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# Criminal Justice Professionals Learn Promising Practices to Prosecute Domestic Violence Cases

Illinois law enforcement agencies reported 118,160 domestic-related crimes in 2016. The Illinois Family Violence Coordinating Council developed and provided training for police and other criminal justice practitioners to improve knowledge about domestic violence and apply this knowledge to support evidence-based approaches to prosecution and orders of protection. This article presents findings from 28 training evaluations held between September 2015 and September 2017. These evaluations provided evidence of some improvement post-training in confidence and knowledge of domestic violence and increased knowledge of promising practices to collect evidence for and investigate domestic violence and abuse cases.

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## Introduction

In 2013, Illinois Family Violence Coordinating Councils (IFVCC) staff and professional volunteer board members implemented the Illinois Integrated Protocol Initiative (IIP) promoting statewide adoption and implementation of model investigation protocols addressing domestic violence, elder abuse, and abuse of people with disabilities for law enforcement, prosecutors, the judiciary, court staff, advocates, emergency responders, and other criminal justice professionals. IFVCC Program Director and board members designed protocols and mini-tool kits to teach best or promising practices for handling abuse cases to increase prosecutions and use of orders of protection in cases of domestic or family violence and abuse of older adults and people with disabilities.

**Domestic Violence.** According to the Illinois State Police Illinois Uniform Crime Reporting System (I-UCR), Illinois law enforcement agencies reported 118,160 domestic-related crimes in 2016. A domestic-related crime is any offense attempted or committed between individuals in which a domestic relationship exists.

<sup>[1]</sup> According to police data, the most common relationship between victims and alleged offenders was a current or former dating relationship (32 percent), spouse or ex-spouse (15 percent), or parent victimized by their child (9 percent).<sup>[2]</sup> *Table 1* provides a list of domestic-related crimes reported by police departments into I-UCR by offense type in 2016.

**TABLE 1**  
**ILLINOIS DOMESTIC-RELATED OFFENSES IN 2016 (N=118,160)**

Offenses	Number of Incidents	Percent
Domestic Battery	65,652	56%
Violations of Orders of Protection	6,685	6%
Aggravated Domestic Battery	4,213	4%
Criminal Sexual Assaults	668	<1%
Criminal Sexual Abuse	659	<1%
Stalking	219	<1%
Aggravated Criminal Sexual Assaults	123	<1%
Homicides	68	<1%
Financial Exploitations of The Elderly	46	0%

(EXCERPTED FROM DOMESTIC OFFENSES, CRIME IN ILLINOIS 2016, OFFENSE TYPE 2016)

**Elder Abuse.** A total of 15,924 reports of abuse to Adult Protective Services were recorded state fiscal year 2016, a seven-percent increase over the previous state fiscal year. The majority (81 percent) involved individuals 60 years old or older. Over half (52 percent) of those reports were for financial exploitation. In addition, 40 percent of those reports included allegations of emotional abuse, 39 percent included allegations of passive neglect, and 23 percent included allegations of

physical abuse. Most victims of abuse were women (66 percent) and figures varied greatly by crime type. For instance, 81 percent of the victims of reported sexual abuse were women.

[3]

**Abuse of People with disabilities.** According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the rate of crimes against people with disabilities were 2.5 times higher than for persons without disabilities.

[4] Of the 15,924 reports of abuse in Illinois during state fiscal year 2016, almost 20 percent, or 2,992 reports, involved victims who were adults with disabilities ages 18 to 59 years.<sup>[5]</sup> Social workers and medical personnel reported a third of abuse cases, while family members and victims themselves reported nearly a quarter of the cases, at 15 percent and 8 percent, respectively. Many victims experienced multiple forms of abuse. Financial exploitation was the most frequently reported (52 percent). Financial exploitation was often reportedly accompanied by emotional abuse (40 percent).<sup>[6]</sup>

## Present Study

In 2014, the IFVCC Coordinator formed an Evaluation Workgroup consisting of IFVCC staff, board members and Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) research staff. The workgroup met regularly to review and develop assessments for their domestic violence protocols and mini-toolkits trainings. The goal of the protocols was to improve investigational practices to increase arrests and convictions of

domestic violence, and to provide supporting evidence for and encourage orders of protection. Model protocols were created specifically for both law enforcement and prosecutors. In addition, the workgroup created model protocols for working on domestic violence and abuse cases for older adults and persons with disabilities, specifically for both law enforcement and prosecutors. Portions of these protocols were adapted for use in mini-toolkits for other criminal justice professionals.

This study evaluated the trainings based upon model protocols and tool kits on domestic and family violence and abuse. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine if the training resulted in increased participant confidence in working domestic violence and abuse cases and knowledge of evidence-based procedures to document and investigate these cases.

## Methodology

A series of instruments were used to assess if confidence in using model protocol procedures and knowledge about domestic violence, older adults, and people with disabilities improved immediately post-training. Confidence ratings, pre/post-assessments, and session evaluations were created for the following trainings:

1. Model Domestic Violence Protocol
2. Model Protocol for Responding to Victims with Disabilities and Older Adults
3. Court Personnel Mini-Toolkits

4. Emergency Medical Services Mini-Toolkits
5. Probation Mini-Toolkits
6. 911 Telecommunicators Mini-Toolkits

The target population in this study was Illinois professionals in the criminal justice system who respond to domestic or family violence and abuse. These professionals included those in law enforcement, prosecutors, the judiciary, court staff, probation officers, advocates, emergency responders, and other professionals in the domestic violence field.

All assessment materials and procedures were reviewed and approved by ICJIA's Institutional Review Board. Local Family Violence Coordinating Council Training Teams and trainers received instructions to conduct anonymous pre- and post-assessments. All trainers were volunteers with professional backgrounds in either domestic violence victim advocacy, law enforcement, or human services. Local Family Violence Coordinating Council Training Teams distributed evaluations during 28 training sessions held between September 2015 and September 2017. A total of 990 assessments were completed (Table 2).

[7] Most of the trainings included law enforcement participation (64 percent). The trainers for court personnel submitted too few assessments for analysis. Their surveys were excluded from the study.

**TABLE 2****ILLINOIS INTEGRATED PROTOCOL INITIATIVE (IPI) TRAININGS 2015-2017**

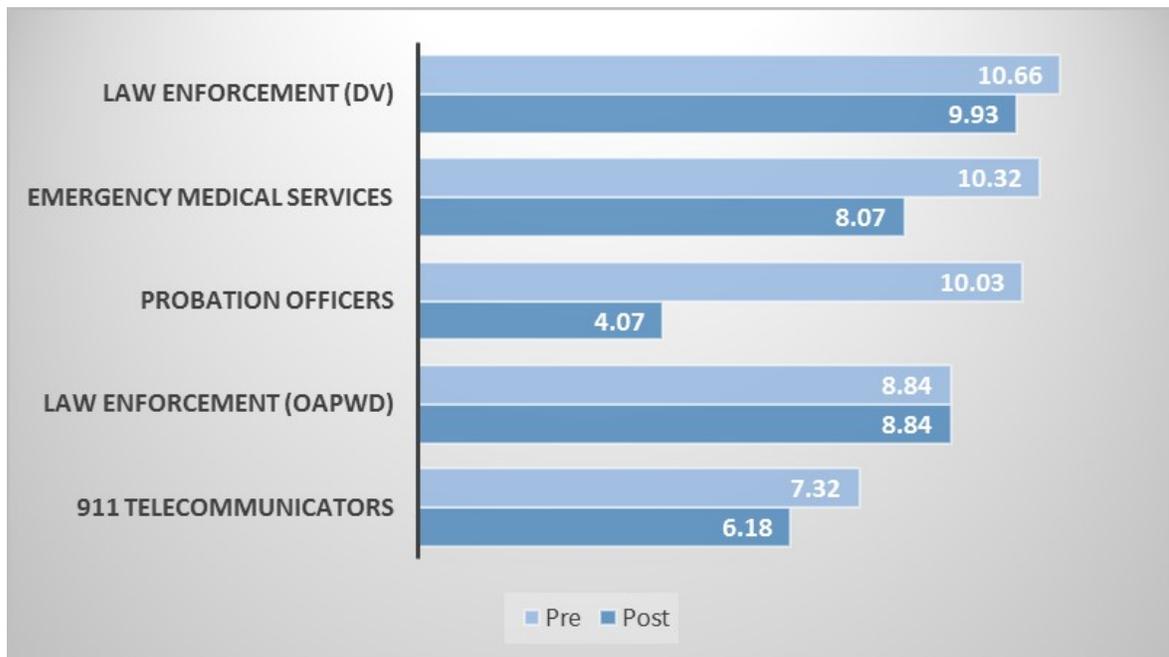
<b>Training Participants</b>	<b>Type of Training</b>	<b>Number of Trainings</b>	<b>Pre-Assessments</b>	<b>Post-Assessments</b>
Law Enforcement	Domestic violence investigations	15	206	240
	Elder abuse and abuse of persons with disability investigations	3	59	49
Probation Officers	Domestic violence and abuse against older adults and people with disabilities	4	73	116
Emergency Medical Services Personnel	Domestic violence and abuse against older adults and people with disabilities	3	103	92
911 Telecommunicators	Domestic violence and abuse against older adults and people with disabilities	2	22	22
Court Personnel	Domestic violence and abuse against older adults and people with disabilities	1	4	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>523</b>

## Main Findings

The Local Family Violence Coordinating Council Training Teams distributed evaluations during 28 training sessions held between September 2015 and September 2017. Researchers found significant differences in assessment scores post-training for law enforcement in domestic violence training. Also, significant differences occurred in several mini-toolkit trainings: emergency medical services, probation, and 911 telecommunicators. There were no significant differences for law enforcement training for older adults and persons with disabilities (Figure 1). The pre/post-assessment evaluations provided evidence of some improvement post-training in confidence and knowledge of domestic violence; and, increased knowledge of promising practices to collect evidence for and investigate domestic violence and abuse cases. EMS and probation personnel showed the most improvement in knowledge at post-assessment with 30 percent and 47 percent improvements, respectively. These improvements could reflect the fact that these participants reported less familiarity with the subject area on the pre-assessment and, therefore, had greater opportunity for knowledge growth.

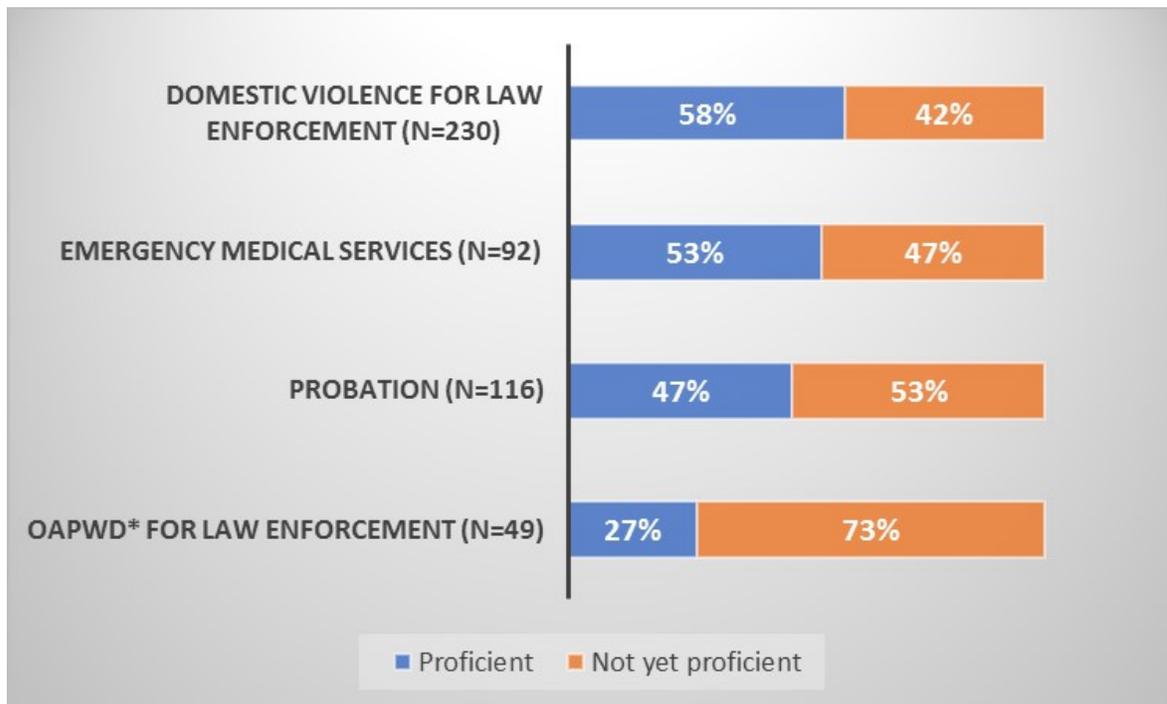
### FIGURE 1

#### IIPI PERCENT CORRECT PRE & POST-TRAINING



For the IIPI, a score of 70% correct on the assessments was used as a cutoff for proficiency in the training material. Researchers noted variation across the types of training in the proportion of participants that exhibited minimum proficiency at post-assessment, from 0 percent (911 Telecommunicators training, not shown) to 58 percent (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**  
**IIPI POST-TRAINING PROFICIENCY**



\*OAPWD REFERS TO OLDER ADULTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

## Conclusion

Although some learning occurred during these training sessions, these data also illuminated several areas where the training was not effective in imparting important information to the trainees. Information on signs of being abused and abusing others were not correctly recalled by many participants. Law enforcement trainees did not recognize that the most dangerous situation is when the batterer is agitated. Rather, it is common for many law enforcement professionals to perceive all domestic violence calls as dangerous.

[8] Most EMS participants did not remember immediately after the training that if domestic violence is suspected, then they should alert hospital security. Also, they answered incorrectly

the importance of documenting injuries, statements, and observations because they may be at the scene of a crime. Those working as 911 telecommunicators did not remember the importance of assessing the threat level, recording the call, and asking enough questions to record important details about the incident. Also, they did not absorb the fact that any disclosure of being choked with difficulty speaking must be assessed by emergency medical personnel. Choking or strangulation was emphasized in the training as a potentially life-threatening injury. The following recommendations were informed by these research results.

### **Continue to Offer Trainings and Encourage Booster Training**

Overall, the data indicated some or significant improvement in knowledge post-training. Trainings for 911 telecommunicators and law enforcement in the Older Adults and People with disabilities should continue, but should be monitored to determine if the assessment is congruent with the content of the training. Also, it may be that the material is so new to the training participants that more time should be spent in the training sessions with more interaction and discussion. A national study of state and local law enforcement training academies reported that out of 840 hours of basic training, an average of 13 of those hours addressed domestic violence.

[<sup>9</sup>] Ongoing training to supplement those 13 hours of training is important to combat common beliefs and misperceptions about domestic violence that police officers maintain even

after training in the academy. One researcher found that police officers operate under several incorrect presuppositions about domestic violence:

1. There is only one type of domestic violence.
2. Most domestic violence is minor.
3. Domestic violence is the same as other crimes.
4. Domestic violence calls are particularly dangerous for police officers.<sup>[10]</sup>

Another researcher found that most sheriffs surveyed maintained the myth that alcohol and drug abuse cause domestic violence.

<sup>[11]</sup> Ongoing training provides opportunities to reflect on domestic violence cases, consider biases and ineffective practices, and continually expose criminal justice professionals to best practices in their field.<sup>[12]</sup> Also, research recommendations for training police officers included regular officer training programs with an emphasis on the unique nature of domestic violence cases, the importance of these cases, and the collection of evidence that is vital to the prosecution.<sup>[13]</sup> Given the ubiquity of domestic violence offenses in Illinois, second only to theft,<sup>[14]</sup> police officers, prosecutors, and other professionals involved in these cases need the most up-to-date, evidence-based knowledge and procedures to combat them.

## **Develop Goals for Each Training Type**

Local Family Violence Coordinating Council Training Teams should consider regularly developing training goals. For example, if the level of proficiency is 70 percent correct post training, then this could be the standard for an effective training outcome. Showing a statistically significant change between pre- and post-assessment scores may be insufficient. Future evaluation should report how many more training participants reached or surpassed the level of proficiency demonstrated by their scores on the post assessment being equal to or above 70 percent correct.

### **Monitor Extent to Which Protocols and Materials Were Used in the Training**

It is not safe to assume that every training for a specific audience is the same or covers all the core competencies. It would be ideal to obtain the resources to continue training observations. In a study of domestic violence training for police officers in South Africa, researchers found practical examples and experiential training methods were sometimes cut short during actual training. These researchers found evidence to support more ongoing and practice-oriented training.

[<sup>15</sup>] In the future, IFVCC should consider monitoring training fidelity and ensure that any interactive components are not skipped due to time. For instance, one training involved listening to and evaluating 911 dispatches and phone calls from victims. It would negatively impact and de-standardize the training experience if this exercise were cut due to time.

## Identify and Provide the Level of Support and Time Needed to Master the Training Materials

With the level of complexity in the training and actual model protocols, it may be insufficient to conduct half or one-day training for knowledge acquisition, especially for skill acquisition, for example, writing more detailed police reports. Trainees need practice and opportunities to use and evaluate the information and procedures in their training, with demonstrated support from their supervisors. In addition, the cultural and organizational change to support model protocols and promising practices go beyond the current training model. For example, the protocols may assume that the law enforcement organizations value an approach that expects police to use both legal and service linkage skills during a domestic violence investigation. It would be important to confirm this value expectation.

[16] [17] Officers in one focus group study recommended more professional training, incident debriefing, specific feedback on case disposition, inter-agency collaboration, and evidence-based prosecution.<sup>[18]</sup> These and other research recommendations go beyond one-day trainings.<sup>[19]</sup>

In a study of an emergency department, researchers found that training alone was insufficient to improve assessments of domestic violence victims. They found that using a standard documentation form, and making systemic changes, such as

reminders, modeling documentation behaviors, and making the form accessible, contributed to improving and sustaining changes in these assessments.

[20]

## **Expand the Training Modality**

Online IFVCC trainings may allow for more participation with a proactive technical assistance component. Research supports the impact of online training for knowledge acquisition, dispute-resolution techniques, interviewing, “victim-supportive behaviors,” and data management, such as case information and risk assessments.

[21] [22] Local Family Violence Coordinating Council Training Teams and volunteers have trained 3,275 professionals from 15 of 23 judicial circuits in Illinois in classroom settings between 2011 and 2015. Given the ubiquity of webinars and the capacity of state government to support this learning modality, IFVCC Program Director and board members should consider using this format in partnership with organizations that train criminal justice professionals online, such as the National Criminal Justice Training Center.

## **Survey Supervisors to Measure Support for Evidence-Based Prosecutions of Domestic or Family Violence**

Although IFVCC’s board includes a variety of professionals in criminal justice, victim advocacy, and police training, it would be prudent to involve the supervisors of the trainees early in the training planning process. Not only must the

training be perceived as relevant and useful, but supervisors should also be able to monitor and support the use of the new skills and knowledge obtained in the training. An online survey exploring the supervisors' acceptance of the core competencies and procedures in the protocols and mini-tool kits could support and guide more effective training, and expand to different levels of training and organizational adoption of new knowledge and procedures.

[<sup>23</sup>] This study focused upon reactions to the training and knowledge acquisition. Additional levels of training would involve supervisors in observing and supporting behaviors recommended in the training, transferring the new behaviors to organizational policies, procedures, and culture, and performing outcome evaluations linking the new behaviors and procedures to better documentation, increased appropriate arrests, and increased orders of protection.<sup>[24]</sup> The survey may also include questions about allocating or re-allocating resources to evaluate domestic violence investigational practices. Members of the Society of Evidence Based Policing recommended that 10 percent of police department discretionary budgets support evaluations of police practices.<sup>[25]</sup>

The Illinois Integrated Protocol Initiative was supported by grant #2014-WE-AX-0025 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice.

The training evaluation was supported by grants #10-DJ-BX-0015, 12-DJ-BX-0203, and 13-DJ-BX-0012 awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance.

These grants were awarded to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Points of view or opinions contained within this document and the findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, the U.S. Department of Justice, or the Office on Violence Against Women.

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**Suggested citation:** Mock, L. (2018). *Illinois Integrated Protocol Initiative Training Evaluation Report, 2015-2017*. Chicago, IL: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

**<https://www.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.16582.32324>**  
**(<https://www.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.16582.32324>)**

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