Research Note

COPS ON CALL: SUMMONING THE POLICE TO THE SCENE OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

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In this paper, we examine factors that affect whether the police are summoned to incidents of spousal violence. The actions of bystanders are distinguished from the actions of victims, and we find that victims and bystanders are moved by somewhat different influences. We also find that the immediate features of the situation dominate the decision to call the police and that many legitimate concerns are salient (e.g., whether there are injuries). In addition, however, some extralegal influences are important so that different offenders engaged in the same crime do not necessarily face the same risks of apprehension. For example, other things equal, bystanders are less likely to call the police if the offender and victim are living together.

I. INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, there has been a growing concern among social scientists and policy-makers about appropriate criminal justice responses to incidents of spousal violence. Given the critical role of police officers as the court of first resort, the extant literature makes police behavior a major theme (LaFave, 1965; Parnas, 1967; Black, 1972; Bard, 1974; Roy, 1977; Potter, 1978; Emerson, 1979; Berk and Loseke, 1981). There has not, however, been a commensurate interest in how the police response is invoked. While Skolnick (1967), Wilson (1968), Black (1970), Reiss (1971), Rubinstein (1973), and others have observed that the majority of police interventions are reactive, there is virtually no data in these studies on why

citizens summon the police in some situations and not others. Equally important, domestic disputes are rarely highlighted. There are, alternatively, occasional observations by those writing on wife battery issues about why victims may be reluctant to call the police (e.g., Walker, 1979; Dobash and Dobash, 1979), but the few studies that focus on intervention in spousal violence incidents are primarily concerned with why bystanders choose to involve themselves (Shotland and Straw, 1976; O'Neil, 1979). We have yet to find a systematic, empirical study taking the victim's point of view.

Understanding how the police come to be involved in spousal violence is important. Not only is the general issue of police mobilization of theoretical interest, but ongoing efforts to minimize spousal violence through official interventions require information about how such cases come to the attention of authorities. In addition, the study of incidents in which victims are intimately related to their assailants and, often, economically dependent on them, may hold special lessons for the victimology and "good samaritan" literatures (e.g., Latane and Darley, 1970; Bickman, 1975; Smithson and Amato, 1982). Finally, analyses of police and judicial responses to "domestic disturbances" may be distorted by sample selection bias (Garber *et al.*, 1983). Understanding the process by which police are invoked, and adequately modeling it, are first steps in controlling for this problem (Heckman, 1979; Berk, 1983).

In this paper, we estimate for incidents of spousal violence several competing causal models of situations in which victims call the police, a bystander calls the police, or the police are not summoned. The data come from detailed interviews with 201 female victims of spousal violence, some of which resulted in police intervention and some of which did not. The quality of the data allows us to consider a number of *situational* factors that heretofore have not been systematically studied.

II.   MODEL SPECIFICATION, DATA, AND STATISTICAL ISSUES

Given the special characteristics of spousal violence incidents, the existing literature on helping behavior and responses to crime provides little guidance for *a priori* model specification. There is clearly no deductive theory speaking directly to our concerns, and the empirical work is tangential or weak. None of the experimental studies of helping behavior (Latane and Darley, 1970; Bickman and Green, 1975; Bickman,

1976; Shotland and Straw, 1976) places bystanders at risk of immediate physical harm or later retaliation, and none has been implemented in a private residence, let alone the offender's home. Likewise, Ringer's work (1981), written within the "responses to crime" tradition, is quite sensitive to the special problems of female crime victims, but wife battery is barely mentioned. And O'Neil's survey efforts (1979), which purport to focus on domestic violence incidents, rest on a single brief vignette with questionable construct validity and a statistical analysis limited to a series of bivariate measures of association. Thus, our model specification must rely on distant extrapolations from the research literature, impressions from clinical accounts (Walker, 1979), a healthy dose of common sense, and some inductive leads provided by the data.

Our models all seek to explain a single endogenous variable with three (nominal) categories: the victim calls the police, a bystander (not necessarily an eyewitness) calls the police, and no one calls the police (so, as a consequence, police are not involved in the incident).[1] In principle, this implies three distinct outcomes, two of which are not mutually exclusive; both a victim and a bystander might call the police.

As an empirical matter, however, the three outcomes *are* mutually exclusive in our data. This is consistent with well-known underreporting of incidents of spousal violence by both victims and bystanders, and with the perceptions of police officers and dispatchers in a number of locales who have told us that multiple calls for the same "domestic" are extremely rare.[2]

Four types of exogenous variables are included in our models. The first consists of answers to ten questions that asked victims about things that worried them when they were deciding whether to call the police. For example, we were interested in whether the victim feared that calling the police would later make the violence worse or would cause the

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[1] We asked respondents about different kinds of bystanders (e.g., neighbor versus a child in the household), but to analyze more than three outcomes would have spread the sample far too thin. For example, of the 201 incidents, 52 involved calls to police made by bystanders. Efforts to develop a multivariate causal model for finer distinctions among the 52 bystander calls would have resulted in too little variance in the outcomes.

[2] The question we asked about who called the police was "For the most recent time the police came, were you the person to call them?" If the answer was "no," we then asked "Who called them?" Conceivably, this may have missed some multiple calls because a "yes" answer was not followed up with the question "Anyone else?" and victims who called the police might not have been aware of others who had called. However, for reasons given in the text, we are confident that this potential problem is of no substantive importance.

offender to lose his job. These items are included not only when we model the victim's behavior but also when we attempt to model the behavior of bystanders, whom we did not interview. We did this because of the possibility that the victim's views are well-known to certain bystanders (e.g., relatives or friends) or are likely to be shared with them. If either of these conditions holds, one would expect a relationship between the victim's views and the bystander's actions.

The second set of variables consists of six measures of the victim-offender relationship. We are concerned with whether the offender believed he had the right to restrict the victim's behavior in some specific manner and with whether the victim agreed that he had that right. For example, we asked whether the offender prohibited the victim from getting a job and whether she felt that he was within his rights. "Yes" answers to both of such question pairs were taken as indicators of a "traditional" attitude toward marriage. Following Walker (1979), we expected victims with traditional attitudes to be inclined toward keeping family problems private and to be relatively unlikely to call the police. We include these measures of traditional attitudes in the bystander equation to allow for the possibility that the victim's beliefs will be known to bystanders or that some views will be shared.

The third type of exogenous variable consists of situational rather than attitudinal information: whether the victim was injured, whether the offender and the victim were married, whether there was an eyewitness, and others. Rationales for these variables are obvious from their content. The review by Sparks *et al.* (1977) of studies in which victims report crimes, coupled with our own sociological intuitions, led us to expect that this group of variables would be most potent.[3]

Finally, we include some historical and biographical material, such as information about the offender's recent violence and the victim's past propensity to call the police. The rationale for these variables is also obvious from their content.

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[3] To quote Sparks *et al.*(1977: 120):

our mainly negative findings should not, of course, be taken as showing that general attitudes toward crime and the criminal justice system, or beliefs concerning the prevalence or seriousness of crime, play no role at all in determining the decision to call the police. It does seem, however, that the most important factors influencing the decision are primarily "incident specific," and depend much more on the features of the particular situation than on characteristics of the victims themselves or their general attitudes and beliefs.

Within the multinomial framework, we consider four models, organized in a *nested* fashion:

1. an unrestricted (or "full") model in which causal influences include a) situational variables such as whether the victim was injured, b) biographical variables such as whether the victim had previously called the police, c) victims' attitudes toward the police, such as whether the victim believed at the time that calling the police would only make things worse, and d) measures of a "traditional" relationship between the victim and the offender, such as whether the offender prohibited the victim from holding a job;

2. a restricted model in which the coefficients for the attitudes toward the police are constrained to zero;

3. a restricted model in which the coefficients for measures of traditional relationships are constrained to zero; and

4. a restricted model including the constraints from the other two restricted models.

Each set of restrictions implies a null hypothesis: first, that victims' general views of the police do not matter; second, that victims' general views about traditional gender roles do not matter; and third, that both sets of attitudes do not matter. The nesting formulation allows for straightforward tests of these hypotheses based on a likelihood ratio approach (Harvey, 1981: Chapter 5). In plain language, our null hypothesis is that nothing important is lost when each set of restrictions is imposed. In operational terms, this means that we expect the imposition of restrictions to reduce the model's ability to account for the data by no more than what might reasonably be attributed to chance.

The data we employ come from face-to-face interviews with 201 female victims of spousal violence, recruited in Santa Barbara County, California, from local shelters, from a victim/witness assistance program in the County District Attorney's Office, or from some other public agency. This sample is far from ideal. It is not a probability sample of any known population but is instead a concession to the difficulty of economically identifying victims of spouse abuse. For example, the fact that many women in our sample sought shelter suggests that their problems were on the average more serious than those of other battered women, that their relationships with spouses or lovers were more tenuous, that their kin or neighborly resources for dealing with battering were less adequate, and that they were more prone than others to turn to

outside agencies for help. Also, their attitudes may have been affected by the act of seeking refuge.

The data may be colored by special features of local criminal justice agencies. For example, the major municipalities have their own police departments (e.g., Santa Barbara, Lompoc, Carpenteria), while most of the County is patrolled by County Sheriffs. None of these are "big city" police departments, and there is reason to believe that different departments have very different reputations for how "domestics" are handled. Both departmental structure and reputation may affect the propensity of people to call the police. However, while we must ultimately leave it to others looking at different areas of the country to determine the degree to which our results generalize, insofar as our empirical results are consistent with *a priori* substantive hypotheses, our hypotheses have, by conventional standards, survived a valid falsification test.

Internal validity is, unfortunately, also a problem. We are clearly vulnerable to sample selection bias. For example, estimates of the impact of factors affecting whether the household experiences any violence may be confounded with estimates of the impact of factors affecting the likelihood that police are called. Given the available data, we have no statistical solutions to such problems (cf. Berk, 1983), but as we will discuss later, some of the findings appear far less vulnerable than others.

While our sample is not random, it nonetheless reflects a diverse group of individuals and households, consistent with the spousal violence literature (Walker, 1979; Straus *et al.*, 1980). Seventy-two percent of the victims and 53 percent of the offenders are white, indicating a substantial number of interracial relationships. The mean age for victims is 29 (range 16-75), while the mean age for offenders is 33 (range 18-82). The average victim and offender have a high school degree, but about 14 percent of each group have a college degree. At the other extreme, approximately 10 percent of the victims and offenders never enrolled in high school. Forty-two percent of the offenders were unemployed at the time of the immediate incident, compared to 50 percent of the victims. The 42 percent figure is high, given local unemployment rates, while the unemployment rates for victims is not. The occupations of offenders and victims are likewise heterogeneous. Twelve percent of the employed offenders hold professional or technical positions. About half hold "middle level" jobs in

service occupations and skilled trades. Seven percent work at unskilled jobs. Seventy percent of the employed victims hold white collar jobs, with 14 percent working at professional or technical occupations. In summary, in our sample, as in society more generally, wife battery knows no age or status bounds.

III.   RESULTS

We asked each of our 201 female victims about their "most recent" incident of spousal violence. Ninety-eight percent claim that their partners directed "physical violence" toward them; 80 percent report having been injured, and 30 percent report injuries requiring medical attention. Yet only 55 percent report a call to the police, by them or a bystander.[4] Victims and bystanders each account for about half of the 110 reported calls to police (52 and 48 percent, respectively). Bystanders were *not* necessarily eyewitnesses, and 42 percent were neighbors, the modal category. The police were also called by children, relatives, friends, and landlords.

Model Selection

As we noted above, the first set of attitudinal measures considered for inclusion in the model focuses on concerns that might influence a victim's decision to call the police. We asked each respondent whether, at the time of the incident, she was "very worried" that calling the police would:

1. make things worse after the police left;
2. do no good at all;
3. hurt the relationship between herself and the offender;
4. mean that the offender would lose his job or that people would think poorly of him;
5. adversely affect the children;
6. cause her to lose her job or make people think poorly of her;
7. meet with disapproval from friends and neighbors;
8. meet with disapproval from the offender's family;

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[4] This last figure is very close to estimates derived from national statistics (U.S. Department of Justice, 1980: 37). Yet it is not clear whether the figure is consistent with the estimate or not. Twenty-eight percent of our sample of victims come from records in the District Attorney's Office (i.e., the Victim/Witness Assistance Program), and the police were called in the vast majority of these cases. The rates of reported physical assault or serious physical assaults are certainly high for those experiencing single incidents of spouse abuse, even incidents that lead to calls to the police (Berk and Loseke, 1981; Worden and Pollitz, 1984).

9. meet with disapproval from her own family;
10. create the new problem of dealing with the police when they arrived.

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses to these items. More than half of the victims were "very worried" that calling the police would make the violence worse after they left. Over a third were "very worried" that calling the police would worsen their relationship with the offender. Nearly 10 percent were "very worried" that their own family would disapprove. And about a quarter were "very worried" about having to deal with police officers.

Yet a joint likelihood ratio test applied to the ten items as a block reveals that the victims' responses to the set of ten items does nothing beyond what might be reasonably attributed to chance in distinguishing between cases in which the victim calls the police, in which a bystander calls the police, or in which the police are never called. Examination of the items individually shows a similar lack of explanatory power.

It is possible, of course, that our retrospective measures fail to capture the victims' views when the violence actually occurred. This is most plausible if the attitudes we measured were shaped by the decision to call the police. Suppose, for example, those who did not call were initially more worried than those who did call about the effects of a police intervention. Suppose, in addition, that those calling had generally negative experiences. Then, our null findings might be spurious. The negative attitudes of those who did not call the police would probably have remained unchanged, while the

Table 1.   Victim Concerns About Calling the Police

(N=201)

Concerns	Very	Percent Worried Somewhat	Not at all
Worse after police left	53.2	21.9	24.9
Do no good	28.9	27.4	43.8
Hurt relationship	36.3	17.9	45.8
Offender lose job	33.3	24.9	53.7
Bad for children	21.9	40.8	37.3
Victim lose job	27.4	18.9	53.7
Friends disapprove	14.4	18.9	66.7
His family disapprove	13.4	9.5	77.1
Her family disapprove	9.0	18.9	72.1
Dealing with cops	25.9	22.9	51.2

Table 2.   Constraints Accepted by Victim

(N=201)

Constraint	% Offenders Constrain	% Victims Concur
Prohibit employment	23.9	6.9
Only victim does housework	68.1	18.4
Offender determines dress	49.8	6.8
Women must check in daily	46.8	26.7
Prohibit credit cards	27.4	10.0
Sex whenever he wants	58.2	6.3

positive attitudes of those who called the police might have shifted so as to be indistinguishable from the "did not call" group. However, such perfectly counterbalancing effects seem unlikely, especially since the questions asked respondents to report their feelings at the time of the incident. Moreover, victims who called report at worst mixed experiences. Thus, we take our results seriously and conclude, for our sample at least, that specific worries about the risks of police intervention have relatively little influence when victims are deciding whether to call the police. We believe this is because the immediate features of the situation, which are examined below, overwhelm even rather specific victim views about the possible consequences of police intervention.

We incorporated the second set of attitudes in our model because of the plausibility of Walker's (1979) speculation that victims are less likely to involve the police if they hold "traditional" views on family and marriage. The items in this set relate to restrictions associated with some versions of a "traditional" marriage that offenders might impose on victims. Table 2 lists six such restrictions along with the percentage of offenders who impose those restrictions and the percentage of victims who agree that offenders are within their rights. For later analyses, we coded the victim as holding a traditional view of marriage if the offender imposed a restriction and the victim felt he had the right to do so. The six items include:[5]

    1. Prohibiting the woman from holding a job;
    2. Requiring the woman to take sole responsibility for housework;
    3. Determining how the woman should dress;

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[5] A larger number of restrictions were included on the questionnaire, but only six seemed truly appropriate for even "traditional" views of marriage.

    4. Compelling the woman to phone or see the offender during the day, even when he is at work;

    5. Prohibiting the woman from having any credit cards;

    6. Requiring the woman to have sexual intercourse any time the offender wishes.

We note from the marginals in Table 2 that many battered women live with men who seek to impose various kinds of restrictions, but only modest percentages of women agree that these restrictions are within their partners' rights. For example, while over two-thirds of the offenders attempt to place the household work burden exclusively on the victim, less than a fifth of the victims feel their partners have the right to do so. While over half of the offenders believe victims must have sexual intercourse whenever offenders wish, only 5 percent of the victims feel men have this right. Clearly, there is variation in the degree to which victims in principle accept offender restrictions.

Yet a joint test on the impact of all six attitudes indicated that no explanatory power was lost by constraining the appropriate logit coefficients to zero. Allegiance to traditional attitudes appears not to matter when abused women are deciding whether to call the police. And just as for the police items, little was found when the set was disaggregated. None of the domination questions had statistically significant effects at the .05 level for a one-tailed test.

The apparent irrelevance of the attitude items leaves us with the model implied by Table 3. Only situational and biographical variables remain. With "no one calling" as the reference category, the second and third columns in Table 3 show the logit and (asymptotic) t-values for variables that might plausibly affect the victim's decisions to call the police, and the fourth and fifth columns report the same information for bystanders' decisions. For the victim equation, the correlation between the observed values and the predicted values is .43, and for the bystander equation, the correlation is .35. A chi-square test for the residuals is reported at the bottom of the table. The p-value of .87 indicates that one cannot, on the basis of the statistical results, reject the hypothesis that the model fits the data. However, this does not necessarily mean that we have properly specified the process, and there is no generally accepted goodness-of-fit measure for multinomial

Table 3.   Multinomial Analysis of Who Calls the Police
(N=201)

Variable	mean	Victim Calls (mean = .29)		Bystander Calls (mean = .26)	
		Coeff.	t-value	Coeff.	t-value
Intercept	--	1.39	1.45	−0.45	−0.43
No. of times the offender violent in last 6 mos.	5.92	0.04	1.67*	0.03	1.05
Victim injured (binary)	0.79	−0.10	−0.20	1.00	1.69*
Offender injured (binary)	0.08	0.16	0.20	1.05	1.41
Victim called cops before (binary)	0.16	2.41	3.94*	0.90	1.30
Relatives present (binary)	0.04	2.25	1.84*	2.18	1.79*
Friends present (binary)	0.07	0.97	1.01	1.99	2.25*
Children present (binary)	0.46	0.87	2.01*	0.69	1.56
Offender damages victim's property (binary)	0.27	0.59	1.27	0.03	0.00+
Offender damages the dwelling (binary)	0.10	−0.03	−0.00+	1.32	1.92*
Offender and victim live together (binary)	0.76	−0.46	−0.91	−0.84	−1.69*
Offender and victim married (binary)	0.56	−0.73	−1.67	−0.40	−0.91
Offender employed (binary)	0.58	−0.30	−0.72	−0.14	−0.33
Victim employed (binary)	0.50	0.35	0.85	0.89	2.10
Offender's education (8 levels)	4.19	−0.57	−3.46*	−0.35	−2.08*

Residual Chi-Square = 336.07   p = 0.87 (df = 366)
Asterisk (*) indicates statistical significance at the .05 level for a one-tailed test

models (Maddala, 1983: 37-41).[6] Nevertheless, there are clearly effects to interpret.

Factors Affecting Whether the Victim Calls

All of the variables included in Table 3 were introduced with *a priori*, signed expectations. Thus, one-tailed tests are appropriate. With .05 as the alpha level, six regressors are statistically significant when the victim's behavior is endogenous, while seven are statistically significant when the bystanders' behavior is endogenous. Focusing first on victims, it is apparent that victims are more likely to call the police a) if the offender has a history of past spousal assaults, b) if the victim has called the police before in similar situations, and c) if children or other relatives are present. Victims abused by their husbands are less likely to call the police than those abused by boyfriends, and the likelihood that a victim will call the police diminishes with the offender's formal education.

The logit coefficients tell us how much the log-odds of an outcome change for a unit change in a given regressor. Because the meaning of such changes is difficult to intuit, it is often instructive to transform such effects into probabilities. Formulas for the binary outcome cases can be found in a number of sources (Maddala, 1983: 23), but it was necessary to derive our own expression for the multinomial setting.[7] As in the binary case, a point must be chosen at which to evaluate the slope of the logistic hyperplane, but all three of the possible outcomes must be considered. We will report the probability effects at the mean of each: .29 for the proportion of victims calling, .26 for the proportion of bystanders calling, and .45 for the proportion when no one called.

The logit coefficients in Table 3 suggest that the largest effect apparently comes from the victim's past reliance on the

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[6] Moreover, the goodness-of-fit test does not address in a descriptive manner how well the model fits, nor does it imply that better fitting models could not be found. Perhaps most important, nothing prevents misspecified models from passing goodness-of-fit tests. In short, the failure to reject the null hypothesis of a proper fit is encouraging, but hardly compelling.

[7] In brief, the marginal effect of a given regressor on the probability of one outcome must take into account a) the marginal effect of that regressor on the other outcomes and b) the expected value (i.e., probability) of each outcome. The former stems from the fact that the three outcomes are linked by the restriction that their probabilities must add to 1.0; a variable that directly affects one outcome indirectly affects others. The latter stems from the fact that in terms of probabilities (in contrast to log-odds), the response function is non-linear; all marginal effects depend on where the slope is evaluated. The derivation was produced by Joseph K. Lowery and is available from the senior author.

police. In probability terms, if she has called the police before in similar situations, she is 42 percent more likely to call again. One implication is that while the police, no doubt, could be doing a better job responding to wife battery, they are certainly not discouraging all repeat customers. Another possible implication is that it is desirable to generate greater police involvement in spousal violence incidents, since getting victims to make the first call is an important hurdle. We have some confidence in this result because it is reasonable to expect that those who have learned to use a particular service will be likely to use it again. At the same time, however, such a strong statistical effect may result in part from "prior calls to police," picking up other historical tendencies that we have failed to capture directly.

The next two most important factors are the presence of relatives or of children. When relatives are present during the incident, the probability of calling the police increases by 29 percent. When any of the household's children are present, the increase is 13 percent. Furthermore, while the effect for the presence of friends is not statistically significant, the sign is in the proper direction. In short, it appears that the presence of any witnesses encourages the victim to use the police, other things being equal. However, the underlying mechanisms are unclear and may differ depending on who the witnesses are. For example, a call when children are present may be made because victims fear for their safety. The presence of friends and relatives, on the other hand, may provide support for victims who would otherwise fear immediate retaliation. And the presence of third parties old enough to understand what is occurring may add costs of embarrassment to the expected costs of physical harm.

With each additional past assault on the victim (in the prior six months), the probability that the victim will call the police increases by a little over 1 percent. Given a mean of about six prior incidents, the average impact is a modest 6 percent. However, the distribution of past incidents has a long tail, since almost 20 percent of the offenders are credited with over ten assaults. Thus, the impact can be quite large for an important subset of the sample.

When the victim and offender are married, the victim is 12 percent less likely to call the police. This effect can be attributed to marriage *per se*, since we have controlled for whether or not the victim and offender live together. (This variable is not statistically significant.) Once again, however, the underlying mechanisms are not clear. On the one hand,

married victims may have special concerns about calling the police. There is some evidence, for instance, that married victims are particularly concerned that calling the police may cost the offender his job. Recall, however, that such fears did not by themselves affect whether the police would be summoned. On the other hand, married victims may be more likely to feel that, in some sense, the violence comes with the territory; with the marriage vows comes a commitment to take the bad with the good.

Victims are also less likely to call the police when offenders have more years of formal schooling. With each additional level (e.g., some high school versus a high school degree), the probability that the police will be called decreases by 9 percent. Clearly, college educated offenders are substantially protected. Since we hold employment constant, we take this as an effect of social class. This is confirmed by the fact that nearly the same effect appears when the victim's educational level is used in place of the offender's.[8] This may well capture the tendency of higher SES households to rely less on police services than low SES households (Bittner, 1980).

Whether or not the offender is employed does not appear to affect a woman's decision to call the police, although the sign is in the anticipated direction. Part of the reason is that, as is apparent from Table 1, about half of the victims are not worried that calling the police poses a threat to the offender's job. Whether the victim is employed also does not seem to matter, possibly for parallel reasons. More surprising is that none of the four variables measuring the "seriousness" of the incident has statistically significant effects. We suspect that two opposing forces are at work. The greater the danger, the more motivated the victim may be to call the police. However, with greater danger may come a greater risk of retaliation; the offender may be seen as more capable of inflicting very serious injuries. In addition, it may be nearly impossible for a victim to use the phone while under sustained attack.

Finally, in a *post hoc* fashion we supplemented the specification implied in Table 1 with several additional variables. First, neither the race of the victim nor that of the offender had any impact, nor was there an effect attributable to interracial couples. In other words, while class may make a difference, race appears irrelevant. Second, we included information about whether any injuries the victim or offender received were (in the eyes of the victim) serious enough to

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    [8] Collinearity prevented us from including both educational variables in the same equation.

require a doctor's attention. These also had no discernible impact, perhaps for the reasons given briefly above for why the presence of injuries had no apparent effect. Third, as a last indicator of "severity" we tried to get a handle on the intensity of the argument associated with the violence. For example, we included a measure of how long the argument lasted. However, our measures of intensity also proved unproductive. In short, a *post hoc* fishing expedition through the data did not yield much of a catch.

To summarize, victims will be very likely to call the police if they have called the police in the past, if witnesses are present, if they are not married to the offender, if the offender is poorly educated, and if he has a violent history. Within the range represented in our sample, however, the seriousness of the incident does not seem to matter.

Factors Affecting Whether Bystanders Call

The story is somewhat different when bystanders are considered. To begin, we once again find that the presence of witnesses is very important. When friends are present, the probability that bystanders will call the police is increased by 25 percent. When relatives are present, the probability is increased by 31 percent. And while the t-value for the presence of children is only 1.56, we are inclined to take seriously the associated 6 percent increase in the probability that a bystander will call. Of course, none of these effects are surprising since the presence of witnesses guarantees that there will be bystanders who are aware of the argument and generally able to take action. The smaller effect for children also makes sense because some of them will be too young to use the phone, while others may feel especially vulnerable to retaliation or conflicted about the propriety of taking sides in a dispute between their parents.[9]

All of the other statistically significant effects for bystanders differ from those we found for victims. First, the severity of the incident seems to matter. When the victim is injured, bystanders are 19 percent more likely to call the police. If, despite a t-value of 1.41, one wants to interpret the effect of the offender's injuries, an increase in the probability of 19 percent is implied. Bystanders are also 25 percent more likely to call if the offender damages the dwelling by breaking windows, kicking holes in walls, and the like. There is, however,

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[9] Space considerations led us not to ask the ages of the children who were present.

no apparent concern if the victim's personal property is destroyed (e.g., her clothing). One possible explanation is that damaged structures may be rented or shared, so bystanders may be calling to protect their own interests. Another possibility is that damage to a dwelling is a form of property destruction that neighbors are likely to hear. Destruction of a woman's personal possessions is likely to be less noisy. When there is no damage to the dwelling, bystanders who are not witnesses are more likely to be unaware that spouse abuse is occurring.

Second, the marital status of the couple does not seem to affect bystanders. Note, however, that the negative sign is what one would expect, and the attenuation of the effect is not surprising, insofar as some bystanders do not know the couple's marital status. In contrast, if the couple is living together, a statistically significant t-value is found. Bystanders are 12 percent less likely to call the police in these circumstances. Like victims, they may feel that violence between people with closer or more enduring relationships should not be police business. For bystanders, a couple's living arrangements may be more salient than their marital status because the former is open to observation while the latter must be disclosed by the couple.

We again find an effect for the offender's education; with each additional level of schooling, the probability that a bystander will call the police is decreased by 3 percent. We interpret this primarily as a class effect. However, why it exists is not clear. One reason may be that people are reluctant to summon the police to deal with high social rank.

Like victims, bystanders appear not to consider the offender's employment status in deciding whether to call the police. However, somewhat surprisingly, they appear to be influenced by whether the victim is employed. When the victim is employed, bystanders are 11 percent more likely to call the police. We do not know quite what to make of this. Perhaps we have captured a chance fluctuation. Perhaps employed victims are more sympathetically perceived as "productive" members of the household.

Finally, we examined the results for any impact when race and severity variables were added to the victim equation. Nothing of interest surfaced. Race does not seem to figure in the decisions of bystanders, although one must keep in mind that in most situations, victims, offenders, and bystanders are likely to have similar ethnic roots. More surprising, perhaps, is that the additional severity measures also had no discernible

impact. However, these measures typically had their predicted signs, and moderate to high levels of collinearity made statistically significant t-values difficult to obtain.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

It cannot be overemphasized that because of our non-probability sampling procedures, all of our estimated logit coefficients are vulnerable to sample selection bias. As we noted earlier, it is impossible with the data on hand to obtain an empirical fix on the amount of bias. Fortunately, there is some reason to believe that the biases may not be large. First, there is nothing in the results that is particularly counterintuitive. It would have been troubling, for example, if the probability of a bystander calling the police were reduced when there were bystanders present. Second, it is encouraging that the effects differed somewhat for victims and bystanders. These two sets of results were derived from a single sample, and the two sets of decisions were made in similar settings. With substantial sample selection bias, one might have expected comparable artifacts in both equations. Thus, we are inclined to believe that any sample selection biases in this study are not so serious that our story is seriously distorted. However, there is no substitute for a well-designed replication.[10]

Bearing in mind the possible shortcomings of our study, we can cautiously draw five conclusions. First, for incidents of wife battery, we have uncovered systematic patterns in how police interventions are invoked. The process by which cases come to the attention of the criminal justice system are patently non-random, and all analyses of police behavior that fail to consider the implications for internal validity of sample selection bias risk seriously distorted results.

Second, the emphasis on the immediate features of the decision-making setting by Sparks *et al.* (1977) and others who have sought to explain the mobilization of police seems to have been well placed. In cases of spouse abuse, major causal variables include injuries to victims and offenders, property damage, and the presence of friends, neighbors, or children.

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[10] A data set that allows effective control for selection bias would be neither easy nor cheap to collect. Basically, one would have to screen a large random sample of adults and then interview victims and a subset of non-victims. In so doing, one would have to avoid the potential sample selection bias that would be introduced if only individuals within ongoing heterosexual relationships were included in the sampling frame. For example, it would be a serious mistake to look only at "intact" marriages (Berk, 1983).

These variables take on additional importance since victims who call the police once are considerably more likely to call them again.

Third, the role of pre-existing attitudes is far more subtle than the usual survey approach suggests. Certain "obvious" measures such as attitudes toward police or attitudes about "traditional" relationships apparently have no impact on decisions to call the police, at least when they capture only the victim's views. On the other hand, it is clear that attitudes figure substantially when victims and bystanders try to make sense of the situation. This is best evidenced in the impact of marital status and of whether the couple lives together on the decisions we have modeled. In other words, attitudes become important in interaction with the immediate setting but seem almost irrelevant when measured as abstract states of mind.

Fourth, it appears that at least for incidents of wife battery, victims and bystanders respond to somewhat different factors. Some of these differences may reflect objective constraints. Thus, victims' actions may in the aggregate not be affected by the seriousness of the assault because physical coercion may prevent many victims from using the telephone. Other differences may reflect differential knowledge or interests. Bystanders may not know, for instance, if the couple is married, and they may have a personal stake in damage to the dwelling that is dwarfed in victims by concerns for their own well-being. Finally, some differences may capture variation in the experience and attitudes brought to the situation. Past calls to the police by the victim, for instance, affect her behavior but not the behavior of bystanders. It should be stressed, however, that since we do not have identical measures for bystanders and victims, some of the observed differences between bystanders and victims may be artifactual.

Fifth, even before the police arrive, differential law enforcement begins. When victims and bystanders allow extralegal variables such as marital status to affect their decisions to call the police, they effectively screen certain offenders from criminal justice sanctions and make others particularly vulnerable. Reforms in the way the criminal justice system responds to spousal violence may be important, but they are necessarily limited unless citizen responses to spouse abuse are altered as well.

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