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# Domestic Violence Blame Attributions in the State of Rhode Island

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**Domestic Violence Blame Attributions in the State of Rhode Island**

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## **Abstract**

The present study focuses on domestic violence blame attitudes in the state of Rhode Island. Using the Domestic Violence Blame Scale, (Petretic-Jackson, 1994), the researcher examined the attitudes of domestic violence shelter care workers, police officers and students. The results are of the three groups compared to one another and to the standard means established in Petretic-Jackson's (1994) study. Additional variables and statistics have been generated by a survey designed by the researcher. Demographical information was gathered and used as mediating independent variables in the study as well. The results suggest a difference between genders among college students, with men blaming the victim more. Domestic violence shelter workers had a lower victim blame score than other participants. Also, the results suggest that domestic violence training for police officers has a positive effect on the victim blaming beliefs of police. A discussion of differences and possible explanation follows. Limitations of the study and an evaluation of the Domestic Violence Blame Scale are discussed.

## **Introduction**

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is an important area of study in the social sciences and is one of the most pressing social problems in our society. The literature on domestic violence is vast (Cantos, Neidig & O'Leary, 1993); the topic is one of the most frequently explored issues in modern social sciences (Harrison & Esqueda, 1998). The purpose of this paper is to examine attributions of domestic violence by law enforcers, social service workers and college students.

Domestic violence is a major problem in America today. Over three million women are assaulted by a domestic partner every year (Harrison & Esqueda, 1998). As a result, over 25% of women report some form of domestic violence in their marriages at some point in their lives (Harrison & Esqueda, 1998). Between twenty and thirty percent of visits to emergency rooms are due to domestic violence or sexual assault. Women are six times more likely to be victims of violence at the hands of a domestic partner (Harrison & Esqueda, 1998). It has been suggested that women are victimized twice in the case of domestic violence; first in the actual incident of violence and, second, in the perception of their responsibility for their victimization by the police and public (Summers & Feldman, 1984). This attribution that women can be at fault for their own victimization is called "blame attribution" (Sinclair, 1985).

To understand domestic violence, one must understand the complex nature of abuse. The theory put forth by Lenore Walker (1979) is that in domestic relationships abuse occurs in a circular pattern. There are three phases involved. First, there is the *tension-building phase* in which there is an increase in domestic tension characterized by arguments and stresses. Second, there is the *violent incident phase*, where the abuser

attacks the victim. Finally, the third phase is the *honeymoon phase*, where there is a renewed affection as a form of penance for the battering. After the honeymoon phase, the relationship slides into the tension-building phase once again and the cycle continues (Walker, 1979). It is a cycle that has been supported by numerous studies. Thus, this theory is one of the most popular and frequently cited in the literature.

When speaking of attributions by observers, two theories are relevant. The first is the *defensive attribution theory* (Shaver, 1970), which states that an observer's amount of victim blame will decrease as the similarity to the victim increases. This is due to a perceived defense mechanism; an observer will not wish to be viewed poorly if something similar happens to him/her. In the case of domestic violence, women would perceive victims to be at less fault because as women, they could be in a similar situation. Thus, victim blame primarily comes from a male observer because they perceive that they have less in common with a female victim and more in common with the a male perpetrator.

A second theory for explaining victim blame in domestic violence is the *just world theory* (Lerner, 1980). This theory proposes that observers will blame the victim because they do not think that there is an innocent victim. People want to believe in *cause and effect*. The belief is that if one avoids victimization, they will not be victimized. Those that are victimized did not prevent their own victimization. Thus, victimization only occurs when one does not take the steps needed to protect oneself. This is the "cause and effect". According to this perspective, every victim will be attributed some responsibility in their victimization. Interestingly, it is those observers that feel they have the most in common with the victim that will blame them. This is largely because observers want to

feel that by taking charge of their actions they will not contribute to their own victimization. Due to this, they blame victims because victims failed to take care of themselves.

An important topic when discussing any form of attribution is the concept of the *fundamental attribution error*. As noted in Watson (1987), the fundamental attribution error is when observers attribute behavior not to external forces, but internal ones. The external or situational causes are not considered, and more emphasis is placed on individual characteristics. This is important with domestic violence, because according to this theory observers will be much more likely to blame the victim rather than attributing the fault to external factors such as the situation or perpetrator.

Hiller (1993) suggested that men were much more likely than women to blame a female victim of domestic violence. Also, she suggested that people with traditional sex role stereotypes were more likely to blame female victims than those individuals with less traditional gender-role concepts. In her study, she found that older women and conservative men were much more likely to have traditional ideas on sex roles and were more likely to blame the female victim of domestic violence for her victimization. Outside factors influence attribution of blame in domestic violence. Delgado et al (1997) found that if jealousy was found to be a factor for the cause of domestic violence, it was deemed to be more acceptable and “unavoidable” by older observers in Europe. This was also discovered in American domestic violence studies (Pavlou et al, 2001).

Some argue that it is a cultural norm in America for observers to blame the victim more than the perpetrator in domestic violence incidents (Summers & Feldman, 1984). Authorities, such as the police and judges, have been less harsh to men who assault their

wives than to men who assault strangers (Head, 1981). Ho (1995) found that knowledge of prior domestic violence did not affect people's perceptions of women who fought back and killed their husbands. It has also been found that women are more likely to be discredited and disbelieved when they resist violent assaults, including domestic violence (Branscombe and Weir, 1992). Burke (1990) found that male jurors and judges imposed lighter sentences on male perpetrators in domestic violence cases. This could be attributed to the earlier mentioned theories.

Observer opinion varies greatly in domestic violence and is heavily influenced by external factors. Blame attribution is the establishment of accountability and/or responsibility of people involved in an event (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2004). Cook and Harris (1995) found that observers were more likely to blame the victim if the victim was believed to have done something to instigate the violence done to them. This often meant that women doing relatively minor things, such as being late to a meeting with their partner, were still assigned more blame than women that had not done anything that could be perceived as instigating. Gender is another important aspect of domestic violence blame attribution. Female observers are more likely to blame the male perpetrator than male observers (Sugarman & Cohn, 1986). Men are more likely to blame external causes for the domestic violence, such as alcohol (Richardson and Campbell, 1980).

Two groups included in this study are police officers and domestic violence shelter workers. Police officers are often seen as unsympathetic toward domestic violence (Miller, 2003). It has been shown that, even though domestic violence awareness is increasing, some police officers still do not view domestic violence cases as legitimate

police work and that male officers are more lenient to domestic violence offenders (Hilton, 1989). Both police and social workers tend to under-respond to victims' requests for help, possibly due to an overload of cases (Goyette, 1990). Home (1994) found that social workers and police officers differ greatly in their attribution of blame in domestic violence cases. Both held the man responsible, but police were more likely to also assign blame to the women or to other factors. Police and social workers also differed in their assessment of the magnitude of the seriousness of similar cases. Home's study also found that the domestic violence training that police officers get is inadequate; a few hours, or a couple of days at best. This training is not enough to change officers' long-held attitudes.

#### *Domestic Violence in the State of Rhode Island*

A key piece of legislation of domestic violence laws in the state of Rhode Island is the revolutionary Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA). It is one of the first of its kind in the country. Code 12-29-3 of the DVPA explains what constitutes domestic violence. Additionally, code 12-29-3 D states that an officer may not simply dismiss a domestic violence incident as both partners being equally responsible. The act defines that the perpetrator must be the *primary aggressor*. The person that is the primary aggressor is determined by the police as the person that used the most force without just cause. What constitutes just cause is at the discretion of the responding police officers. Typically, it is the person who uses violence when it was not proper to do so. For example, if a man defends himself against his wife's physical assault with too much force

(as in defending his wife's physical blows with a knife), he is the primary aggressor. A man who slaps his wife in response to a non-threatening action is the primary aggressor. A woman who uses a gun to defend herself against a partner's verbal abuse is the primary aggressor.

Another aspect of the DVPA that has caused great controversy is the inappropriately named "Mandatory Arrest" clause. This is also known as clause 12-29-3 d-f. The media, and reportedly some domestic violence advocates, have suggested that this clause means that a police officer *must* make an arrest at a domestic violence call. During brief interviews the researcher conducted, police officers were in an uproar at the false implications of this. It was believed that this would reduce police discretion. In an interview I conducted, one police officer was quoted as saying that he was told by a domestic violence court advocate that, "The only probable cause you need to make an arrest is a woman's statement." However, after much legal investigation, it can be seen that this is not the case. What the clause allows is for the state to be the *charging witness*. This means that the victim does not need to press charges for the aggressor to go to jail. This clause now elevates the crime of domestic violence to the same level as murder; there does not need to be a testifying witness to bring charges against the accused. Many police chiefs in the state of Rhode Island have gone on record as stating that they feel this alleviates pressure from victims and is a positive change to the laws.

Statistics of domestic violence in the state of Rhode Island are generated mainly from the Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault system. Forms entitled "DV/SA Forms" are filled out by police departments following an incidence of domestic violence and sexual assault. The form is easy to read and very detailed in its description of the assault. The

form can list numerous aspects of the crime, from the description of the perpetrator to the exact nature of the crime. These forms are compiled into a domestic violence report for the entire state. Statewide, domestic violence cases occur an average of 8,200 times annually. That number was highest in 2001 at 9,154 and reached its lowest point in 2004 at 8,143 (RI Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit).

The purpose of this study is to examine the domestic violence attributions of three groups in the state. I believe that the findings with the college students will be congruent with Bryant and Spencer's (2003) study with previous domestic violence history influencing the results. I expect there will be a difference between genders, with males having higher victim blame than women congruent with Sugarman & Cohn's (1986) study. Police will have higher perpetrator and situational blame attributions. Shelter workers will have the lowest victim blame scores.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

College students are one group that this study examines, because they have a wide range of attributions about domestic violence. Many of them are first generation college students and may be victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. Those living on campus may be witness to or victim of to abuse and may develop their own ideas on domestic violence. Also, they may have developed attitudes from their course work at Rhode Island College.

Police from five communities were recruited for this study. They were chosen because these communities agreed to participate, and they are a varied sample of communities in the state of Rhode Island. The five communities included in this study are Central Falls, Cumberland, Glocester, Narragansett and Pawtucket. Central Falls has a population near 19,000 living in the small area of 1.2 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau). This city reported 240 domestic violence cases in 2004, which was an increase from 2003 (RI Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit). The city of Central Falls is a very urban area with many industrial areas. The city of Cumberland has a population of 7,800 living in an area of 3.2 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau). Cumberland reported 117 domestic violence cases in 2004, a decrease from 2003 (RI Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit). Cumberland is less urban center than Central Falls or Pawtucket. Glocester has a population of almost 10,000 people in a large rural area of 54.8 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau). Glocester reported 81 incidents of domestic violence in 2004 (RI Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit). This city is a very rural area with a large amount of land. The town of Narragansett has a population of 3,671 located in a waterfront area that is roughly 3.6 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau). Narragansett reported 107 domestic violence cases in 2004, a decrease from 2003 (RI Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit). Narragansett is a beach community with a high tourist population. Pawtucket is the largest city examined in this study. It has a population of 72,958 people and covers an area of 8.7 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau). It is a major metropolitan area in the state. Pawtucket reported 849 cases of domestic violence, a

sharp increase from 2003 (RI Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit) (see Figure 1 in appendix)

Also included in this study are domestic violence shelter care workers. There are six domestic violence shelters in the state of Rhode Island; Blackstone Valley, the Domestic Violence South County center, Elizabeth Buffum Chace center, Sojourner House, the Woman's Center of Rhode Island (WCRI) and the Woman's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol County (WRCNBC). Four of the six shelters agreed to participate in this study; Elizabeth Buffum Chace center, Sojourner House, the Woman's Resource Center of Rhode Island and the Woman's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol County. All domestic violence shelters in Rhode Island serviced 570 women in 2004, a dramatic decrease from 2003 (Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence). Individually the shelters reported sheltering the following numbers of women: Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center (136), Sojourner House (22), WCRI (194), WRCNBC (22) (Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence). (See Figure 2 in appendix). Shelter workers are included in this study because of their direct involvement in domestic violence cases. They are often as important to domestic violence incidents as police officers. Because of their experience, I believe that they will have different attitudes and the public.

### *Instrument*

The instrument that is being used in this study is the Domestic Violence Blame scale. This scale was constructed by Dr. Patricia Petretic-Jackson to test blame attributions of domestic violence. It is a 23 item self-report questionnaire that uses a six-point Likert scale with responses from "Almost Never/ Strongly Disagree (1)" to "Almost

Always/ Strongly Agree (6)". The questions are then divided to test four areas of blaming: victim, perpetrator, society and situation (Petretic-Jackson et al, 1994). Situational blame is the amount of responsibility placed on factors such as alcohol use and family issues for the cause of domestic violence. Perpetrator blame is the amount of responsibility placed on the assaulting person, such as the inability to control their violence, for the cause of domestic violence. Societal blame is the amount of responsibility placed on factors such as media displays of violence and sexuality and a male-dominated society, for the cause of domestic violence. Finally, victim blame is assigning responsibility to the victim for their victimization (Petretic-Jackson et al, 1994). In her study, Petretic-Jackson tested health care professionals and mental health professionals. The means were Situational Blame = 4.20, Perpetrator Blame = 4.10. Societal Blame = 3.40, and Victim Blame = 2.20. Victim blame was much lower than all other factors. Situational aspects were held higher in responsibility than others (Petretic-Jackson et al, 1994). Bryant and Spencer (2003) used the Domestic Violence Blame Scale in a study conducted with college students, finding that a previous history of domestic violence heavily influenced the results.

### Procedure

The first group in this study was college students attending Rhode Island College. A convenience sample of classes was chosen to participate in this study. The researcher went to these classes to administer the survey. The classes were chosen for ease of access, professor and class agreement to participate, and generalizability (an attempt was made to select as many "general" or "introduction" style courses as possible to add diversity to the sample). Any student that was also a police officer or shelter worker was

asked not to participate in the study. The students filled out the surveys and the attached questionnaire for demographic data. This questionnaire asked each student their gender, sexual orientation, major, previous history of domestic violence and their opinions on police and shelter handling of domestic violence cases. Three hundred surveys were given out in a one month period with 281 being returned to the researcher. Eight of these were eliminated due to problems with the survey's completion making the final number in the study 273 (92 male participants and 180 female participants. The gender breakdown of Rhode Island College is roughly 60/30 with females being in the majority). This gave the researcher a sample that represented 3.4% of the population of Rhode Island College students.

The police departments were contacted by phone and asked to participate in this study. Many agencies declined, citing a very hectic workload and could not devote the needed time to the study. Others refused not citing a reason. The five included in this study were chosen because they agree to participate and the researcher had contacts with them which eased some of the burden of data collection. The Domestic Violence Blame Scale (DVBS) was administered to the police with an attached questionnaire for demographic data about the police officer's career. This questionnaire asked the officer's rank, years on the force, and amount and opinion of the domestic violence training. In addition to the (DVBS), a questionnaire was given to the chiefs of the departments. This questionnaire asked about the department's statistics and training for domestic violence. The DVBS surveys were administered during the change of shifts at "roll call". Roll call is the meeting period where all officers working the shift are assigned their duties. The surveys were passed out by the researcher or by a police officer during a late shift. The

officers were asked if they wanted to participate in the study and that it was completely voluntary and confidential. Those officers who wanted to participate were given the survey and filled it out after the roll call. Overall attrition rate was 66.8 %. Each department that agreed responded with numerous surveys, bringing the total to 92. Pawtucket's response rate was 18.3% with three surveys needing to be eliminated by the researcher due to mistakes. Central Fall's response rate was 69.2%. Gloucester's response rate was 56.2%. Cumberland's response rate was 57.4%. Finally, Narragansett's response rate was 22.5% with one survey needing to be eliminated.

The domestic violence shelters were contacted by phone and asked if they wanted to participate. All desired to participate, but two cited that they were unable to due to an overworked staff. The four that agreed were sent ten copies of the DVBS each with postage in order to return them to the researcher. The Woman's Center of Rhode Island was unable to complete the surveys. The three shelters that remained returned 19 surveys back. Of these 19 two needed to be eliminated.

The means of the DVBS scores for each of the three groups were compared to one another and to the means of health care professionals established by Petretic-Jackson et. al (1994). Differences were then compared among the demographic data that had been gathered. These data included the race and ages of the participants. In the case of college students, questions about race, major and domestic violence history were also asked. Police officers and college students demographic data were analyzed for any influence on the scores on DVBS.

## Results

The means for the nation average gathered in the original study were: Situational Blame = 4.20 (SD=1.20), Perpetrator Blame = 4.10 (SD= 1.01), Societal Blame = 3.40 (SD=.96), and Victim Blame = 2.20 (SD=.79) (Petretic-Jackson et al, 1994). The means for the domestic violence shelter workers were: Situational Blame = 2.47, Perpetrator Blame = 3.58, Societal Blame = 3.09, and Victim Blame = 1.33. The means for the police officers were: Situational Blame = 3.68 (SD=.93), Perpetrator Blame = 3.58 (SD=.66), Societal Blame = 2.43 (SD=.63), and Victim Blame = 1.82 (SD=.63). Finally, the means for the college students were: Situational Blame = 3.59, Perpetrator Blame = 3.80, Societal Blame = 2.94, and Victim Blame = 1.74.

Using a one-way ANOVA, the means of the three groups in this study were compared. They were then compared to the national means found in the original DVBS study. The differences were all significant with  $p$  values ranging from .023 to .000. On the Situational Blame scale, only the shelter workers varied significantly, scoring lower (MEAN= 2.47, SD= .92) than the police, students and the average ( $F= 9.98$ ,  $df= 3$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Interestingly, there were no significant differences between the four groups on Perpetrator Blame. On the Societal Blame scale, only the police varied significantly from the others. Their scores were significantly lower ( $p=.000$ ) than the college students and the average and shelter workers ( $p=.002$ ). On the final scale, Victim Blame, only the domestic violence shelter workers differed by being significantly lower (MEAN= 1.33, SD= .49). This difference was  $p=.041$  with the college students ( $F=4.52$ ,  $df=3$ ),  $p=.014$

with the police ( $F=4.52$ ,  $df=3$ ) and  $p=.006$  with the average ( $F=4.52$ ,  $df=3$ ). (see Figure 3 in appendix)

With the police, there were differences between departments. The means for the Central Falls Police Department were: Situational Blame = 3.31 (SD= 1.06), Perpetrator Blame = 3.50 (SD= .72). Societal Blame = 2.41 (SD= .69), and Victim Blame = 1.64 (SD= .52). The means for the Narragansett Police Department were: Situational Blame = 3.84 (SD=.50), Perpetrator Blame = 3.44 (SD= .67). Societal Blame = 2.47 (SD= .62), and Victim Blame = 1.80 (SD= .37). The means for the Pawtucket Police Department were: Situational Blame = 4.06 (SD= .83), Perpetrator Blame = 3.44 (SD= .67). Societal Blame = 2.47 (SD= .56), and Victim Blame = 2.10 (SD= .68). The means for the Gloucester Police Department were: Situational Blame = 4.04 (SD= .72), Perpetrator Blame = 3.74 (SD= .64), Societal Blame = 2.47 (SD= .62), and Victim Blame = 1.72 (SD= .64). The means for the Cumberland Police Department were: Situational Blame = 3.32 (SD= .82), Perpetrator Blame = 3.72 (SD= .60), Societal Blame = 2.55 (SD= .70), and Victim Blame = 1.53 (SD= .49). (see Figure 4 in appendix)

Using a one-way ANOVA the differences between departments were investigated. On the Situational Scale, the only significant difference was between Central Falls and Pawtucket with Central Falls scoring significantly lower ( $F= 3.77$ ,  $df= 4$ ,  $p=.014$ ). Among the Societal and Perpetrator variables, there was no significant difference between the departments. Victim Blame scores were significantly different between Pawtucket, Central Falls and Cumberland, with Pawtucket scoring significantly higher than the other two ( $F= 4.59$ ,  $df= 4$ ,  $p=.006$  and  $p=.004$  respectively). (see Table 1 in appendix)

Another factor that influenced police scores was whether or not additional domestic violence training was offered. Each of the police departments offer four hours of additional domestic violence training annually. With the extra training, the officer's scores on the Situational Blame scale were significantly lower ( $t= 2.48, df=82, p=.015$ ). Also, the officer's Victim Blame score was significant lower if additional training was taken ( $t=3.87, df= 82, p=.000$ ). The percentages of officers that took additional domestic violence training were as follows: Central Falls = 53%, Narragansett = 100%, Pawtucket 5%, Glocester = 56% and Cumberland = 31%. With the police officers no significant difference was found between the scores on the DVBS and rank, age, or years on the force. (see Tables 2 and 3 in appendix)

With college students, many significant differences were found. The means were as follows: Police Handling= 3.57 (SD= 1.02), Situational Blame = 3.59 (SD= .94), Perpetrator Blame = 3.80 (SD= .73), Societal Blame = 2.94 (SD= .72), and Victim Blame = 1.74 (SD= .64). (see Table 4 in appendix) Firstly, there was a significant gender difference in the sample. Women scored significantly lower with all of the DVBS scores except for Situational Blame (Perpetrator Blame =  $t= -2.36, df= 271, p=.019$ ) (Male MEAN= 3.65, SD= .71) (Female MEAN= 3.87, SD= .73) (Societal Blame =  $t= -3.11, df= 271, p=.002$ ) (Male MEAN= 2.75, SD= .65) (Female MEAN= 3.04, SD= .74) (Victim Blame =  $t= 3.98, df=271, p=.000$ ) (Male MEAN= 1.95, SD= .68) (Female MEAN= 1.63, SD= .59). Women were also more likely to believe that police were not doing a good job of handling domestic violence cases. This difference was significant ( $t=3.20, df=271, p=.002$  level) (Male MEAN= 3.84, SD= 1.03) (Female MEAN= 3.42, SD= .99). (see

Table 5 in appendix) There was no difference between the DVBS scores or the perception of police handling with age, race, or sexual orientation.

Previous history of domestic violence influenced some of the data. Thirty-five percent of the students responded that they had experience some form of domestic violence in their family life. Twenty-three percent of students surveyed said that they had been victims of domestic violence by a partner at some point in their lives. Sixty-seven percent of students said that they knew someone that had been the victim of domestic violence. Those who had experienced domestic violence in their home lives were significantly more likely to believe that the police were doing a poor job of handling domestic violence cases ( $t = -3.72$ ,  $df = 269$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Students who had experienced domestic violence in their own relationships had higher scores on the Situational Blame scale ( $t = 2.93$ ,  $df = 271$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Finally, students that had known someone that had been a victim, were more likely to give police a poor rating ( $t = -2.67$ ,  $df = 271$ ,  $p = .010$ ). The number of women who would seek aid was approaching significance in relation to men ( $p = .060$ ), however a majority of women (68%) said that they would *not* seek aid from a shelter. Additionally, a large majority of men said that they would not seek aid from a shelter (81%). (see Table 6 in appendix) There was no significant difference between genders in any of the domestic violence history reports. Men were just as likely as women to have had domestic violence in their own families, to have known someone who had been a victim, and *be victims themselves*. There was no difference between race, age or sexual orientation and domestic violence histories.

Interestingly, two majors had a significant influence on the DVBS scores. Both Criminal Justice and Business majors had higher Victim Blame scores ( $F = 2.05$ ,  $df =$

272,  $p=.007$ ). No other differences were found among the majors. (see Figure 5 in appendix)

### **Discussion**

All of the hypotheses of this study were supported by the results. Police and shelter workers were assumed by the researcher to have different attitudes than the results of mental health workers in original study. The results support the findings of Bryant and Spencer (2003). The reason for a difference with police and shelter workers could be that as the training and experiences of the police and shelter workers changes their opinions from the norms presented in Petretic-Jackson's study.

There could be numerous reasons for the differences in college students being the student's background, experiences, living arrangements (dorm or non-dorm) and course loads. It seems that shelter workers are the most different.

With police, differences in departments can be attributed to many factors such as population diversity and density. Also, geographic areas may have greater effects on the statistics, such as urban areas and case load affecting the statistics. Pawtucket, being the largest area studied, could have different attitudes than the other departments. Thus, the more urban areas, having more crime, may have different opinions and experiences concerning domestic violence.

A very interesting and important finding is that additional training was a positive influence on police attributes, mainly lowering of victim blame. This suggests that the

training is working and is well worth the time. Every department in this study has four hours of extra domestic violence training available to officers annually. Departments should encourage their officers to undergo this additional training whenever possible.

There was no significant difference between male and female police officers. This could be due to the very small number of responding female police officers (n= 4 out of the sample of 92).

With college students, the gender differences were expected. An explanation can be found in the defensive attribution theory. Women will perceive themselves as more likely to be the victims of domestic violence, thus will have more “liberal” views on domestic violence. These findings were consistent with the previous findings of Sugarman and Cohn (1986).

The statistics concerning domestic violence history were also interesting. The twenty-three percent of the student population that had experienced domestic violence in their own relationships was consistent with crime statistics. The percentages of other domestic violence, such as incidence of family domestic violence and having a friend who was a victim of domestic violence, were surprising. Over sixty-seven percent of students reported that they knew someone that had been the victim of domestic violence.

The difference in DVBS scores among majors is interesting as well. Criminal Justice majors having higher victim blame scores was shocking. With important courses such as Victimology and Woman’s Studies being offered in the department, it is troubling that the students blamed the victim. This could be because most students in Justice Studies wish to become police officers, but do not take courses like Victimology because it is not required. As a result, their beliefs are not altered by the course load at the college

as we would expect. The business majors' difference is hard to explain considering that other majors similar in a lack of interpersonal contact outlook, like Mathematics and the Sciences, did not share such high victim blame. This could be due to the background of the students in the program. Further research would be needed to better explain this difference.

The lack of other differences among the college students shows a fact of domestic violence that is commonly overlooked. This is that domestic violence is a social ill that affects all people regardless of race, ethnic background, *and even gender*. To answer to this, perhaps Rhode Island College should have more resources available to the students to help them with domestic violence issues. The Rhode Island College Counseling Center should realize the growing problem of domestic violence that is occurring among its students. Additionally, the discouraging number of people who said that they would not seek help from a domestic violence shelter needs to be addressed. Domestic violence shelters need to be more able to reach people in need. Important questions need to be asked. Why are these people reluctant to seek aid? Is there something that can be done? Additional research is needed in this area.

Domestic violence shelters do not handle homosexual (lesbian) domestic violence as readily as they do receive training, but state that lesbian domestic violence cases are hard to handle. Reasons are stated that it was harder to protect a victim from a female attacker, because women are allowed in the shelters with little background checking. Workers interviewed said that they have had issues with female attackers, claiming to be victims and in need of aid, enter the shelter to find the location of their victims. The same has happened with male aggressors sending female accomplices to find the location of

their victims. The state of Rhode Island has *no* shelters to aid for male homosexual domestic violence. Male homosexuals must be referred to out-of-state shelters. This is due to the gender barrier within the domestic violence shelters. The barrier is that men are not allowed to interact with the victims; for fear that a male attacker will find his victim. However, what about men that are victims of other men, or other women? What about lesbians that have an abusive partner? This barrier and difficulty with homosexual cases is troubling, because many studies have stated that domestic violence is as prevalent in gay and lesbian relationships, if not slightly more so (McClennen, 2005). Perhaps Rhode Island needs another domestic violence shelter to help meet the needs of same-sex domestic violence victims.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the population was only approximately three percent of the population of students attending Rhode Island College. A larger sample might be needed to further verify the results. Second, a more representative sample of the majors and races may be needed. Third, this study only applies to Rhode Island College students. Typically, Rhode Island College participants represent a population of students that are more urban and commuting. These results may not be generalizable to other colleges such as the University of Rhode Island and other institutions throughout the state. Fourthly, the shelter workers of the domestic violence shelters did not provide as many participants or data as the police departments and Rhode Island College. This could possibly be due to the fact that access to shelters is very limited and the researcher, being male, had further restriction to the shelters.

Finally, another limitation of the research was the Domestic Violence Blame Scale. I disagree with some of the questions memberships in some areas. I feel that

question 20 may not actually test victim blame, but instead test societal blame. Also, this scale does not allow the participants to consider domestic violence in homosexual relationships, nor does it accurately allow for men being the victim of female domestic violence. This is a considerable drawback to this survey and the results gathered from homosexuals and bi-sexuals may have been affected. The language of the survey is very clear that the woman is always the victim and the man is always the aggressor. However, this is not always the case. Changes should be made to this survey to accommodate an updated perspective on domestic violence.

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