



a series of briefs on

## **CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES FOR ARIZONA**

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Volume 2

### **SKEPTICISM, “FIXABILITY,” OR JUST A DAY’S WORK**

#### **HOW ARIZONA LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS APPROACH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES**

*This second criminal justice brief is, like the first, based upon further analysis of the data gathered in the preparation of **Layers of Meaning: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona**.<sup>1</sup> The findings presented here expand on the findings and issues presented in the full report. The aim of this briefing is to present additional information and analysis in support of Arizona's ongoing public conversation about reducing and preventing domestic violence.*

More than 800 Arizona police officers and sheriff's deputies participated in surveys and interviews for *Layers of Meaning: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona*. Analysis of their responses – as detailed in the report<sup>2</sup> – found many areas of consensus. For example, officers overwhelmingly agreed that domestic violence is a major issue in their communities. The great majority also saw domestic violence as a “real” crime that warrants officers' intervention. At the same time, strong majorities of officers expressed frustration over the volume and repetitive nature of DV calls, the behavior of victims, and the perceived reluctance of prosecutors to follow up on arrests. There were areas of disagreement as well.

The richness of the data and the similarities and differences among officers with various characteristics encouraged further analysis to see whether responses tended to occur together in statistically significant ways, meaning they could not have occurred by chance. If so, these underlying clusters of responses could be used to construct “profiles” that would more clearly describe the most prominent officer attitudes in Arizona. This, in turn, could help agencies design more effective training activities. This research brief reports on a “factor analysis” and answers:

- How well, if at all, does an officer's response to certain survey statements predict his or her response to other similar statements?
- Can responses be grouped in a way that would reveal “profiles” of Arizona officers' approaches to DV?
- If so, how would these profiles relate to gender and other characteristics among officers?

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<sup>1</sup> *Layers of Meaning: Domestic Violence and Law Enforcement Attitudes in Arizona* was published by Morrison Institute for Public Policy (School of Public Affairs, College of Public Programs) in December 2005. The project was prepared for the Governor's Commission to Prevent Violence Against Women, Arizona Department of Public Safety, and the Arizona Peace Officers Standards and Training Board. The report is available at [www.morrisoninstitute.org](http://www.morrisoninstitute.org).

<sup>2</sup> See *Layers of Meaning* for differences in responses from rookies and veterans, men and women, officers from rural and urban locales and other characteristics. The variety of responses among groups of officers with different characteristics prompted the questions that led to this factor analysis.

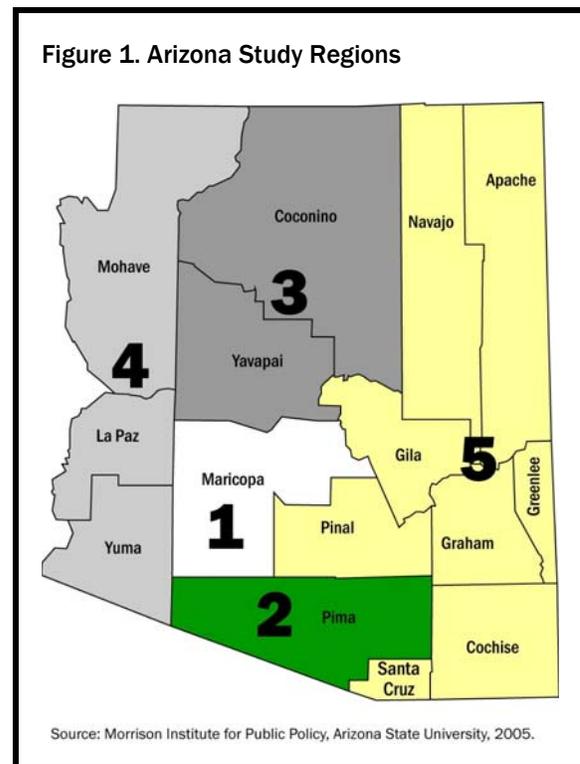
## METHODOLOGY

The 777 survey questionnaires completed for *Layers of Meaning* contained 32 statements about domestic violence and DV enforcement. Officers indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. For analysis, Arizona was divided into five regions (see Figure 1).

The statistical technique of factor analysis<sup>3</sup> was used to see if Arizona officers' survey responses "clustered" or fell into major "factors." Factor analysis examines many variables to see if certain combinations of responses tend to occur together. These groups of responses form categories that reflect broad trends.

In fact, three major "factors" were identified from this analysis. Together, these three factors explain nearly a third (31.4%) of the wide variation of opinion expressed on all 32 survey statements by the nearly 800 officers. The factors, which are profiled below, refer to themes underlying attitudes and behaviors, rather than to groups of people. The benefit of doing this type of analysis is to understand the range of values that could shed light on the roots of various attitudes.

To identify potential factors, a numerical score (a partial correlation coefficient) was calculated for each of the relevant 29 statements (See Table 1). Scores range from +1 to -1. The closer the score is to one, the more the statement is associated with the underlying factor, and the closer the score is to -1, the less the statement is associated with the underlying factor.



## THREE PRIMARY FACTORS OR THEMES

- *Skepticism* – the most prominent factor, this theme shows officers are frustrated with domestic violence policies, laws, and victims, and have little faith that arrest or other law enforcement interventions can help beyond “just that one night.”
- *“Fixability”* – this theme refers to the outlook of DV as a serious community problem that can be eased by law enforcement intervention as well as by attention to the “root causes” of DV.
- *Just a Day’s Work* – this theme refers to seeing DV enforcement as simply another part of an officer’s job – though a challenging one – and thus welcoming more guidelines and training from supervisors.

### SKEPTICISM

The factor that emerged as the strongest of the three (accounting for 15% of the total variation in all of the survey responses) describes what could be called the skepticism among Arizona’s police officers and sheriff’s deputies. These officers’ deep frustration with the challenges of DV enforcement prompts them to question America’s recent “criminalization” of domestic violence. That is, they dispute whether it’s wise to treat DV as a crime – rather than a private family matter as in the past. These officers chafe under the requirements of Arizona’s current “pro-arrest” law, and believe

<sup>3</sup> Factor analysis is sometimes known as principal component analysis.

that DV cases take too much time and too often involve merely verbal disputes that do not warrant police action. They are frustrated by many victims, who they believe often themselves contribute to DV incidents, exaggerate the amount of violence involved, and refuse to extricate themselves from abusive relationships. Some of these officers even believe that police at some point should stop responding to repeated 911 calls from the same victim.

Table 2 shows the average score on this factor for each of the five study regions. Table 3 presents average scores among men and women.

**Table 2. Skepticism is Strongest in Maricopa County**  
Average score by region

Region	Count	Mean Factor Score
Maricopa County	363	0.300
Pima County	95	-0.328
Northern Arizona	94	-0.287
Western Arizona	67	-0.315
Eastern Arizona	79	-0.392

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2006.

**Table 3. Skepticism is Higher among Men than Women**  
Mean factor score by gender

Gender	Count	Mean Factor Score
Male	605	0.027
Female	73	-0.347

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2006.

**Table 1. Skepticism is the Strongest Theme**

Correlations between survey statements and the three factors (only scores above 0.3 or below -.03 are shown because other scores were not statistically strong).

Statement	Skepticism	Fixability	Just a Day's Work
DV calls take too much of officers' time and effort.	0.736		
DV is best handled as a private matter, rather than by the police.	0.658		
DV victims are often as responsible for the incident as the person arrested.	0.608		
I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls.	0.581		
Too many DV calls are for only verbal family arguments.	0.577		
DV victims often exaggerate the amount of violence involved.	0.558		
Police should arrest in DV cases only when there is clear evidence of injury.	0.538		
There should be a limit on how many times I respond to DV calls from the same victim at the same address.	0.528		
I think DV offenders should be arrested even when victims don't want it.	-0.516	0.366	
Many DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't.	0.513		
I am less likely to make a DV arrest if the suspect is cooperative at the scene.	0.492		0.335
Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents.	0.479		
An arrest policy is the best approach to DV calls.	-0.348	0.329	0.337
DV is a significant problem in the community I serve.		0.608	
Most DV incidents stem from abusers' need for power and control over victims.		0.559	
A major problem with DV is that there are so many repeat cases.	0.335	0.532	
Most DV incidents occur because of offenders' anger-control problems.		0.521	
Substance abuse by the suspect is a primary cause of DV.		0.489	
I am more likely to be injured during a DV call than in a violence call involving strangers.		0.385	
Mental health problems are a major contributor to DV incidents.		0.337	
I find it's often hard to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases.			0.636
I need stricter guidelines from supervisors on how to deal with DV calls.			0.581
More training would help me sort out what happens at DV scenes.		0.326	0.524
Most DV calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships.		-0.363	0.491
It's often hard to know who to arrest in DV incidents.	0.380		0.490
Most DV victims are receptive to interventions by law enforcement.			0.406
I am more likely to make an arrest if the victim is cooperative at the scene.			0.403
I am more likely to make DV arrests when children are witnesses.		0.303	0.370
In my experience, prosecutors usually follow up effectively on DV arrests.			0.366

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2006.

### “FIXABILITY”

The Fixability theme shows DV enforcement as a critical and complex challenge that *should* be handled by law enforcement – with the aid of other social service professionals. This outlook considers DV a public issue, not a private matter, and believes that – despite their frustration over its repetitive nature – their continued response could make a difference. This factor accounted for 8.3% of the total variation in responses.

The Fixability theme sought to identify and understand the underlying causes of and contributing factors to domestic violence. These might include offenders' psychological issues, anger problems, substance abuse, and mental illness. This profile tends

to favor Arizona’s “pro-arrest” policy towards of DV offenders, and believe in arresting offenders even when victims do not desire it. Scores on Fixability are higher among women than men (Table 4).

**JUST A DAY’S WORK**

The final factor identified in the analysis puts responses under the theme Just a Day’s Work, which also accounted for 8.3% of the variation in responses. This factor does not appear to share the frustration high in the Skepticism factor because responses show victims are viewed as generally receptive and prosecutors usually attentive. Nor is Fixability’s apparent concern with the extent of domestic violence or curiosity about its causes as evident. Instead, the Just a Day’s Work responses dwell more on the practical challenges that DV incidents pose for responding officers, and the need for training to help them meet those challenges. These operational concerns show up in four of the top five statements associated with this factor, which also reflect a desire for stricter guidelines from supervisors.

The Just a Day’s Work factor seems to reflect a somewhat more optimistic view than the others, with statements favoring Arizona’s “pro-arrest” policy and supporting the view that most DV problems are just temporary difficulties in otherwise good relationships. Overall, this factor shows concern with the difficulties of making good decisions and the practical aspects of doing police work according to departmental policies, even if that means more restrictions from supervisors and a reduction in individuals’ discretion at DV scenes. The Just a Day’s Work factor tends to reflect fewer domestic violence calls (Table 5).

This factor analysis reaffirms the findings of *Layers of Meaning*: that Arizona law enforcement attitudes toward domestic violence are varied and complex. The categories of *Skepticism*, *Fixability*, and *Just a Day’s Work* do not suggest that officers can be strictly separated into these roles; most are skeptical about some aspects of DV enforcement, while at the same time would be delighted to be able to “fix” the problem. However, the factors do provide insights into more of the characteristics of law enforcement officers. This further examination of officers’ attitudes will provide additional help to policy makers, law enforcement agencies, domestic violence advocates, and others as they work to improve Arizona’s response to this critical problem.

**Table 4. Fixability is More Prominent among Women than Men**

Mean factor score by gender

Gender	Count	Mean Factor Score
Male	605	-0.041
Female	73	0.342

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2006.

**Table 5. Fewer Domestic Violence Calls are Part of the Just a Day’s Work Theme**

Mean factor score by number of DV calls

DV Calls Last Year	Count	Mean Factor Score
0-25	189	0.210
25-75	156	0.131
75-150	153	-0.068
150+	131	-0.409

Source: Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University, 2006.



ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

For further information

**Richard Toon, Ph.D.**  
richard.toon@asu.edu

**Bill Hart**  
whart@asu.edu

Morrison Institute for Public Policy  
Arizona State University  
P. O. Box 874405 | Tempe, Arizona 85287 4405  
480-965-4525 (voice) | 480-965-9219 (fax)  
www.morrisoninstitute.org

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