

COMBATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: FINDINGS FROM AN EVALUATION OF A LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT*

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Research Summary:

The present study examined the effectiveness of a localized domestic violence court in Lexington County, South Carolina. An interrupted time series analysis indicated that domestic violence arrests increased significantly after the court was established. Recidivism rates of 189 defendants arrested for domestic violence before the implementation of the domestic violence court were compared with 197 defendants arrested after the court's implementation. Results indicate significantly lower rates of rearrests among defendants processed through the domestic violence court.

Policy Implications:

The results from this study suggest that systematic localized court interventions aimed at domestic violence defendants can be effective at enhancing enforcement and improving victim safety.

KEYWORDS: Domestic Violence, Specialized Courts, Recidivism

Over the past decade, there has been a growing awareness that domestic violence is a serious social problem. Much of this attention can be credited to increased efforts to collect empirical data on this issue. According to the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey, for example, approximately 4.5 million women in the United States were physically assaulted by their intimate partners during the 12 months preceding the survey (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). In addition, over a half

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million women in the United States were stalked by an intimate partner and 322,230 women were raped by an intimate partner (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000).

In addition to the increased awareness of domestic violence, during the past decade, there have been significant changes in the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence (Buzawa and Buzawa, 1996; Clark et al., 1996; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Epstein, 1999; Ptacek, 1999). Although most attention has been placed on law enforcement's response to domestic violence (e.g., mandatory arrest laws; Sherman, 1992), the criminal court has also experienced an increase in processing domestic violence cases over the past decade (Bell and Goodman, 2001). Between 1989 and 1998, for example, domestic relations cases in state courts across the United States grew by 178% (Ostrom and Kauder, 1999). In response to the growing awareness of domestic violence as a serious social problem and rising caseloads, judicial systems have been searching for innovative methods to deal with domestic violence cases. Traditionally, domestic violence cases have been handled in various criminal and civil courts. Recently, specialized domestic violence courts have emerged as a more effective means to combat intimate partner violence (Belknap and Graham, 2000; Dawson and Dinovitzer, 2001; Fritzler and Simon, 2000; Goldkamp et al., 1996; Karan et al., 1999; Levey et al., 2001; Weber, 2000). Domestic violence courts attempt to improve the judiciary's response to this issue by increasing coordination among criminal justice and social service agencies, holding defendants accountable, and to address properly the needs of victims. This type of specialized court adopts a therapeutic jurisprudence approach to courtroom justice (Fritzler and Simon, 2000; Rottman and Casey, 1999). In essence, the therapeutic jurisprudence approach focuses on offender accountability and victim safety, and it requires those who are making decisions to consider the potential benefits and consequences of their decisions on those involved (Fritzler and Simon, 2000). Most experts agree that a multi-agency approach to domestic violence is the most appropriate strategy (Hofford, 1991).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURTS

Domestic violence courts, similar to other specialized courts (i.e., drug courts, juvenile courts, family courts), emphasize the need for treating domestic violence with special attention and separating and distinguishing the process from the traditional criminal court process (Karan et al., 1999; Keilitz, 2000). According to a survey conducted by the National Center for State Courts in 1998, more than 200 courts throughout the United States were providing specialized processing practices for domestic violence cases, such as specialized intake centers, separate court calendars,

and specific domestic violence units (Karan et al., 1999). More recent estimates indicate that over 300 courts have recognized the need for special attention to domestic violence cases by incorporating specialized processing and structure within existing judicial systems (Keilitz, 2000; Levey et al., 2001).

Little empirical evidence, however, has been collected to evaluate the effectiveness of specific domestic violence courts and their processes (Buzawa et al., 1998). Despite the lack of empirical studies, numbers of specialized domestic violence courts have been increasing (Karan et al., 1999). Although many jurisdictions have implemented domestic violence courts, there is no standardized definition that directs judicial practices within these courts (Weber, 2000). There are only a few published process or outcome evaluation studies of domestic violence courts that can serve as guides for local jurisdictions interested in implementing this type of specialized court (see Goldkamp et al., 1996).

One of the few published studies of domestic violence courts involves a court established in 1993 in Miami, Florida (Karan et al., 1999). This court sought to improve judicial response through the establishment of specialized intake units, dedicated calendars, specialized judges, and a fully integrated domestic violence court. According to a process evaluation of the domestic violence court, misdemeanor cases had a 37% lower dismissal rate compared with common practices prior to the implementation of the court (Goldkamp et al., 1996). In addition, this study found 40% to 50% of the offenders who were processed by the domestic violence court were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the domestic violence incident. The integrated batterer substance abuse treatment program was found to be successful in enrolling offenders in the treatment and retaining participants in the program compared with the control group. Further, offenders who participated in the integrated treatment program reoffended against the same victims at a lower rate compared with control offenders (6% versus 14%) (Goldkamp et al., 1996).

Other research has been published on specialized domestic violence courts developed in Washington, D.C., Clark County, Vancouver, Canada; and Leeds, England that also incorporated a multi-agency approach with input from law enforcement, social services, victim support services, and probation services (Fritzler and Simon, 2000; Levey et al., 2001; Walsh, 2001). The intention of these courts was to structure offenders' sentences toward a rehabilitative approach, as opposed to a custodial sentence, so that offenders would be able to attend community-based treatment programs focused on the cause and the control of their violent behavior. All of these courts focused on increasing collaboration from several agencies working together to deliver a more effective response to issues of family

violence. In addition, treatment-focused domestic violence courts anticipate that victims will have a higher likelihood of reporting domestic violence incidences given the rehabilitative philosophy (Walsh, 2001).

A limited amount of research suggests that increased collaborative efforts between agencies that increase victim participation and hold offenders accountable can lead to reductions in domestic violence recidivism (Gamache et al., 1988; Harrell, 1991; Tolman and Weiz, 1995). According to a recidivism analysis of offenders who were convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence in Hamilton County, Ohio, offenders who received more severe sentences were less likely to recidivate compared with offenders who received less severe sentences one year after sentencing (Thistlewaite et al., 1998). The findings from this study indicated that recidivism reduction was significantly related to sentence severity in misdemeanor domestic violence cases (Thistlewaite et al., 1998). Few other studies, however, exist that explicitly examine the impact of specialized domestic violence courts in holding offenders accountable and reducing recidivism. As a result, it is unclear whether designing specialized domestic violence courts provides any improvement over traditional methods of adjudicating domestic violence cases.

Most research on this topic examines specialized domestic violence courts located in urban settings. In general, less research is devoted to the issues of domestic violence in rural settings and appropriate programs for addressing the needs of battered women. Yet research indicates that there are not dramatic differences in the rates of domestic violence between urban and rural settings (Rennison, 2000). Domestic violence receives less attention in rural areas compared with urban areas because there is a lack of accessible social and health care services, the population is more dispersed and isolated, law enforcement has to service large geographic areas with limited resources, and cultural beliefs regarding gender roles and family violence inhibit victims from seeking services (Orchowsky, 1998). As a result of the lack of attention to issues of domestic violence in rural settings, less evidence is available from which criminal justice agencies located in rural areas can use to design appropriate interventions for combating domestic violence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN LEXINGTON COUNTY

Lexington County, South Carolina is a rural county located in the midlands region of the state. The population of Lexington County is approximately 220,000, and 84% of the residents are white. Most of the county is geographically dispersed in small rural communities. The county is predominately working class, and the per capita income is approximately \$22,000 a year (Bureau of Census, 2000). Throughout the state of South

Carolina, there has been a growing concern with issues related to domestic violence. In 1996, 54,602 domestic violence reports were filed in South Carolina, a 34.8% increase from 1992 (Uniform Crime Reports, 1998). During this same year in South Carolina, 76% of female homicide victims (who knew their assailants) were murdered by their husbands, common-law husbands, ex-husbands, or boyfriends, compared with 56% nationally (Violence Policy Center, 2000). Domestic violence is of particular concern to the Lexington County Sheriff's Department, because this county has seen a recent resurgence of domestic violence abuse incidents. Their records indicated a dramatic growth in domestic violence between 1997 and 1998. However, using their current staffing resources, the Lexington County Sheriff's Department had to assign all of the criminal domestic violence cases to the same three investigators who were responsible for robbery, aggravated assault and battery, homicide, and criminal sexual conduct investigations. Not surprisingly, because of the shortage of resources, many domestic violence cases were not getting the attention for a complete investigation and eventual prosecution.

In addition, once a domestic violence case was processed to court, it was historically assigned to one of the eight Lexington County magistrate's courts. Magistrate courts in the state of South Carolina handle all non-felony-related cases (such as traffic cases) and can assign a maximum penalty of 30 days in jail or a \$1,000 fine. Because the magistrate courts process all misdemeanor cases, individual domestic violence cases typically did not get the proper amount of attention they needed. The eight magistrate's courts also do not maintain a centralized database for tracking domestic violence defendants throughout the county. In other words, as a result of a lack of resources within the magistrate courts, many domestic violence cases were either dismissed or assigned minor fines. It was believed that the lack of resources and attention was perpetuating a continued trend of inattention to domestic violence in Lexington County.

THE LEXINGTON COUNTY SPECIALIZED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT

To address shortcomings in both the investigation and prosecution of criminal domestic violence cases, the Lexington County Sheriff's Department applied for and received a Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA) grant to establish a separate Criminal Domestic Violence Court within the Lexington County magistrate court system. All non-felony battery cases of domestic violence in Lexington County are referred to this specialized court. The separate domestic violence court was designed to hold perpetrators of domestic violence accountable through increasing fines and time

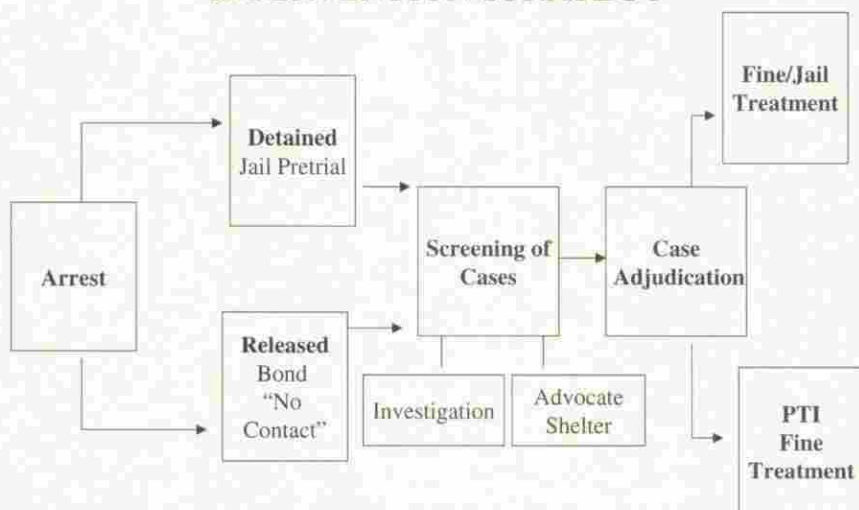
spent in jail, as well as placing a strong emphasis on mandatory batterer treatment.

The Domestic Violence Court in Lexington County was established in November 1999. Since the inception of the court, all non-felony battery cases of domestic violence cases in Lexington County have been processed by the Criminal Domestic Violence Court. To improve the criminal justice system's response to this social problem, the Lexington County Sheriff's Office established a multi-agency collaborative approach to processing domestic violence cases. For example, the Sheriff's Office appointed two full-time investigators and a full-time prosecutor to work as a team on domestic violence cases. In addition, the Sheriff's Office hired a full-time victims advocate to assist domestic violence victims referred to the court. Also, a court administrator was hired to handle the administrative tasks involved in running a separate court docket for domestic violence cases. The Lexington County Department of Mental Health also dedicated two mental health counselors to diagnose and assign proper treatment programs for perpetrators of domestic violence. In addition, a legal advocate from a local domestic violence shelter was also dedicated to the court and was present in each court session. Together, the Lexington County Criminal Domestic Violence Court has been operating as a multi-agency collaborative effort involving Sheriff's investigators, a full-time prosecutor, court officials, local domestic violence shelter services, and the Department of Mental Health. The basic court intervention is displayed in Figure 1.

Overall, the broad goal of the Lexington County Criminal Domestic Violence Court is to improve investigations and prosecution of domestic violence cases through increased resources, improved collaboration, and a progressive new court approach. Additionally, the goal of this specialized court is to improve victim safety by holding defendants accountable for their actions and reducing recidivism.

The court attempted to achieve these goals by focusing its efforts of coordination and cooperation among agencies responding to domestic violence. This was accomplished by having all key representatives from agencies dealing with the problem of domestic violence present during the court proceedings, including law enforcement, prosecution, mental health, victims' services, and shelter services. Through the increased knowledge and skills of domestic violence associated with a dedicated full-time prosecutor and investigators who only handle domestic violence cases, the court attempted to improve the investigation and prosecution of domestic violence cases. The focus of the court was a therapeutic model of jurisprudence to processing domestic violence cases. Specifically, the prosecutor, investigators, judges, advocates, and mental health officials worked together in a coordinated approach that placed the primary emphasis on treatment options for defendants convicted of domestic violence offenses.

FIGURE 1. THE CDV COURT INTERVENTION STRATEGY



Typically, this was accomplished through suspending jail sentences in lieu of the successful completion of a 26-week group-based cognitive therapy program for domestic violence batterers. These referrals were accompanied by a strict weekly follow-up on defendants' progress in the treatment program. If defendants failed to comply with their treatment conditions, then a bench warrant would be issued by a judge for their arrest and their suspended jail sentence would be imposed. The Lexington County Criminal Domestic Violence Court emphasized the idea that criminal justice and mental health professionals must work together to attack the social problem of domestic violence. Since the domestic violence court began operating, over 2,500 court cases have been processed. The federal funding for the court expired in June 2002. Since the expiration of the federal grant, the Lexington County government has absorbed the operational costs of the court.

METHODOLOGY

The current study evaluates the effectiveness of the misdemeanor criminal domestic violence court in Lexington County, South Carolina. Two methods of quantitative analysis were used to examine the overall impact of the court on case outcomes and community safety. First, to examine the general impact of the Criminal Domestic Violence Court (CDVC) on domestic violence in Lexington County, a time series intervention analysis was used. Second, a recidivism analysis was conducted that examined the

impact of the domestic violence court on individual case outcomes. A sample of cases processed in the CDVC were compared with a historical sample of cases processed in the traditional magistrate court setting.

TIME SERIES ANALYSIS

The time series intervention analysis examined the monthly frequency of criminal domestic violence for the years 1997 through 2001 (60 months). Criminal domestic violence cases were compared for the 34 months before the establishment of the CDVC (January 1997 to October 1999) to the first 26 months after the courts implementation (November 1999 to December 2001). Prior to conducting the intervention analysis, a simple before-after comparison of the average monthly number of arrests was conducted. The trends in arrests for domestic violence were compared with the trends in simple assault and aggravated assault. The results displayed in Table 1 indicate a significantly higher number of average monthly domestic violence arrests after the establishment of the CDVC. Specifically, the average monthly number of arrests for domestic violence was approximately 55 in the pre-court period compared with 61 in the post-court period ($t = -2.55$; $p < 0.05$). In contrast, there were no changes in simple assault. The average monthly number of arrests for simple assault was roughly 21 before and after the court was established. Aggravated assaults did, however, decrease in the post-court period. The average monthly number of aggravated assaults pre-court was approximately 14 compared with 12 in the post-court period ($t = 1.89$; $p < 0.05$ —one tailed). A simple comparison of the average arrest numbers between time periods, however, cannot determine if a true causal relationship exists. It is possible, for example, that a positive trend in domestic violence arrests (autocorrelation) would lead to the conclusion that the intervention of the court had a statistically significant effect when in fact it had not.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF MONTHLY ARRESTS
BEFORE AND AFTER CDVC (N = 384)

Average Monthly Arrests	Pre-CDVC (n = 34)	Post-CDVC (n = 26)	T-test
Domestic Violence	55.35	60.92	-2.55*
Simple Assault	21.58	21.84	-.15
Aggravate Assault	14.14	11.76	1.89

*Statistically significant change ($p < .05$).

ARIMA INTERVENTION

To obtain a more rigorous estimate of the effects of the CDVC on domestic violence in Lexington County, the data were analyzed as a set of

interrupted time-series experiments. The time series analysis involved a quasi-experimental design that rules out a number of rival hypotheses (Cook and Campbell, 1979). This method of analysis has been used in many other areas of policy research, such as drunk-driving crackdowns and changes in firearms policies (Loftin and McDowall, 1984; McDowall et al., 1992), and it is one of the strongest quasi-experimental methods for examining the impact of policy interventions (Campbell and Stanley, 1966).

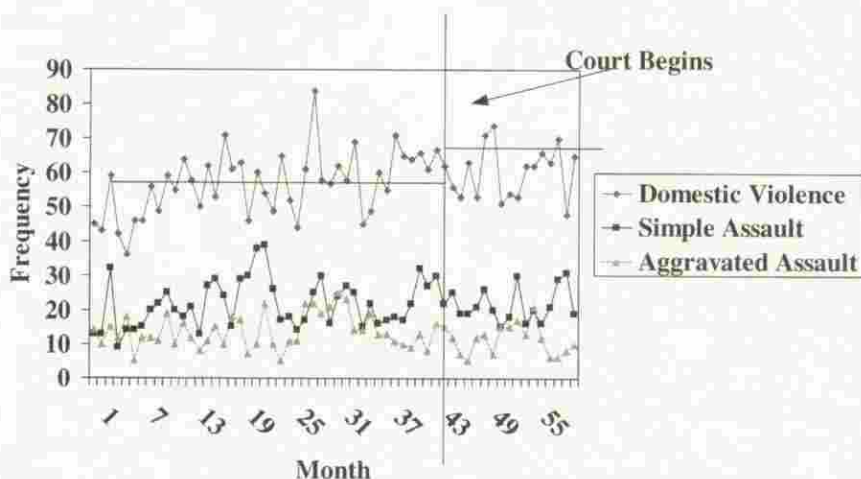
To reduce the chance of historical threats, such as law enforcement officers reclassifying simple assaults and aggravated assaults between intimates as criminal domestic violence cases, a control series was included in the analysis. Domestic violence arrests were compared with simple and aggravated assault arrests. If the experimental series of domestic violence arrests increased or decreased in the post-court period while the control series remained stable, it would be possible to conclude that the establishment of the court had an effect. If all three series increased or decreased, this would lead to the conclusion that the introduction of the court was confounded with history. Although this method is less superior to a no-treatment comparison group for ruling out alternative explanations, it does provide a defensible method for analyzing the impact of the domestic violence court (see Loftin and McDowall, 1984). Because Lexington County is different from other neighboring counties in terms of its demographic make-up and crime rates, it was not possible to find a no-treatment comparison group. The time series for domestic violence, simple assault, and aggravated assault arrests are displayed in Figure 2.

The interrupted time series analyses were conducted using autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) noise models (Enders, 1995). The ARIMA models examined whether the effects of the court had an abrupt permanent effect on criminal domestic violence in Lexington County (McDowall et al., 1980). For the identification of the appropriate univariate noise model the Box-Jenkins methodology was used.¹ Results for these estimates are displayed in Table 2.² The findings indicate that

1. The intervention models were built in two stages. First, the identification of the appropriate ARIMA noise model was examined to control for the effects of nonstationarity and autocorrelation in the data over time. Autocorrelation and nonstationarity are systematic effects that would affect the time series through the pre- and post-court time periods. If nonstationarity and autocorrelation are not systematically controlled for, inferences about the effects of the court may be incorrect.

2. The first step to the time series methodology involved analyzing the autocorrelation function (ACF) and partial autocorrelation function (PACF) (McDowall et al., 1980). From a review of the ACF and PACF on the first 25 lags in the domestic violence arrest series, it was apparent that autocorrelation was not present in this series. Therefore, for the criminal domestic violence series, the use of an ARIMA intervention model is unnecessary and a standard ordinary least-squares model is sufficient. For the

FIGURE 2. MONTHLY ARREST NUMBERS



the first-order autoregressive model provides a good estimate of both simple and aggravated assault and that a standard ordinary least-squares model is sufficient for the domestic violence arrest series.³

FINDINGS

Now that the time series process for all three series have been properly identified, the effects of the CDVC on domestic violence, simple assault, and aggravated assault were estimated by adding the intervention effect. A change in the level of the series (domestic violence, simple assault, aggravated assault) after the inception of the CDVC should show up in the estimates of the ARIMA intervention model if the court had an effect.⁴

simple assault series, however, an examination of the ACF and PACF indicated that the series were autocorrelated. From a review of the ACF and PACF, it was apparent that the series follow a first-order autoregressive process AR (1). The autoregressive process was apparent because the first two lags in the ACF were statistically significant and in the PACF the first lag dominates the series. Similarly, a review of the ACF and PACF for the aggravated assault series reveals a similar AR (1) process. In the second step of identification, the process for the simple assault and aggravated assault series were estimated following a first-order autoregressive process. This estimation is a simple ordinary least-squares estimate with the number of simple or aggravated assaults (pre-intervention) explained by the average mean value as the intercept term and the slope coefficient of the lag values.

3. In both models (simple and aggravated assault), the coefficient of the lag value is statistically significant and falls within the bounds of stationarity, which means that the coefficient value is greater than zero and less than one (McDowall et al., 1980).

4. The most parsimonious model, an abrupt permanent change, was estimated for each of the three time series.

TABLE 2. INTERVENTION DIAGNOSTICS FOR FIRST-ORDER AUTOREGRESSIVE MODEL (N = 60)

Series	Estimate (lag 1)	z-value	95% Confidence	
			Lower	Upper
Domestic Violence	.20	1.53	-.05	.46
Aggravated Assault	.27*	2.08	.01	.54
Simple Assault	.31*	2.85	.09	.52

*Statistically significant ($p < .05$) with 95% confidence

Table 3 displays the results for the three intervention models. The intervention coefficient represents the change in the number of monthly arrests for each series after the introduction of the court. The main conclusion from the analysis is that the introduction of the criminal domestic violence court in Lexington County had a statistically significant positive effect ($z = 2.42$) on the number of domestic violence arrests. The coefficient interpretation suggests that on average, the court increased domestic violence arrests by 5.57 arrests per month. This translates into a 10% increase in the average monthly number of domestic violence arrests. In contrast, there is little evidence that the introduction of the court had any effect on either simple or aggravated assault arrests.

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF INTERVENTION ANALYSIS (N = 60)

Series	Estimate	z-value	95% Confidence	
			Lower	Upper
Domestic Violence	5.57*	2.42	.69	10.44
Aggravated Assault	-2.14	-1.26	-5.47	1.17
Simple Assault	.60	0.23	-4.41	5.63

*Change statistically significant ($p < .05$) with 95% confidence.

These results indicate that the establishment of the domestic violence court had a significant effect on the increase in the number of domestic violence arrests in Lexington County over time. These findings lead to the conclusion that the establishment of a centralized court for processing domestic violence cases increased the responsiveness of law enforcement to this crime. The fact that the series for simple assault and aggravated assault did not significantly change after the establishment of the court suggests that the increase in domestic violence arrests was not an artifact of charge displacement. Therefore, there is clear and convincing evidence that the court increased the response to domestic violence in Lexington County.

RECIDIVISM

In an effort to examine the impact of the Lexington County CDVC on individual case outcomes, a recidivism analysis was performed on a random sample of 400 criminal domestic violence cases. A simple random sample of 200 cases was drawn from the Lexington County Sheriff's Department's arrest database that occurred between January 1997 and June 1999. This sample represented the historical comparison group of cases that were processed through traditional magistrate courts in Lexington County prior to the establishment of the CDVC. This sample period was chosen to provide the closest time comparison and to ensure that cases were disposed of before the inception of the CDVC. The experimental group comprised a simple random sample of 200 domestic violence arrest cases that occurred between December 1999 and December 2000 and were processed through the CDVC. The overall recidivism analysis, therefore, included a final sample of 400 cases (200 control and 200 treatment).

CORRELATES

From the hard copies of the case files, research staff coded information on each domestic violence case. The following is a list of information that was included: (1) offender's race, (2) offender's age, (3) offender's gender, (4) offender's employment status, (5) time spent in jail by the offender after arrest, (6) the offender's domestic violence criminal history, (7) number of charges pending at the time of the arrest, and (8) diversion or court disposition.⁵ Race of the offender was dummy coded "1" if the suspect was Black.⁶ Gender of the offender was dummy coded "1" if the offender was female. Employment status was dummy coded "1" if the offender was unemployed. Domestic violence criminal history represented the number of prior arrests for domestic violence. Number of charges pending represented the defendant's number charges on the given domestic violence case. Diversion or court disposition was dummy coded "1" if the defendant was diverted from court into a pretrial intervention program.

OUTCOME MEASURE

Each case was followed for 18 months after their initial domestic violence arrest. Each case was censored at exactly 551 days post-arrest. This

5. The initial plan for data collection included obtaining information on the evidence of alcohol or drug use, the severity of injury in the case, and the relationship between the victim and the offender (i.e., married versus nonmarried intimates). However, after reviewing and coding case files, it was apparent that there was too much variation in the quality of the incident reports and case files to include this information.

6. Ninety-nine percent of non-black suspects were white.

procedure ensured that each case had exactly the same exposure time (Schmidt and Witte, 1988). Post-disposition rearrest data for domestic violence offenses were then collected through the examination of arrest records. Rearrests for domestic violence, simple assaults, or aggravated assaults involving intimates were included as failures.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Table 4 presents descriptive-level data for the historical control group and the domestic violence court sample. Fourteen cases were dropped from the analysis because they involved domestic violence against a minor and were therefore processed by the county's family court. The final sample resulted in 386 cases. In general, the two samples resembled each other. No differences were found between the pre-CDVC and the CDVC samples on age, race, gender, employment status, number of days in jail pretrial, number of charges, number of prior domestic violence arrests, and pretrial intervention. In both samples, the average age of an offender was approximately 34 years old and roughly 20% of the offenders were unemployed. Few offenders had prior domestic violence arrests. Together these descriptive data indicate that the control and treatment groups closely resembled each other in terms of personal background factors. The only statistically significant difference between the two samples was for domestic violence recidivism rates. In terms of recidivism, 19% of the pre-CDVC sample were rearrested for a domestic violence offense during the follow-up period compared with only 11.6% of the CDVC sample ($t = 2.00$; $p < .05$). Although the recidivism rate for both groups was relatively low, the CDVC sample had a significantly lower rate of recidivism than did the pre-CDVC sample.

TABLE 4. SAMPLE COMPARISON OF BASELINE DATA (N = 386)

Characteristic	Pre-CDVC (n = 189)	SD	CDVC (n = 197)	SD	T-test
African-American	26.9%		25.3%		
Female defendant	12.7%		13.2%		
Mean days in jail pretrial	4.14	11.19	5.00	20.33	
Mean age of offender	33.5	8.89	33.62	9.91	
Employed	82.5%		80.8%		
Pretrial Diversion	57.1%		56.3%		
Mean number of charges	1.19	.53	1.20	.73	
Mean prior domestic	.34	.79	.48	.97	
Recidivism	19.0%		11.6%		2.00*

*Statistically significant difference ($p < .05$).

FINDINGS

To more accurately isolate the effects of the domestic violence court on recidivism for domestic violence offenses, a logistic regression model was used. This model estimates the impact of the court, controlling for prior domestic violence arrests, number of charges, pretrial diversion, employment status, race, gender, and the number of days in jail pre-trial. Table 5 displays the results, from the logistic regression model. The findings indicate that only three variables are significant predictors of recidivism. Defendants with a greater number of prior domestic violence arrests are significantly more likely to recidivate, holding all other factors constant. The findings indicate that an additional prior domestic violence arrest increased the odds of recidivism by 46%. Those with a greater number of charges filed were also significantly more likely to recidivate. Specifically, an additional charge increased the odds of recidivism by 77%. In contrast, defendants who were processed by the domestic violence court were significantly less likely to recidivate. Being processed through the domestic violence court decreased the odds of recidivism by 50%. Overall, the results from the logistic regression model provide additional strong evidence for the effectiveness of the court in reducing recidivism for domestic violence.

TABLE 5. LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF OFFICIAL
RECIDIVISM (n = 378)

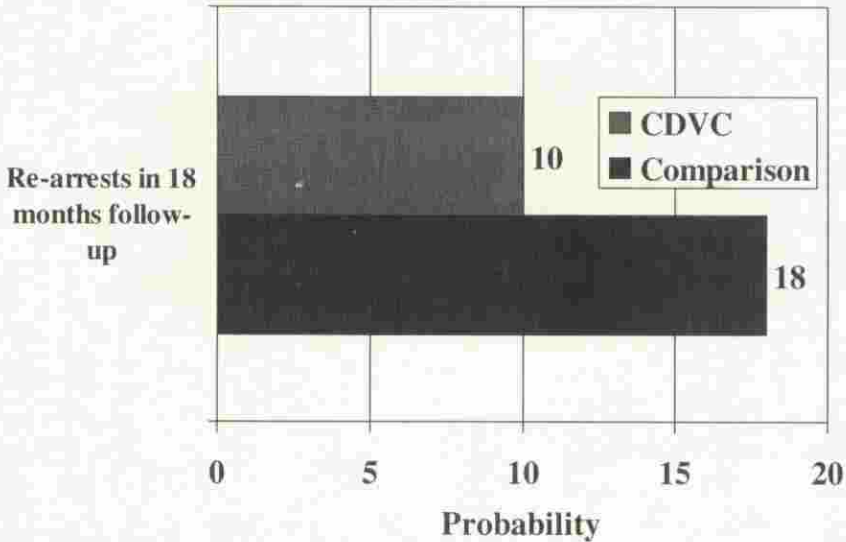
Variable	Coefficient (B)	Odds
African-American	-.29 (.36)	.78
Female defendant	-.61 (.56)	.53
Days in jail pretrial	-.01 (.01)	.98
Age of offender	-.01 (.01)	.98
Employed	-.09 (.40)	.90
Pretrial Diversion	.03 (.30)	1.04
Number of charges	.57 (.22)	1.77*
Number of prior domestic	.38 (.14)	1.46*
CDV court	-.68 (.30)	.50*
Log likelihood	-150.58*	

NOTE: Standard errors in parentheses. Eight observations were deleted because of missing data.

*Statistically significant ($p < .05$).

To provide a more meaningful interpretation of these results the estimates were converted into predicted probabilities. This method allows one to examine the effects of isolated factors, which holds other variables constant at their mean values (Long, 1997). These probabilities provide a

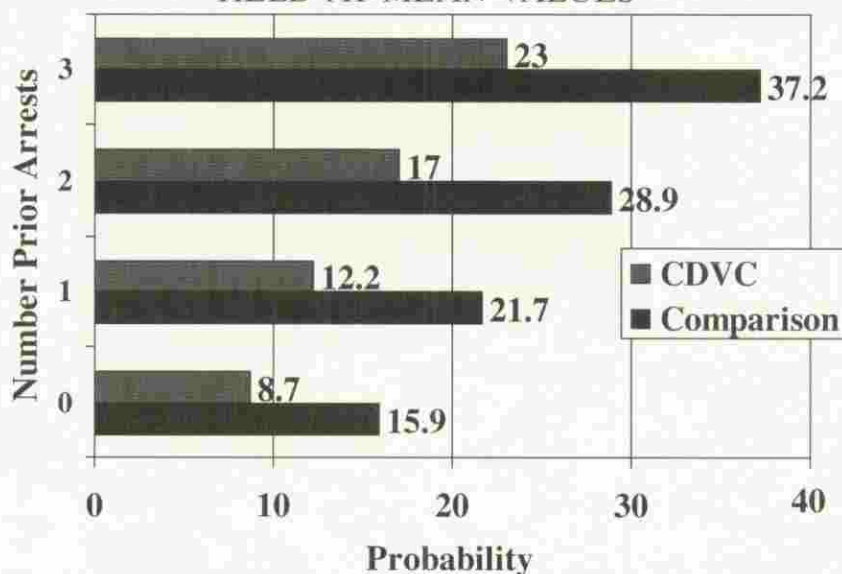
FIGURE 3. PREDICTED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAMPLES ON RECIDIVISM, ALL OTHER VARIABLES HELD AT MEAN VALUES



profile of the effect of the specialized domestic violence court on recidivism, whereas all other characteristics of an offender are held constant at their average levels. In other words, the predicted probabilities of a hypothetical offender who was processed through the domestic violence court compared with a hypothetical offender from the historical control group who was average on all other factors. The results from a series of predicted probabilities are displayed in Figures 3 to 5. The predicted probability of being rearrested for domestic violence was 18% for the comparison group and 10% for the CDVC group. Additionally, the predicted probability of recidivism for the CDVC sample and the comparison group were examined for varying levels of prior domestic violence arrests and a number of charges. The predicted probability for recidivism was, for instance, 16% for those with no prior arrests for domestic violence in the comparison group and 9% for those in the CDVC group. For those with one prior arrest for domestic violence, there was a 22% chance of recidivism for the comparison group versus only 12% in the CDVC group. In terms of number of charges, the predicted probability of recidivism for those with two pending charges was 26% for the comparison group and only 15% for the CDVC group.

In addition to the probability of being rearrested during the 18-month follow-up period, the predictors of the time (number of days) until rearrest

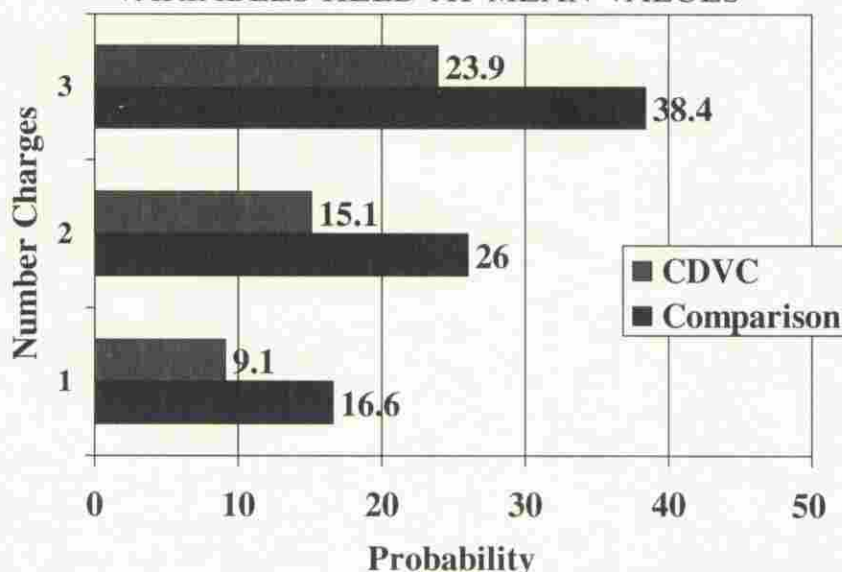
FIGURE 4. PREDICTED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAMPLES BY NUMBER OF PRIOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARRESTS, ALL OTHER VARIABLES HELD AT MEAN VALUES



were analyzed. A Cox proportional hazards model was estimated that controlled for differences between the comparison sample and the CDVC sample using the correlates described earlier. Table 6 presents the results from the Cox proportional hazards model. This method analyzes factors that predict the timing (in days) a defendant was in the community before being rearrested for a domestic violence offense. The proportional hazards model shows a significant reduction in the time to rearrest for domestic violence for the CDVC sample compared with the historical comparison group. Specifically, these findings indicate that those in the CDVC group have 53% risk for time to failure compared with those in the historical comparison group. The findings also indicate that offenders with prior domestic violence arrests and a greater number of charges were at an increased risk of being arrested earlier over time.

To provide a graphical depiction of this relationship, the probability of survival for the CDVC sample and the comparison group are plotted in Figure 6. It is evident from this graph that the probability of staying arrest free over time is greater for those processed in the CDVC. These findings suggest that in addition to lowering the overall likelihood that domestic violence offenders will be rearrested in the 18-month follow-up period, a

FIGURE 5. PREDICTED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAMPLES BY NUMBER CHARGES, ALL OTHER VARIABLES HELD AT MEAN VALUES



longer period of time passed before defendants in the CDVC group were rearrested for domestic violence compared with offenders in the control group.

Together, the findings from the logistic regression model and the predicted probabilities indicate that being processed through the CDVC significantly reduced the likelihood that an individual would be rearrested for a domestic violence offense over an 18-month follow-up period. This effect is not the result of different types of offenders being processed during the two time periods. Therefore, it appears from the available data that the CDVC has a significant inhibitory effect on the likelihood of rearrest compared with the traditional magistrate court approach to processing domestic violence cases. These findings cannot be explained by a general decrease in the stringency of enforcement between the two time periods. The time series analysis presented earlier indicated that the general enforcement of criminal domestic violence increased significantly during the post-CDVC time period.

DISCUSSION

Most domestic violence court evaluations have been conducted in urban settings, although domestic violence is certainly not limited to these areas.

TABLE 6. ESTIMATES FROM PROPORTIONAL HAZARDS MODEL OF TIME TO REARREST—18-MONTH FOLLOW-UP (N = 378)

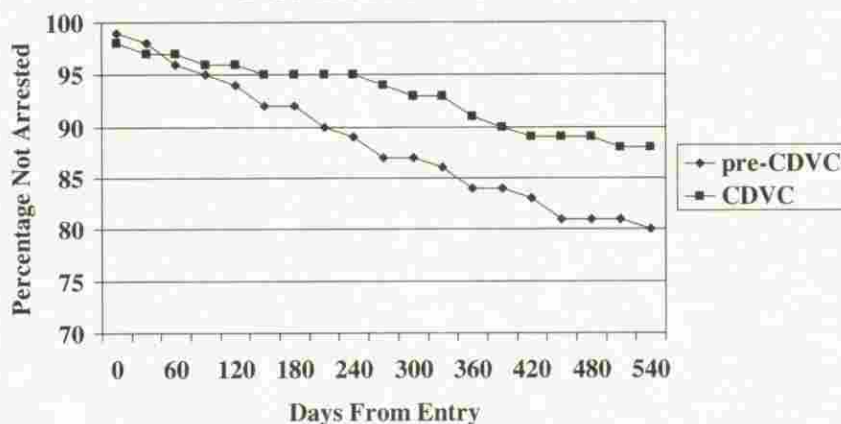
Variable	Coefficient (B)	Exp (B)
African-American	-.22	.79
Female defendant	-.57	.56
Days in jail pretrial	-.01	.98
Age of offender	-.01	.98
Employed	-.06	.93
Pretrial Diversion	.06	1.06
Number of charges	.42*	1.53
Number of prior domestic	.29*	1.34
CDV court	-.63*	.53
-2 Log likelihood	657.52*	

NOTE: Eight observations were deleted due to missing data.

*Statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Policy makers often note that criminal justice presents special difficulties in rural settings because the infrastructure for dealing with such problems

FIGURE 6. DAYS UNTIL RE-ARREST FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



is often more limited. For example, there tends to be fewer domestic violence shelters and programs for victims in general in rural areas compared with urban environments. The results from this study provide an in-depth evaluation of a domestic violence court located in a rural environment. Therefore, this study provides a unique contribution to the literature. The

findings indicate that a coordinated response among local law enforcement, mental health, and the courts can be effective in combating domestic violence in local settings. Importantly, this court model did not involve a significant amount of infrastructure or resources.

The quantitative results suggest that domestic violence can be affected by increased attention from representatives of the criminal justice system and coordination with service providers. Specifically, recidivism for domestic violence offenders was significantly reduced during a period when the overall number of domestic violence arrests increased. The findings suggest that evaluations of criminal justice interventions need to examine systemic effects at multiple levels. A focus at only the aggregate level would have suggested this specialized court was increasing domestic violence, when in fact the probability of reoffending was decreasing. This dual methodological approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the nature of the research and making sure all measures of change are explored.

Results from this study show the effectiveness of a specialized domestic violence court in increasing law enforcement responsiveness to domestic violence and reducing recidivism of domestic violence batterers. The results suggest that the law enforcement officers and investigators responded to the actions of the court by making more arrests of domestic violence abusers. This likely occurred because officers realized the court was taking the charges and offenders seriously.

The success of this domestic violence court had a lot to do with the centralized structure of the court and the extensive coordination among key agencies dealing with the problem of domestic violence. Having all domestic violence cases processed through one specialized domestic violence court with trained and dedicated personnel permitted the coordination of resources, supervision of defendants, and consistency in case processing that was not available when cases were assigned to one of eight geographically dispersed magistrate's courts. Maintaining a full-time dedicated prosecutor was especially beneficial for maintaining consistency in case processing and holding defendants accountable for their sanctions. An additional ingredient to the success of this court was the fact that mental health and the victim and defendant service providers were present in every court session. As a result, defendants and victims could immediately receive assistance from these service providers. Given that victims and defendants often lived in rural outlying communities and had difficulty making travel arrangements to get to court, it was key that all services be available to them in the same court so that the burdens of travel could be minimized. Additionally, the court placed an emphasis on holding convicted defendants accountable for the treatment programs they were assigned to by maintaining weekly follow-ups on their progress. The

judges made it clear to defendants that if they failed to comply with their treatment conditions, they would spend time in jail. The results from this research, therefore, suggest that policy makers interested in combating domestic violence should seriously consider a centralized therapeutic court approach that permits a greater level of coordination between the diversity of agencies that are needed to handle domestic violence situations and holds defendants accountable for their actions.

Indeed, these findings underscore the benefits of a coordinated response to domestic violence and the ability of local communities to act in a proactive manner toward the crime of domestic violence. Although traditional approaches to dealing with domestic abuse and violence have shown little hope, the specialized court system provides evidence for positive change. A serious and coordinated criminal justice response to domestic violence that focuses on a therapeutic jurisprudence philosophy of justice appears to be an effective method of reducing domestic violence recidivism. The court has the ability to determine treatment needs for offenders and to provide accountability of the sanctioned treatment. These actions need to be taken by the court because victims can be endangered by any breakdown in the system. With these types of assistance, there is a chance to reduce the incidence of domestic violence. Jurisdictions that undertake such efforts need to plan these efforts in advance and identify the resources and roles that each stakeholder will adopt so that a collaborative interagency strategy toward combating domestic violence can be successfully implemented. Such efforts have proved fruitful in Lexington County, South Carolina and should be replicated in other settings.

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