four concluded with peer reviews of the chapter by Dr. Robert England, Dr. Jeffery Rush, and Dr. Ben Stickle.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This qualitative descriptive study explored how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences, understanding, and navigation of the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions in Virginia. Within this study, I aimed to gather rural law enforcement officers' perspectives regarding the referral of victims to domestic violence advocacy groups. The theoretical underpinnings of this study rely on victim-oriented policing. The foundation for victim-centered policing combines criminological thought and police practice to design opportunities to reduce the fear of crime and the crime costs to a community (Clark, 2003). The change in policing has placed disciplinary power in the hands of crime victims by shifting the priorities of law enforcement. Law enforcement now utilizes formal and codified law while taking on the role of the victim (White & Perrone, 1997). Chapter Five includes a detailed summary of the findings. The chapter also includes a discussion of these findings and a review of the literature to include theoretical and empirical implications of the study's findings. The chapter addresses limitations and delimitations and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Two research questions drove the study to learn about the rural law enforcement officers' perspectives regarding the referral of victims to domestic violence advocacy groups. How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence? How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies

accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

I used semi-structured interviews to gather thick and rich descriptions of the participants' professional experiences. Qualitative research provides insights into understanding the lived experiences of people. The design is a method of inquiry and encompasses a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). I coded the participant interviews and identified five themes and 15 subthemes.

RQ1

How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

The research question had two focal points on how the participants described their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence. Two significant themes applied to the first research question: successful experiences and unsuccessful experiences. The data analysis of the participants' statements yielded six subthemes. These subthemes were professional advocacy assistance, professional law enforcement assistance, victim compliance, advocate shortcomings, law enforcement shortcomings, and victim shortcomings (see Table 4 for the frequency of these themes and subthemes among the participants' statements).

The participants provided data regarding successful experiences during the domestic violence referral process. Participants discussed the interworking of their law enforcement teams regarding domestic violence investigations stating their units are cohesive and well-functioning. The participants emphasized the importance of training younger recruits because domestic

violence investigations resonate with the recruits, and they want to help victims of domestic violence. The participants stated that while victim compliance rarely occurs, it positively impacts law enforcement officers when victims remove themselves from violent domestic situations.

The participants provided additional data regarding unsuccessful experiences during the domestic violence referral process. Some participants noted they rarely had personal interaction with domestic violence advocacy members. While advocacy service availability was rare, other participants noted advocacy service availability did occur at random times. The participants added managing victims of domestic violence could be frustrating. They stated many victims do not wish to cooperate with criminal investigations. The participants said the victim's unwillingness to cooperate often led the victim to later recant their version of abuse either during the investigation or during court proceedings.

RQ2

How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

The three remaining themes identified through the participant interviews surfaced when analyzing RQ2: referral process, advocacy services, and law enforcement services. The following subthemes emerged from the referral process: law enforcement rapport with victims, law enforcement initiating the investigation, and law enforcement referral process steps. The second central theme identified was advocacy services. The subthemes supporting this central theme were advocacy processes to help victims, various community outreach, and law enforcement teaching services. Three subthemes supported the third theme of law enforcement services. These subthemes were connecting victims to services, referral service follow-through,

and training law enforcement officers (see Table 4 for the frequency of these themes and subthemes among the participants' statements).

The participants provided data regarding the referral process and identified that one of their primary purposes was adequately investigating domestic violence cases. They stated part of an adequate investigation is to ensure they connect victims with advocacy services. The participants noted the importance of relating to victims and developing a rapport with them to feel comfortable and supported. They described part of this process as providing appropriate information, often disseminated in packets, to victims of domestic violence.

The participants also provided data regarding advocacy services. The participants explained that advocacy services representatives assist victims in various community forms, including shelter for victims to keep them safe from their offenders. Community services also work to protect not only the victims of domestic violence but other at-risk family members, such as children. The interaction between advocacy service representatives and law enforcement officers promotes the abovementioned process. Promoting the referral process by advocacy members to law enforcement officers is essential because many study participants did not receive specialized domestic violence training. As the relationship between advocacy members and law enforcement officers grow, the probability for the education of both parties will grow.

As the last major theme in answer to RQ2, the participants provided data regarding law enforcement services. Several participants stated they instinctively recognized whether a victim of domestic violence would follow through regarding advocacy services. The participants said when victims were initially offered advocacy services, the probability of the victim following through was higher when they were interested in using the services. The participants said their departments focus on following through with victims to ensure they have done everything

possible to connect the victim with advocacy services. The participants described the best way to ensure the follow-through of referral services is through proper and thorough training. The participants noted the importance for all law enforcement officers to receive proper training regarding domestic violence cases by educating officers on how to respond, manage, and investigate domestic violence cases.

Discussion

I conducted this qualitative descriptive study to explore how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences, understanding, and navigation of the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions in Virginia. The theoretical framework for this study was twofold. First, this study attempted to fill the knowledge gap by evaluating law enforcement officers' perceptions of the referral process for victims of domestic violence to advocacy services. Second, this study did not stop at identifying law enforcement officers' perceptions of domestic violence referrals; instead, it delved more specifically into the same issue within rural jurisdictions. I chose the qualitative descriptive research design, and 15 participants provided data for the study. I used semi-structured interviews to ask six open-ended questions to each participant using Zoom video conferencing software. I used reflexive memoing to take notes during the interviews. In the following section, I discuss the study's findings as they pertain to theoretical and empirical literature explored during the literature review. I also evaluate in the next section how the current research has impacted current peer-reviewed literature.

Conceptual Literature

The foundation of the conceptual framework for this study was based on law enforcement officers' attitudes toward cases of domestic violence. Law enforcement officers play an essential

role in domestic violence incidents because they are often the first point of contact for victims of domestic violence (Barrett et al., 2019; Franklin et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2020). Due to the critical role law enforcement officers have in managing domestic violence cases, it is essential to study law enforcement officers' attitudes toward domestic violence, especially from the perspective of the rural law enforcement officer (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Goodson et al., 2020). This study worked to understand how rural law enforcement officers described their experiences during the domestic violence referral process. Understanding law enforcement officers' perceptions of domestic violence events are necessary to create better policies and protocols for how law enforcement generally manages these events (El Sayed et al., 2020).

The conceptual design of the research had two parts. The first part of the research project was to learn how rural law enforcement officers described their experiences during the domestic violence referral process. Regarding their successful experiences related to the process, 12 participants discussed professional advocacy assistance, 13 participants discussed professional law enforcement assistance, and nine participants discussed victim compliance with the process. Conversely, the participants also discussed their unsuccessful experiences with the domestic violence referral process. Of the 15 participants, 12 discussed advocate shortcomings, 11 discussed law enforcement shortcomings, and 15 discussed victim shortcomings with the domestic violence referral process.

The second part of the conceptual research design focused on how rural law enforcement officers navigated the domestic violence referral process: the referral process, advocacy services, and law enforcement services. In the referral process section, 10 participants discussed law enforcement developing rapport with the victim, 13 participants discussed the issue of law enforcement initiating the investigation, and 15 discussed the law enforcement referral process

steps. In the advocacy services section, eight participants discussed advocacy services to help victims, six participants discussed community outreach in various forms, and 11 participants discussed teaching services to law enforcement. Regarding law enforcement services, 12 participants discussed connecting victims to services, 13 discussed referral service follow-through, and 12 discussed training law enforcement officers (by other law enforcement).

Empirical Literature

Rural Officer's Experience with Domestic Violence Referral Process (RQ1)

This study uniquely examined rural law enforcement officers' experiences while referring victims of domestic violence to advocacy services. The participants described their experiences of referring victims of domestic violence to advocacy services within two significant themes identified in the study: successful experiences and unsuccessful experiences. Each of the participants described their experiences from their unique perspectives. The participants described both of these experiences as they related to advocacy, law enforcement, and victims of domestic violence. See the summary of these experiences below.

Successful Experiences. Of the 15 participants, 12 spoke to the Professional Advocacy Assistance subtheme, referencing the topic 27 times. Most participants discussed how professional advocacy services assist victims of domestic violence by providing shelter, medical care, and in some cases, legal assistance. The participants spoke of how they could make contact with domestic violence advocacy services for help when dealing with victims of domestic violence. These findings are consistent with L. Johnson and Stylianou (2020), who stated that it was important for each jurisdiction to identify appropriate modeling and collaboration efforts that best fit the communities they deserve.

Thirteen participants discussed the subtheme of professional law enforcement assistance. Many participants cited how their law enforcement agencies were organized and efficient regarding their enforcement response to domestic violence. The participants provided examples of taking victims to advocacy services, guiding them to magistrates, and providing services to remove victims from immediate danger. Senior law enforcement officers showed how they led by example and encouraged recruits to see the importance of doing their jobs correctly, reassuring recruits, and working together to make decisions. The actions provided by senior officers aligned with empirical research noting law enforcement supervisors, law enforcement peers, and an agency culture impact officers as they manage cases of domestic violence (Diemer et al., 2017; Grant & Cross-Denny, 2017; R. R. Johnson & Dai, 2016; Peacock et al., 2021; Van Craen, 2016). Some participants also discussed the advantages of having their jurisdiction's domestic advocacy shelter next door to their law enforcement agency and how the locations of the agencies promote cohesiveness. The cohesiveness mentioned by these participants is tied directly to the need for rural studies on this topic due to the close-knit social and cultural traditions in rural jurisdictions (Little, 2017).

Of the 15 participants, nine discussed successful experiences where victims of domestic assault complied with law enforcement efforts to connect them to advocacy services. Successful experiences with victim compliance had the lowest amount of references in the section totaling 19, whereas professional advocacy totaled 27 references, and professional law enforcement assistance totaled 43 references. Many references discussed the rarity of victim follow-through during the referral process. Participants provided examples of how victims followed through after violent incidents, how the victims accepted community and family support, and how they pursued more extensive protective orders. Still, the scarce number of experiences referred by the

participants underscored the high probability of underreporting by victims of domestic violence, leaving most domestic violence incidents unaddressed by law enforcement (Morgan & Kena, 2017).

Unsuccessful Experiences. The second central theme in answering RQ1 was unsuccessful experiences involving advocacy shortcomings, law enforcement shortcomings, and victim shortcomings. Of the 15 participants, 12 provided references regarding the subtheme of advocacy shortcomings. The participants discussed advocacy shortcomings, including lack of bed space at shelters and advocacy criticisms of law enforcement officers who catch victims lying about their circumstances. The participants added they had limited interactions with advocacy members and had insufficient advocacy information handouts for victims. The participants complained that because advocacy shelters maintained high levels of confidentiality, they often did not know if victims received services. The participants also expressed frustration with advocacy groups because they claim to help male victims of domestic violence, but they do not follow through on those promises. These unsuccessful experiences require a remedy to increase buy-in to the advocacy referral process because research indicates officers are more likely to provide advocacy services when their attitudes are favorable towards those services (Goodson et al., 2020).

Eleven participants discussed the second subtheme, law enforcement shortcomings. The participants discussed some officers who viewed the referral process as simply disseminating paperwork to victims. The participants noted sometimes officers lack follow-through after a victim connects to advocacy services. Some participants failed to correctly identify domestic violence, stating there is a difference between domestic violence and domestic assault, which confirms Fleming and Franklin's (2021) research stating law enforcement officers endorse myths

and misconceptions of domestic violence. Participants discussed frustrations with the feeling they are wasting time on domestic violence investigations, the lack of specialized training, being overloaded with other calls for service, burnout, forgetfulness, and frustration with repeat calls for service involving domestic violence. Other participants felt some officers go through the motions while investigating domestic violence, and they only seriously investigate domestic violence cases when physical injury results. These notions confirm Myhill's (2019) research findings suggesting law enforcement officers are more likely to arrest domestic violence offenders in severe cases where future threats of harm are evident.

All 15 participants mentioned victim shortcomings in domestic violence cases, represented a third subtheme under the central theme of unsuccessful experiences. Participants provided rich detail regarding their experiences with victim shortcomings regarding the domestic violence referral process. The participants expressed frustrations with victims' lack of follow-through regarding their safety, health, and protection of their children and failure to recognize the need to protect themselves in the long term. Participants observed that many victims of domestic violence fail to follow through during the referral process because they may lose financial support, believe the violence is their fault, and develop unhealthy sympathy for the offender. Participants said victims often fail to testify, fall back into cycles of abuse, intentionally fail to recall events in court to protect the offender, and lack self-esteem. Victims in these cases also suffer from mental health problems due to abuse from the offender, believe in empty promises by the offender, and feel they can take care of their own in rural communities. Richards et al. (2021) researched the above barriers law enforcement officers listed while investigating domestic violence cases. and found that law enforcement officers feel they cannot always fulfill their roles properly because victims fail to disclose injuries, argue against the offender's arrest, and decline

medical assistance. Officers feel the victims do not help themselves and are often unwilling to change their lifestyles (Richards et al., 2021).

Rural Officer's Navigation with Domestic Violence Referral Process (RQ2)

This study examined rural law enforcement officers' navigation during domestic violence referral. Each of the participants described their experiences from their unique perspectives. The participants described their navigations of referring victims of domestic violence to advocacy services within the remaining three significant themes identified in the study: the referral process, advocacy services, and law enforcement services. See the summary of these experiences below.

Referral Process. Ten participants discussed the subtheme of law enforcement building a rapport with victims during domestic violence investigations. The participants noted that the importance of understanding the referral process is more than just seeking shelter for the victim; it is understanding the victim as a "whole person," seeking to understand their experience, and acting as an advocate for the victim. The participants discussed establishing a good rapport with the victim by asking questions and building trust. They also discussed the uniqueness of the referral process from a rural perspective, stating that law enforcement officers should maintain a good relationship with community members by maintaining a good reputation. One participant took the duty further by noting the importance of developing personal empathy for the victim's case instead of simply checking a box. The participant expanded on the thought by ensuring the victim that law enforcement is there to help, not just arrest someone. These actions relate to empirical research emphasizing police accountability by effectively using their resources to help victims of domestic violence (Hamilton et al., 2019). Empirical research adds to the importance of the law enforcement officer developing a relationship with the victim because victims may not

have confidence in the actions of law enforcement, and the burden of developing a relationship with the victim is the responsibility of the law enforcement officers (Ballucci et al., 2017; Peirone et al., 2021; Regoeczi & Hubbard, 2018; Swerin et al., 2018).

Thirteen participants discussed the second subtheme of how law enforcement initiates the investigation into the domestic violence incident. The participants mentioned the importance of responding to domestic violence calls and handling them consistently. They discussed documenting a domestic violence report with their agency since some agencies forward the information to advocacy services to assist the victim after the report is filed, including the department of social services. The participants discussed the importance of understanding the differences between assault and no assault instances during domestic violence investigations. They discussed the importance of determining the predominant physical aggressor after separating the victim from the suspect, following through regarding appropriate protective orders, educating the victim regarding their legal and help options, exercising referral options to a magistrate, initiating counseling, and contacting advocacy services for the victim. Consistent management of domestic violence cases can help prevent law enforcement officers from making mistakes during domestic violence investigations. In some cases, law enforcement officers are exposed to the raw emotions and stress of the domestic violence incident. Clear procedures and practical training can help officers negotiate these instances to complete their investigations successfully (Franklin et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2019; Twis et al., 2018).

All 15 participants provided rich perspectives regarding the third subtheme, the law enforcement referral process. In various ways, the participants described the referral process in a series of steps. They discussed arriving on the scene, assessing the scene, assessing the circumstances of the case, interviewing the suspect and victim separately, and providing

advocacy referral paperwork to the identified victim. The participants noted the importance of explaining the advocacy process to the victim, providing the victim with the officer's contact information, connecting the victim to the appropriate advocacy services, transporting them to the shelter, and speaking with the advocate. The participants added follow-up tasks: conduct a second interview, evaluate injuries, connect the victim with the witness coordinator (if not done before), and celebrate the victim's health (if appropriate) and freedom. One participant noted the importance of this process, even though there are no guarantees the victim will follow through with separating from the offender. The process of these steps should be cultivated and adequately developed by the officer to improve interpersonal relations and provide proper services to victims of domestic assault (Maple & Kebbell, 2020; Regoeczi & Hubbard, 2018).

Advocacy Services. Eight participants provided data regarding the fourth central theme: advocacy services. The first subtheme of the section was advocacy services to help victims, which received one of the fewest responses from participants. The lack of data is coupled with many participants' extensive working relationships with advocacy services. The participants discussed some generalities associated with the advocacy process to assist victims of domestic assault, but nothing novel arose from the data provided by the participants. The participants discussed advocacy services assisting victims with housing and other resources and assisting victims in removing them from abusive relationships and living conditions. They talked about how advocacy assists victims who run out of resources independently and how they can provide victims with health care services. The participants noted that advocacy services accept donations, and it is vital for advocacy services and law enforcement to work together because domestic violence cases can be complicated. The participant data confirmed the importance of Rauhaus et al.'s (2020) research, which indicated law enforcement and domestic advocacy stakeholders

should emphasize client and public input. Their input promotes principles and practices of social equity, care ethics, compassion, and empathy (Rauhaus et al., 2020).

Six participants mentioned the second subtheme of community outreach in various forms. This section represented the lowest number of participant responses at six. The participants provided some data involving the importance of connecting victims of domestic violence to available community services outside of typical advocacy programs. Participants from various jurisdictions noted different programs exclusive to their jurisdictions. They discussed family youth coalitions, pregnancy centers, legal services, medical center provisions, counseling and therapy service, and unique connections to their school systems. The participant who provided the richest data served their law enforcement agency in a specialty role as a domestic violence investigator and discussed a variety of cases where they were able to work beyond the average services. However, this participant was the only one of the 15 participants who served in a “special” capacity. Their service spoke to specialty units, as discussed by Segrave et al. (2018), who proposed establishing domestic violence specialty units to manage these cases better. Segrave et al. stated police agencies could identify the law enforcement officers best suited for these teams by evaluating their previous domestic violence investigative records and their interest in specialized training.

Eleven participants discussed teaching services to law enforcement from an advocacy perspective as the third subtheme within the central theme of advocacy services. Eleven participants provided data associated with learning from advocates. They noted advocates teach how to be patient with victims and ensure the victim information will be confidential with the advocacy service representative. The research indicated and reinforced by the participants that advocacy training on domestic violence was often the only specialized training officers received

regarding the subject matter. The training is necessary because research has shown some officers miss subtle cues associated with domestic violence (Twis et al., 2018). Advocacy training involves helping officers identify signs of domestic violence and sexual violence. The participants noted training helped remove the stigma associated with how law enforcement officers sometimes view advocacy services. One participant noted the importance of advocacy services and law enforcement officers working together in rural areas because neither have the same resources as their counterparts in more metropolitan regions. Empirical research has indicated that jurisdictions should identify appropriate modeling and collaboration efforts among law enforcement and advocacy services that best suit their communities (L. Johnson & Stylianou, 2020).

Law Enforcement Services. The central theme of law enforcement services contained three subthemes: connecting victims to services, referral service follow-through, and training law enforcement officers. Eleven participants provided data for the subtheme of connecting victims of domestic violence to advocacy services. One participant described the process as bridging the gap in seeking justice by helping victims find the support they require. The participants provided examples of how they helped victims with injuries gain the assistance they needed. They connected them to services by making phone calls for them, connecting them to Magistrates to seek charges and protective orders, and connecting them with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office when they have cases going before the court. The participants stated they disseminated the domestic violence packets provided to them by their agencies. The initiatives described by the participants relate to empirical research from Regoeczi and Hubbard (2018) who found proper service referral benefits advocacy involvement, which improves advocacy and law

enforcement relationships and increases guilty case dispositions for offenders in domestic violence cases.

The second subtheme was the subject of referral service follow-through. Ten participants provided insight into the subject matter. They discussed how they lacked a complete understanding of advocacy operations because they had little interaction with advocates after referring the victim to the advocacy service. Some participants discussed how they have worked to ensure follow-through during and after the service referral. The participants noted examples of how their shelter received victims from all over Virginia, and they always had to be ready to assist advocacy services. One participant noted he did not know much about his jurisdiction's advocacy program until the program was endorsed and celebrated by his sheriff. This response coincides with previous research data. When police leaders prioritize domestic violence arrests and training initiatives, subordinate officers respond by higher prioritization of domestic violence investigations (R. R. Johnson & Dai, 2016; Li et al., 2021). The participants discussed the importance of educating victims they can text 911 for assistance, which prevents the victim from having to call 911 when their offender could overhear the conversation. Participants provided other follow-through tasks such as connecting victims with hotels, performing welfare checks during weekend hours, assisting victims with employment applications, developing trust with advocacy workers, garnering offender statements, and utilizing multidisciplinary teams to prevent cases from being neglected. Previous research emphasized these practical strategies and specialty efforts, noting the importance of using practical applications to foster unique approaches to managing domestic violence cases (Ballucci et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2018; Segrave et al., 2018).

The third subtheme was training law enforcement regarding the most effective strategies to manage domestic violence investigations. Twelve of the 15 participants provided data regarding this topic. The participants discussed using officers in specialty positions to train patrol officers on evidence cues, reviewing body cam footage for additional evidence (Ballucci et al., 2017; Birdsall et al., 2017), how to obtain multiple charges for domestic assault in one call for service, and how to use available resources in rural jurisdictions. The participants discussed the importance of utilizing training and attending meetings with the Commonwealth Attorney regarding Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART), inner departmental training, squad training sessions, and creating mini-field training academies for recruits. The participants noted the importance of ensuring all law enforcement officers receive critical incident training (CIT). They added it was essential to invest in younger officers, fight complacency, maintain open lines of communication across all levels of the agency, and build a culture that emphasizes the responsibility of officers to stand in the gap to protect victims of domestic violence and bring offenders to justice.

Implications

This qualitative descriptive study explored how rural law enforcement officers described their experiences and navigations of connecting victims of domestic violence to domestic violence advocacy services. The following section discusses the study's conceptual, empirical, and practical implications.

Conceptual Implications

The conceptual framework for this study was rooted in rural law enforcement attitudes toward the domestic violence referral process and the need to understand their perspectives (El Sayed et al., 2020; Little, 2017). Scholarly studies have examined the perspectives of

metropolitan law enforcement officers, but scholars have neglected the rural law enforcement officer's experience (Goodson et al., 2020). While there have been non-rural studies regarding law enforcement officers' perspectives on domestic violence, this research has brought to light the unique perspectives of rural law enforcement officers. The experiences described in this study provided data consistent with metropolitan studies, but new data emerged regarding the rural law enforcement officer's experience. This study has brought the implication forward that the rural law enforcement perspective is unique concerning their experiences, understanding, and navigation of the domestic violence referral process. The experiences described in this study had undertones consistent with rural law enforcement activities not found in metropolitan areas. Officers understood the importance of developing relationships with victims of domestic violence, advocacy groups, and other law enforcement officers to utilize available community resources to the victim's benefit. Unlike existing literature, these documented experiences differed from those of the non-rural law enforcement officer.

This study's findings supported law enforcement attitudes and perspectives regarding domestic violence. The perspectives held by rural law enforcement officers and non-rural law enforcement officers are consistent. Both sets of law enforcement officers experience the same barriers, the importance of securing victim confidence during domestic violence investigations is the same, and victim reactions to law enforcement to the two sets of officers are similar (Ballucci et al., 2017; Goodson et al., 2020; Peirone et al., 2021; Swerin et al., 2018). The recurring themes in this study specific to the rural law enforcement officer's experience raise the concern that more data are needed from these officers to provide a complete assessment of law enforcement's role in domestic violence matters.

Empirical Implications

This study resulted in a combination of predictable and surprising findings. The first significant empirical implication of the research was the participants recognized the importance of following through with the referral process in connecting victims of domestic violence to needed resources. Specifically, the participants recognized the importance of developing a community-based rapport with the victim. The participants also believed their ability to establish a positive relationship with their communities also impacted their effectiveness regarding successful outcomes during domestic violence investigations. The participants believed the initiation of the domestic violence investigation depended on developing the rapport mentioned above and the repetition of investigatory steps reinforced by agency leaders and peers.

The second empirical implication involved advocacy services. The participants believed the advocacy process helped victims when victims utilized the advocacy programs available. The participants expanded the definition of advocacy services to include domestic violence advocacy assistance and other advocacy sources in other supportive constructs such as legal, medical, and social resources. The participants acknowledged the importance of learning from advocacy representatives. While the participants noted advocacy opinions and suggestions sometimes do not reflect the mission of law enforcement, they noted representative advocacy insight helped them increase their skill set.

The third significant empirical implication involved law enforcement services. The participants believed it was their responsibility to connect victims of domestic violence to advocacy services, even when victims did not accept their assistance. The participants believed their professional connection to the advocacy services helped victims receive sound and efficient assistance. The participants recognized the need for more frequent and specialized training on

domestic violence. While the participants noted many victims rarely seek and follow through regarding advocacy assistance, the participants feel rewarded when they do.

Practical Implications

The implications of this study should be of significance to community stakeholders. These stakeholders include advocacy service representatives, law enforcement officers, and leaders. Advocacy service representatives are on the frontlines battling domestic violence. Still, the advocacy members are far removed from the crisis intervention conducted by law enforcement officers when they respond to domestic violence calls for service. While advocacy organizations wish to conceal the identities of their clients from anyone in public, including law enforcement officers, advocacy organizations should consider entertaining the idea that some of their measures are too strict. The global view of domestic violence reveals consequences when advocacy services fail to provide consequential information to law enforcement. In many cases, law enforcement officers intervene in domestic violence situations blindly. Valuable information, including clientele history and circumstances, could benefit law enforcement and provide insight into the best ways to manage these cases. While several participants noted they do not know what happens behind the closed doors of an advocacy shelter due to lack of experience, several other participants with extensive experience in law enforcement stated the clandestine nature of advocacy services could be a hindrance.

Secondly, law enforcement officers must recognize they should take an active role in learning more about domestic violence. Many participants noted burnout, frustration, and a pessimistic view of domestic violence investigations because of the rare nature of victims leaving their abusive relationships. As mentioned by one of the participants, law enforcement officers need to celebrate that they are bridging the gap for victims of domestic violence. While

few victims leave their violent circumstances, some do leave and live productive and healthy lives. Law enforcement officers should focus on helping the entirety of those who suffer domestically violent relationships while realistically hoping and accepting they will only save a few.

Thirdly, the participating law enforcement officers in the study acknowledged in unison the importance of extended training regarding domestic violence investigations. Education for law enforcement officers cannot end after the academy, and it should not be on the shoulders of advocacy to be the sole administrator of extended training for law enforcement. The dual responsibility of law enforcement officers and their leaders is to ensure they receive the continuing education needed to conduct their jobs effectively. Law enforcement officers should proactively search for training that can help them discover improved ways to conduct domestic violence investigations. Simultaneously, law enforcement administrators need to recognize that if they do not celebrate the importance of efficient and effective domestic violence investigations within their agencies, neither will the law enforcement officers employed beneath them.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

This study provided rich, thick data essential for rural law enforcement operations in Virginia. The design of the research project and the study participant interviews yielded rich data. While the combination of the research design and the participants created the cumulative information required to complete the research project, strengths and weaknesses were naturally identified and are discussed below.

Strengths of the Study

The first strength of this study was that it helped fill a research gap associated with how rural law enforcement officers describe their experiences navigating the domestic violence

referral process. The scope of the research used law enforcement agencies in Virginia accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission. The research included towns and cities with populations of less than 50,000. Second, I specifically selected a qualitative research design to glean rich and thick data from the participants. The research design allowed the participants to delve deep into their explanations and lived experiences regarding the domestic violence referral process. Third, gleaned data came from participants recently on the frontlines of investigating and managing domestic violence cases. Fourth, the experience level in front-line law enforcement service varied drastically. While some participants had just begun their careers, others were in the twilight of their careers. These different experience levels afforded research data from a wide variety of law enforcement experiences with the topic.

Weaknesses of the Study

Specific criteria were required to participate in my study that caused weaknesses in exploring how rural law enforcement officers described their experiences and navigations of the domestic violence referral process. First, the participants had to be Virginia law enforcement officers employed with agencies accredited with the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission. As noted by peer debriefer Dr. Robert England, the study did not utilize participants from non-accredited agencies, which eliminated the possibility of comparing responses from the two groups. A second weakness was the number of agencies used for the study. I only interviewed law enforcement officers from five of Virginia's 44 accredited agencies. I planned to use participants from 10 of the available agencies, but one agency lost accreditation during the research process and four did not respond after the initial agreement to participate. Third, the descriptive study design in itself has limitations. The descriptive study design cannot statistically test or verify the study's research problem. The descriptive study

design cannot reflect certain bias levels. After all, no statistical tests exist. The fourth limitation was the descriptive design could not identify the cause behind the phenomenon of the study (Dudovskiy, 2016).

Recommendations for Future Research

I intentionally used a narrow lens of research to explore my participants' lived experiences and navigations when referring victims of domestic violence to advocacy resources. This study's narrow scope allows future researchers to conduct more in-depth studies into rural law enforcement activities. As a rural law enforcement officer, I conducted this research to tailor a study specific to the rural law enforcement officer and agency needs. While numerous studies are available for non-rural law enforcement officers and agencies, there is a research gap regarding how rural law enforcement officers describe their experiences and navigate domestic violence advocacy services (Goodson et al., 2020; Little, 2017). I hope this research project inspires more researchers to evaluate the needs of rural law enforcement across the United States. Additional research should evaluate the rural law enforcement officer's lived experiences not only regarding the topic of domestic violence but also the various other topics that impact the rural law enforcement officer.

Summary

This qualitative study aimed to explore how law enforcement officers from rural jurisdictions describe their experiences and navigate the domestic violence referral process from law enforcement to domestic violence advocacy groups within rural jurisdictions in Virginia. I used the descriptive study to understand how the participants perceived their experiences while encountering the domestic violence referral process. The framework of the study was centered around the limited research on law enforcement officers' provision of services for domestic

violence victims after they formally report domestic violence incidents to law enforcement officials. Two research questions informed this study: How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence? How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

The current study found rural law enforcement officers struggled with the strict level of confidentiality advocacy services followed regarding the release of client information because the officers rarely observed the outcome of their work. Secondly, it is imperative for law enforcement officers to recognize they must take an active role in their education regarding the domestic violence process. Finally, the rural law enforcement officer needs extended training regarding domestic violence. Until law enforcement agency leaders celebrate the educational process, the probability that domestic violence training will become a higher priority for law enforcement officers is unlikely. There must be an investment by all law enforcement agencies in understanding domestic violence and properly enforcing domestic violence laws against offenders.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 13, 2022

Aaron Cabbage
Vincent Giordano

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-1119 LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS AND THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
ADVOCACY REFERRAL PROCESS

Dear Aaron Cabbage, Vincent Giordano,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Law Enforcement Officers and the Domestic Violence Advocacy Referral Process



- Are you a sworn law enforcement officer in the state of Virginia employed with a law enforcement agency accredited through the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission who investigates domestic violence cases?
- Are you in good ethical standing with your agency?
- Do you serve a population less than 50,000?

If you answered yes to all questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this study is to understand how law enforcement officers describe their experiences and navigate the domestic violence referral process within rural jurisdictions with populations less than 50,000.

Participants will be asked to complete a demographic survey and an audio-recorded interview.

Participants will also have the opportunity to review the findings of the interviews. These processes combined will take approximately 60 minutes, and they will be done in-person or remotely by Zoom. Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the information will remain confidential.

If you would like to participate, please contact the researcher at the phone number or email address provided below.

A consent document will be emailed to you if you are found to be eligible.

Aaron Cabbage, a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Aaron Cabbage at [REDACTED] for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall, Lynchburg, Va.

Appendix C: Background Screening

To confirm your eligibility to participate in the study, please answer by circling your answer.

1. Are you a sworn law enforcement officer in Virginia employed with a law enforcement agency accredited through the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

2. Are you a law enforcement officer who investigates domestic violence cases and refers victims of domestic violence to domestic violence advocacy services?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

3. Are you in good ethical standing with your law enforcement agency?
 - a.) Yes
 - b.) No

4. How many years of certified law enforcement experience do you have (Do not include time serving in correction or communication positions)?
 - a) 0–5 years of service
 - b) 6–10 years of service
 - c) 11–15 years of service
 - d) 16–20 years of service
 - e) 21–25 years of service
 - f) Over 25 years of service (Specify): _____

5. How many calls for service regarding domestic violence have you answered in the last three years?
- a) 0–5 calls for service
 - b) 6–10 calls for service
 - c) 11–20 calls for service
 - d) Over 20 calls for service (Specify): _____
6. How many domestic violence incidents have you personally investigated within the last three years?
- a) 0–5 incidents
 - b) 6–10 incidents
 - c) 11–20 incidents
 - d) Over 20 incidents (Specify): _____
7. How many domestic violence arrests have you personally made within the last three years?
- a) 0–5 arrests
 - b) 6–10 arrests
 - c) 11–20 arrests
 - d) Over 20 arrests (Specify): _____
8. When was the last time you referred a victim of domestic violence to an advocacy group?
- a) Within the last month
 - b) Within the last three months
 - c) Within the last six months
 - d) Within the last year

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Law Enforcement Officers and the Domestic Violence Advocacy Referral Process

Principal Investigator: Aaron Cubbage, Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University,

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a sworn law enforcement officer in Virginia. Your agency must be accredited through the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC), serving populations of fewer than 50,000. You must be responsible for investigating domestic violence cases and referring victims of domestic violence to advocacy groups. You must also be in good ethical standing with your agency. Taking part in this research is voluntary.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this research is to understand how law enforcement officers describe their experiences and navigate the domestic violence referral process within rural jurisdictions with populations of fewer than 50,000.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a demographic survey in-person or via email.
2. Complete an audio-recorded interview conducted either in-person or via Zoom video conferencing. The interview is scheduled to last approximately 54 minutes. After the data has been analyzed, participants will be allowed to review the findings to verify their accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing more information to the law enforcement community, aiding policy and helping lawmakers identify improved training and procedures for more efficient law enforcement actions in domestic violence investigations.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in the study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you take daily.

How will personal information be protected?

All records of the study will be kept private. Any research publication will not include any of the participant's identifying information. The research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The researcher will conduct the interviews in a location where others cannot easily overhear the conversation.

Liberty University
IRB-FY21-22-1119
Approved on 7-13-2022

- The research data will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and any hard copies will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Interview recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer, and only the researcher will have access to those recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

There will be no compensation for this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in the study is voluntary. Your decision or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting the study is Aaron Cabbage. You may ask any questions you may have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Vincent Giordano, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd. Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email the IRB at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

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I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

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Approved on 7-13-2022

Appendix E: Demographic Survey

1. How old are you?

- a. 21-30 years of age
- b. 31-40 years of age
- c. 41-50 years of age
- d. Over 50 years of age

2. What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Transgender
- d) Non-binary
- e) Other (specify): _____

3. What is your racial/ethnic background? (Select all that apply)

- a) African American or Black
- b) Asian
- c) Hispanic or Latino
- d) Native American or Alaska Native
- e) White
- f) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- g) Multi-racial
- h) Other (specify): _____

4. What is your highest level of education?

- a) High School / GED

b) Some College

c) Associates Degree

d) Bachelor's Degree

e) Other Degree (please list) _____

5. Have you received any specialized domestic violence training? If yes, please list.

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Research Question One

How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe their experiences with making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your understanding of your law enforcement agency's domestic violence referral process for victims of domestic violence to advocacy services.
2. Please tell me about your experiences of referring victims to domestic violence advocacy services.
3. Please tell me about your interactions with members of domestic violence advocacy groups.

Probing Questions

1. "Tell me more about that . . ."
2. "Keep going . . ."
3. "What did you mean when you said . . ."
4. "Please explain what you mean . . ."
5. "Please provide an example . . ."
6. "Please tell me about that step-by-step . . ."

Research Question Two

How do rural law enforcement officers from agencies accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission describe how they navigate making referrals to advocacy groups for victims of domestic violence?

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about the steps you take in the domestic violence referral process to connect victims of domestic violence with domestic violence advocacy services.
2. Please tell me about any problems you have experienced while navigating the domestic violence referral process, including victims of domestic violence, law enforcement officers, and domestic violence advocacy groups.
3. Please tell me about the success you have experienced while navigating the domestic violence referral process to include victims of domestic violence, law enforcement officers, and domestic violence advocacy groups.

Probing Questions

1. Tell me more about that . . .”
2. “Keep going . . .”
3. “What did you mean when you said . . .”
4. “Please explain what you mean . . .”
5. “Please Provide an example . . .”
6. “Please tell me about that step-by-step . . .”

Appendix G: Sample Site Permission Request

[date]

[agency]

Attention: [sheriff]

Dear [insert name],

As a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. The title of my research project is "Law Enforcement and the Advocacy Referral Process."

The purpose of my research is to determine how law enforcement officers describe their experiences and navigation of the domestic violence referral process. Law enforcement officers selected for this study serve rural jurisdictions with populations less than 50,000 people, and they are officers employed with law enforcement agencies accredited through the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at the [insert agency name] in-person, by phone, or by Zoom meeting, as I interview your law enforcement officers. Data will be used to achieve a greater understanding of the domestic violence referral process in Virginia, gain a greater awareness of improving the referral process, and establish an improved relationship between victims of domestic violence, law enforcement officers, and advocates for victims of domestic violence.

Thank you for considering my request. Please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval if you choose to grant permission. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience. I can be reached [insert phone number] or email at

Sincerely,

Aaron Cabbage, Doctoral Student
Helms School of Government
Liberty University

Appendix H: Site Approval Goochland County Sheriff's Office**Site Approval Request**

March 12, 2022

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

[REDACTED]

After careful review of Aaron Cabbage's research proposal entitled "Law Enforcement and The Advocacy Referral Process," I have decided to permit Aaron Cabbage to conduct his study at the Goochland County Sheriff's Office (2938 River Rd W, Goochland, VA 23063) in-person, by phone, or by Zoom meeting with my law enforcement officers. I understand that I will be contacted by phone or email to confirm the dates and times of the study so appropriate arrangements can be made to accommodate Aaron Cabbage and my department's participants.

[REDACTED]

Sheriff

[REDACTED]

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

Appendix I: Site Approval Greene County Sheriff's Office**Cabbage, Aaron Allen**

From: Steve S. Smith [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2022 2:58 PM
To: Cabbage, Aaron Allen
Subject: [External] RE: -Incorrect Paper Work-

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

You have permission to talk to our employees. If you need anything else ,let me know.

From: Cabbage, Aaron Allen [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, March 19, 2022 1:13 AM
To: Steve S. Smith [REDACTED]
Subject: -Incorrect Paper Work-

Sheriff Smith,

Please sign these forms as they have my signature. The first email I sent you did not have my signature on the forms. I apologize for the inconvenience.

Regards,
Aaron Cabbage

Appendix J: Site Approval Winchester Police Department

Site Approval Request

March 12, 2022

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

[Redacted]

After careful review of Aaron Cabbage's research proposal entitled "Law Enforcement and The Advocacy Referral Process," I have decided to permit Aaron Cabbage to conduct his study at the Winchester Police Department (231 E Piccadilly St, Winchester, VA 22601) in person, by phone, or by Zoom meeting with my law enforcement officers. I understand that I will be contacted by phone or email to confirm the dates and times of the study so appropriate arrangements can be made to accommodate Aaron Cabbage and my department's participants.

[Redacted]

Chief

[Redacted]

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

Appendix K: Site Approval Woodstock Police Department**Site Approval Request**

March 12, 2022

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

After careful review of Aaron Cabbage's research proposal entitled "Law Enforcement and The Advocacy Referral Process," I have decided to permit Aaron Cabbage to conduct his study at the Woodstock Police Department (134 N Muhlenberg St, Woodstock, VA 22664) in person, by phone, or by Zoom meeting with my law enforcement officers. I understand that I will be contacted by phone or email to confirm the dates and times of the study so appropriate arrangements can be made to accommodate Aaron Cabbage and my department's participants.

Chief

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

Appendix L: Site Approval King George County Sheriff's Office**Site Approval Request**

March 12, 2022

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

[REDACTED]

After careful review of Aaron Cabbage's research proposal entitled "Law Enforcement and The Advocacy Referral Process," I have decided to permit Aaron Cabbage to conduct his study at the King George County Sheriff's Office (10445 Government Center Boulevard, King George, VA 22485) in-person, by phone, or by Zoom meeting with my law enforcement officers. I understand that I will be contacted by phone or email to confirm the dates and times of the study so appropriate arrangements can be made to accommodate Aaron Cabbage and my department's participants.

[REDACTED]

Sheriff

[REDACTED]

Aaron Cabbage
Doctoral Student

Appendix M: Interview Field Testing

Table – Interview Field Testing

Field Test Volunteer	Test Setting	Test Duration [00:00:00]	Transcribed Pages [single-space typed]	# Codes Produced
FTV-1	Home Office	54:00:00	21	5
FTV-2	Home Kitchen	60:00:47	18.5	5
FTV-3	Home Kitchen	60:00:56	15	5
Average		58:00:34	18.16	5
Total		174:01:03	54.5	15

Appendix N: Coding Table

Themes and Related Codes

Code	Main Themes	Subthemes
1.	Referral Process	Family Options Mandatory Arrest Victim Support Advocacy Literature Follow-Up Intervention Victim Advocacy Referral Protection
2.	Advocacy Group Assistance	Child Care Therapy Transportation Shelter Appointment Assistance Safety For Children Safety For Victim Communications Food
3.	Law Enforcement Involvement	Identifying Physical Aggressor Thorough Referral Domestic Violence Education Follow Through Ignoring Past Case Failures Patience Agency Culture
4.	Successful Experiences	Victim Independence Victim Cooperation Advocacy Reliability Defining Roles Helpful Consistent Reliable Responsive Supportive
5.	Problem Experiences	Victim Follow Through Victim Not Ready To Leave Victim Availability Numbers Drive Funding Second Guessing of Arrests Victim: Poor Details of Events Advocacy Interpretation of Laws