5-2023

Internal Perceptions: A Look at the Fayetteville Police Department's Partnership with Social Workers

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Internal Perceptions: A Look at the Fayetteville Police Department's Partnership with Social Workers

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work in Social Work

by

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Bachelor of Science in Journalism, 2008

May 2023
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

The development of co-response models where law enforcement partner with social workers or mental health clinicians to respond to individuals in mental health crises or with other social needs is on the rise throughout the United States. The Fayetteville, AR Police Department (FPD) developed their program with a University of Arkansas School of Social Work (UA) intern in 2021. The newly created Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT) now has two full-time, two-person co-response teams along with two social work interns and has plans for growth. This study looks at FPD sworn and civilian employees' perceptions of embedding social workers/advocates into their department. Results and discussion highlight factors that have made the program work thus far, lessons learned, and suggestions for program improvement as it continues to grow.

Keywords: police, law enforcement, social work, mental health, crisis intervention, co-response

Acknowledgments

There are many who contributed to the success of this study. I would like to thank my committee – Dr. Kim Stauss, Dr. Mark Plassmeyer, and Dr. John Gallagher. You each played a different yet vital role in this project. Thank you for encouraging me, guiding me, pushing me, and believing in me.

This study would not have happened without the Fayetteville Police Department and its forward-thinking administration. Thank you to Chief Mike Reynolds for your initiative to partner with the University of Arkansas School of Social Work, your vision of developing the CIRT Division, and for making it an FPD priority. Shout out to Lt. Tim Shepard and Sgt. Patrick Hanby for CIRT implementation and oversight, and to Lead Social Service Advocate Steven Greathouse for blazing the trail for social work interns and practitioners to follow. Thank you to all who participated in the study. Your insight will be intragal to the continued development of CIRT as well co-response programs in other departments.

To the 2023 MSW cohort, I am so thankful we went through this process together and for the memories we made. These two years, this thesis, would not have been possible without your support. We are…magical. A special thanks to Allen Burnett and Lizeth Guadalupe who got me across the official thesis finish line on time and to Leea Johnson for their camaraderie in the final push. I am enterally grateful to my wife, Patty Arnett, for her unwavering support and patience. And to our four cats, who constantly remind me that life is ultimately about connection.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The idea of social workers partnering with police is not new. August Vollmer, the father of American policing, delivered a speech in 1919 called "The Policeman as a Social Worker" at a meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (Patterson & Swan, 2019). Patterson & Swan (2019) explain that police were encouraged, but reluctant, to collaborate with social service agencies to help deal with a variety of social problems, including poverty, alcohol use, unemployment, prostitution, illness, gambling, and inadequate home environments. In the early 1900s, police departments hired women with experience in social work to do the work officers would not because of lack of time and interest (Patterson & Swan, 2019). There have been many iterations of law enforcement and social work collaborations over the last century to better meet the social needs of those in the communities they serve.

A more recent iteration has been exploring alternative ways to respond to people in mental health crisis. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2020) estimated that more than 20 percent, or 51.5 million adults in the United States, had a mental illness in 2019. That is approximately a four percent increase from the estimated 39.8 million people with a mental illness in 2008 (SAMHSA, 2020). On average, one person dies by suicide every 11 minutes (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). In Arkansas, 457,000 adults have a mental health condition. In a year's time, 106,000 Arkansans had thoughts of suicide, and 554 died by suicide (NAMI, 2021). Too often, those with mental illness are arrested or abandoned rather than treated. About one in four people with mental disorders have histories of police arrest, and one in ten have contact with police before receiving treatment (Livingston, 2016).

The Crisis Intervention Team, or "Memphis Model," was developed in the late 1980s after Memphis police fatally shot a man diagnosed with schizophrenia (Wood & Watson, 2017). It provides law enforcement officers with an additional 40-hours of training on how to better interact with people with mental illness. More recently, co-response team models began popping up around the country, including cities in Northwest Arkansas. There is no developed structure that is consistent among the co-response programs (Patterson & Swan, 2019), but a key component is that a police officer is paired with a social worker or other mental health clinician to respond together to people experiencing a mental health crisis. (Morabito et al., 2018; Bailey et al., 2022; Blais & Brisebois, 2021).

To address the increased calls for service regarding those with mental health concerns or those experiencing homelessness, the Fayetteville Police Department (FPD) in Fayetteville, Arkansas launched a partnership with University of Arkansas School of Social Work (UA) to develop a blended CIT co-response program in 2021. The program began with one MSW intern in the Spring 2021 semester. Two years later, the department has two full-time social service advocates, an MSW intern, and a BSW intern. Of the two social advocates, one is a licensed social worker and one has a sociology background. Both perform similar tasks. For the sake of simplicity, this paper will use a broad definition of social advocate to encompass both when refering to the FPD program. Known as the Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT), the program has co-response pairs where a CIT-trained officer and social advocate respond to certain types of calls and follow up with high utilizers of the department. A second task of CIRT is to follow up with people they have had contact with as well as connect with people who have been referred to them by other department employees.

This research study was designed to explore the cultural changes within the department, the lessons learned, and the continued challenges the CIRT program faces. While there is a growing body of research about the effects of co-response programs, few report the characteristics of what make them successful or explore police agencies' internal perceptions. Also, most research evaluates co-response programs in more urban areas (Bailey et al., 2022; Blais & Brisebois, 2021; Morabito et al., 2018; and White & Weisburd, 2017). This study will look at a program in a more rural city, less than 100,000 people, in the country's mid-south.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Fayetteville, Arkansas Police Department

Fayetteville, Ark. is located in the Northwest corner of the state. Its population is about 95,000 people, of which nearly 75 percent is White, 8.5 percent is Hispanic or Latino, and 6.4 percent is Black (US Census). The median household income is $61,428, and 17.7 percent of Fayetteville residents live in poverty (US Census). The FPD has 128 sworn officers. Of those, 112 are men and 16 are women; 107 are White, 10 are Hispanic, 6 are Black, and 5 are other races (Fayetteville Police Department, 2023).

Arkansas state law requires all law enforcement officers receive 16 hours of training on behavioral health crises. This training includes education on mental illness, community services to support those in a mental health crisis, laws applicable to those in crisis, and best practices to promote the safety of officers and the public (AR Code §12-9-119, 2020). This law also encourages law enforcement agencies to have at least 20 percent of their sworn officers CIT trained. CIT training includes information on behavioral health impairments and mental illness, and it incorporates the development of communication skills, practical experience, and role playing of situations officers could encounter with someone in a mental health crisis (AR Code §12-9-119, 2020). As mentioned above, FPD's CIRT co-response model pairs these CIT officers with a social advocate, who can provide additional expertise with mental health illness and assist with referrals to other social services.

Co-Response Teams

According to Patterson and Swan (2019), "law enforcement agencies do not have accessible name brand social work and social service collaboration models that can be replicated" (p. 863). As a result, evaluating the effectiveness of co-response programs is

challenging. Additionally, most CIT programs only train officers and do not pair them with social workers or mental health clinicians. The implementation of co-response teams varies as well in the role and credentials of the person paired with an officer, the availability of teams, communities served, type of concerns addressed, and data collected (Bailey et al., 2022; Blais & Brisebois, 2021; Morabito et al., 2018; White & Weisburd, 2018).

Studies completed do suggest that the co-response model decreases the likelihood of an individual in a mental health crisis from being arrested (Bailey et al., 2022; Morabito et al., 2018). A descriptive exploratory study looking at a co-response program in Boston found that less than one percent of the 1,127 incidents reviewed ended in arrest (Morabito et al., 2018). Additionally, in 36 percent of incidents involving an individual in a mental health crisis, the team deescalated the person and left them on scene, and nearly 29 percent were transported to an emergency room (Morabito et al., 2018). Another quasi-experimental study conducted in Indianapolis compared results of a co-response model to the traditional police response. Bailey and colleagues (2022) concluded the co-response "reduced the short-term incarceration risk but not the long-term emergency medical services demand or risk of justice involvement" (p. 366). Data was collected on immediate interactions and follow-up with individuals at six and 12 months post contact (Bailey et al., 2022).

On the other hand, another quasi-experimental study found little to no difference in arrest rates when comparing outcomes of co-response teams and police response as usual (Blais & Brisebois, 2021). This study researched responses to suicide-related emergencies. The treatment group consisted of 251 suicide-related interventions and 130 similar instances from the department's system files (Blais & Brisebois, 2021). While little evidence existed on the

reduction of arrest rates, there was a significant decrease in the use of police force and transports to the hospital when a co-response team intervened (Blais & Brisebois, 2021).

Co-response teams have also shown evidence in helping individuals connect to social services through referrals (Blais & Bresbois, 2021), and providing information on resources (White & Weisburd, 2018). The Laval Police Department co-response initiative saw a nearly 33 percent increase in people referred to other community resources over a two-year period (Blais & Bresbois, 2021). One of the primary goals of a pilot co-response program in Baltimore, Maryland was to provide information about other resources and connect people to services (White & Weisburd, 2018). Teams in the program were more proactive rather than responding to calls. This included knocking on doors in high-crime spots to support those in crisis and divert them from criminal justice system. The teams provided information regarding social services to 60 percent of the people they interacted with (White & Weisburd, 2018). The most common needs were referrals to outpatient mental health, drug treatment, housing, medical care, and legal services (White & Weisburd, 2018).

Social Workers Embedded into Police Departments

Lamin & Teboh (2016) argue that though police still collaborate with agencies that use social workers, more structured partnerships, mainly through hiring social workers in the departments, would provide a large skill base that would benefit victims of a crime or those involved in non-emergency situations. Adding in social workers into police departments is still novel but growing in popularity. Lamin and Teboh (2016) reported that 69 percent of 40 police chiefs interviewed believed collaboration with social workers would increase trust between the police and community.

Additionally, Marabito and colleagues (2018) reported that police officers perceived the co-response program added a "tool in their daily work" (p. 1101). Other benefits noted by officers included increased ability to get a mental health clinician on scene quickly and social workers and clinicians bringing a different skill set than law enforcement to situations. Some officers, however, did express concern about the increased responsibility on them to keep the clinician safe (Morabito et al., 2018).

Purpose

While the literature around co-response models is growing, there remains limited research around how police believe progams in their departments are working. This study fills in that gap as it explores FPD employee perceptions on the department's CIRT program, which embeds social advocates. It also explores the successes of the program, what progress has been made on programmatic goals and implementation, and ways it can improve as it continues to develop.

Chapter 3: Practice and Theoretical Frameworks

Multi-Systems Life Course

This study is informed by the multi-systems life course (MSLC) perspective, which "considers the multi-dimensional nature of the human experience" (Murphey-Erby et al., 2010, p. 673), or in this case, agency experience. MSLC encompasses four theories to provide contextual understanding of the actors at play. Those theories are life course theory, ecological social systems theory, symbolic interactionism theory, and theories of social change (Murphy-Erby et al., 2010). MSLC is used as a broad lens to analyze various-sized systems and how they affect an entity. For this paper, it is used to provide a starting framework to understand the complex relationships between law enforcement, the Fayetteville Police Department, social work, and the partnership of the professions through the CIRT program.

Life Course Theory

Life course theory considers the significant events in the FPD, NWA community, and the collaboration with the UA School of Social Work. Life course theory emphasizes interdependency and includes intergenerational events and time frames, and it assumes the free will of a person or agency while acknowledging that they are influenced by societal forces (Murphy-Erby et al., 2010).

Life course theory can be used when looking the history of policing as a profession as well as the history of the FPD. Historically, there was the political era from the mid 1800s to the 1920s where police represented local politicians in the neighborhoods they patrolled. The professional era occurred through the 1970s when police legitimacy transitioned from politics to criminal law. Currently, community policing often focuses on efforts to build trust with the communities they serve (Community Policing, n.d.). Additionally, when exploring the history of

policing, one must consider the racist roots of policing traced back to the slave patrols in the 1700s (NAACP, 2021; Lepore, 2020). It is important to note that the way the history of the profession is understood affects the way the profession operates today.

The FPD has its own history that dates to its creation in 1870 (City of Fayetteville, n.d.). It includes four deaths of officers while on duty. They occurred in 1881, 1928, 1968, and the most recent was Officer Stephen Carr in 2019 (City of Fayetteville, n.d.). A death so recent does have implications for how the department views itself and how community members view the department.

Ecological Social Systems Theory

Ecological social systems theory within the MSLC approach helps analyze the systems interrelated in this case (Murphey-Erby et al., 2010). The systems that influence the FPD include: 1) City Council as it approves the department's financial activity; 2) the residents who pay the taxes that pay officer's salaries; 3) other service organizations that partner with law enforcement to provide alternatives to arrest; and 4) various community members that interact with police whether for assistance, criminal behavior, or simple traffic stops. The location of the department also influences how it operates. It is in town in the southern part of the Midwest that is not overly rural or overly urban. The diversity is Northwest Arkansas is increasing, but the majority of the population remains white, conservative, and Christian (Arkansas Secretary of State, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2022; Northwest Arkansas Council, 2022). These dominant characteristics impact one's FPD trust and community engagement, depending on how an individual self-identifies.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic interactionism theory considers cultural symbols, roles, and the meanings they have in shaping behavior (Murphey-Erby et al. 2010). The role of law enforcement is going to be different depending on who is perceiving that role. As presented above, the dominant white culture may see them more as an authority figure that deserves respect, while minorities may often see them as a threat (DeSilver et al., 2020; Skinner & Haas, 2016). Those with liberal ideologies may see them as problematic while those with conservative ideologies may see them as public servants and as necessary to enforce law and keep communities safe (DeSilver et al., 2020; Ekins & Feeney, 2017).

Theories of Social Change

Theories of social change emphasizes "the relationship among social justice, social change, and social action by considering issues of power and oppression and strategies for actively challenging the status quo to promote social change" (Murphy-Erby et al., 2010, p. 679). It could be argued that the CIRT program was developed in the atmosphere of a national call for police departments to change. Though the FPD chief had interest in alternative responses to non-criminal calls for service since 2019, the FPD was able to acquire grant money to partner with social workers for certain types of calls after the protests George Floyd's murder in 2020 (M. Reynolds, personal communication, January 4, 2023). The program works to reduce the criminalization of those with substance abuse disorders, mental health illness, and homelessness while building trust between the police and community (City of Fayetteville, n.d.). Yet, for some in the social work field, even such efforts are seen as not going far enough, and they continue to call for the defunding of police and investment in non-carceral social services (Jacobs et al., 2020).

Change Theories

The MSLC perspective provides a practice framework that influenced this study. There are also several other change theories that could assist in understanding why and how the CIRT program is being implemented at the FPD. They include change model theory, diffusion of innovation theory, and the concept of three levels of resistance.

Change Model Theory

Kurt Lewin's change model theory is one of the most well-established theories when addressing social change. Lewin explains change as a three-step process of "unfreezing" the current status quo, "moving" when the change occurs, and "refreezing" when the new norm is adopted (Burnes & Bargal, 2017). The CIRT division provides officers with an alternative response to certain types of calls as well as an avenue to connect people in need to services that could help them. This requires a shift in mindset and asks officers to take into consideration a person's needs rather than just enforcing the law. However, the stages from unfreezing to moving is not clearly defined, making it difficult to know how many people in the department are in the moving phase and how many are still in the unfreezing stage.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

This is where the diffusion of innovations theory may provide some insight. Developed by E.M. Rogers in the 1960s, this theory suggests how a new idea gains momentum and spreads through a social system over time (Rogers, 2004). The adoption of a new behavior, or in this case a new program, happens in a process where some are going to adopt the new idea more quickly than others. There are five adopter categories that include innovators (the first on-board with the new idea), early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (who are the most difficult to bring on board) (LaMorte, n.d.). This theory can be seen in the current implementation of the

new CIRT program at the FPD where the chief, lieutenant over the program, and the segreant in the program are the innovators, or the first to have full buy-in of the new program. Many of the early adopters of the program can be identified by the which officers make the most referrals to the program, signifying they believe in what it can do. Further research, including this study, will help identify where other members of the FPD currently are in the adoption of the new program.

Three Levels of Resistance

Rick Maurer's three levels of resistance is unique in that it highlights different types of resistance and how they are obstacles to making change a success. Maurer titles the three levels of resistance as "I don't get it," "I don't like it," and "I don't like you" (Maurer, 2022). The first level, "I don't get it," is about information, data, and ideas, and resistance comes when one does not agree with why there is a change or how it is being done. The second level, "I don't like it," deals with the emotional resistance one may have to the change. The third level, "I don't like you," deals with people who are not resistant to the change but skeptical about the success of its implementation (Maurer, 2022). It is likely that all three of these types of resistance will be present in the FPD as it implements the new CIRT program. This research should help identify current resistance, which can then be addressed.

Chapter 4: Methods

This qualitative study explores the perceptions of FPD employees regarding the newly established CIRT program that includes social advocates and social work interns. Data was collected through qualitative interviews with 13 participants. The one-on-one interview format was selected over a focus group to encourage honesty and so that participants could openly share opinions that may differ than colleagues.

This study is most closely influenced by the ethnography (Creswell, 2023) tradition in that it explores the culture of the police department and its reaction to a developing a partnership with social workers and other social services advocates. The researcher was conducting this study while also completing a year-long internship with the department's CIRT program. Field notes were collected throughout the internship but were limited in use of the study. The field notes were used indirectly to help inform the interview process and additional questions to seek further clarification on emerging themes. This study will be looking at shared themes among employees of the agency as well as discovering "lessons learned and questions raised" (Creswell, 2023, p. 106).

Sampling

Convenience sampling was incorporated to recruit the 13 FPD participants. Participants, except for one, were gathered through an email with recruitment material sent to every FPD employee. One participant offered to be interviewed after he and the researcher were talking about the study in passing. Three additional interested people responded to the email, but the interviews were not completed due to the inability to set up a convenient time for the participant. The main eligibility criterion was that participants were FPD employees. The sample included 10 sworn and three civilian employees. Division representation included administration, patrol,

criminal investigation, records, and dispatch. Interviewing sworn and civilian employees from various divisions provided insight into how the CIRT program affects all aspects of the police department.

Each participant was given the option of being interviewed outside of the police department, over the phone, or in the police department. The researcher emphasized the importance of confidentiality and explained how the location of the interview may affect it. Prior to each interview, the researcher had a brief and honest discussion about her role as the researcher of this study as well as the MSW intern as part of the CIRT program. Discussion centered around her dualistic roles, how that might affect what the participant was willing to say, affirmation that participants' honesty would not have negative consequences, and reiteration of the study's confidentiality. All participants except for one preferred to be interviewed at the police department. One participant requested and was interviewed via phone. The average interview length was 33 minutes. All interviews were recorded with a hand-held voice recorder, including the interview done by phone. The researcher conducted that interview alone in a car and used speaker phone so the voice recorder could capture the conversation. The University of Arkansas Internal Review Board approved the study in October 2022.

Measurement

The interviews were semi-structured and were augmented by several closed survey questions. These include: 1) length of time the participant has worked at the FPD; 2) department they worked in; 3) interaction with CIRT; 4) completion of the Crisis Intervention Team training; and 5) shifts they work. These descriptive variables provided a better idea of the sample selected as well as more insight into participants' relationship to the CIRT program.

The rest of the interview was semi-structured, and the questions were open in nature. A list of the questions can be found in Appendix B. The questions explored the participant's relationship to the CIRT program, perceptions of the program, including what the challenges and successes are, how the program changed their job, and recommendations to enhance the program. The purpose behind these questions was to discover lessons learned based on the program development and implementation, and possible changes needed to enhance the current program or provide a greater understanding so replication can be facilitated with other collaborations.

Data Preparation and Analysis

Transcriptions, or data, were cleaned for accuracy. Identifying information about the participants was removed in this phase to maintain confidentiality. Once cleaned, the researcher read each transcript at least once before beginning the coding process. That reading did not include any notetaking. The second and subsequent readings included memos, notes, and colors so that codes and themes could be established. Codes were counted to assist the researcher in looking at how prevalent each code was.

To reflect rigor and credibility of this study, several qualitative methods were incorporated to enhance the data analysis process. These include the use of an autoethnography, a research team, an audit trail, and a triangulation of data sources to check on potential biases, and accuracy and comprehensiveness of the emerging themes. The interviews were divided among three UA faculty with research experience. The three faculty members coded their assigned interviews then met with the researcher for a data triangulation meeting where categories and clusters were identified. The researcher also conducted an autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to better understand her own perspectives and biases of law enforcement,

social work, and the idea of a partnership between the two professions. While this exercise does not eliminate the researcher's bias, it can increase the researcher's awareness of how their bias can affect the research and help to mitigate that affect. It increases the credibility of the study with transparency. Additionally, data triangulation (DeCarlo et al., 2020) was used in creating the sample. Participants were recruited from various divisions within the police department to get a more holistic picture on how the CIRT program is affecting the agency and not just the patrol division. Lastly, the researcher developed an audit trail of her process from collecting the raw data to the study's findings. This increased the study's rigor by monitoring reflexivity and increasing transparency (DeCarlo et al., 2020). Data triangulation was also used during the data analysis coding process, as mentioned earlier. The researcher also regularly met with one professor to discuss the research process and gain feedback and suggestions.

Chapter 5: Results

Several themes emerged from the 13 qualitative interviews that were conducted with sworn officers and civilian employees in the FPD. The 11 identified themes were broken down into three categories: 1) factors that have allowed the program to work; 2) areas where progress has been made since the CIRT program's inception; and 3) ways the CIRT program could improve.

What's Worked

Five themes emerged when looking at factors that have contributed to the CIRT program's early success. The themes include: selecting the right people, FPD's leadership, FPD's progressive culture, creating an a-political program, and the collaborative partnership between police and social work.

Theme One: Right Person

A few participants (n=4) commented that part of what has made the program work so far is that the "right people" were selected for the position of the officer and the social worker for the first CIRT team. One participant commented that:

> (the social worker) has such a personality that he's impossible to dislike…If somebody came in here and they had I'm-going-to-change-everything-in-the-department attitude, I don't think that they could last. How do you survive when everybody thinks that they're out to get them? He's not like that.

Another participant explained his knowledge of the Sargent in the CIRT division for many years and that, "he's probably one of the best guys for that job. I would not be good at it…Patience, that's the biggest thing."

Participants also discussed the characteristics that future officers and social workers should have as the CIRT division grows. One participant emphasized the need for trust by saying, "From an officer's standpoint, we need to not fear you. I need to feel like you're not

looking for a reason to end my career." Another participant spoke about having the right officers selected for the CIRT program by commenting:

> If you have the right person selected that's a police officer, and if you're approaching it in the right way, they show compassion and empathy, I don't think that they're going to hamper what the social worker is trying to accomplish. I think if you develop that partnership, communication, understanding what people's roles are, then I think that in my opinion, that's the best approach.

Theme Two: Leadership

Participants (n=4) also commented on the department's administrative leadership as a driving force for implementing CIRT. Participants explained how the chief of police has clearly stated that developing the CIRT team is one of his priorities and how FPD employees do not want to be in opposition of their leaders. One participant illustrated this by commenting, "When the chief is clearly putting a lot of resources into it, I mean, you kind of see they just get in line behind it." Another participant stated:

> We need to mirror the attitude of our chief of police at the end of the day and what his attitude is regarding this type of stuff. And that trickles down. So other departments, to me, it would be required for that chief of police to really be on board and to really prioritize that in order to get there. Because from there it goes down to the captains and the lieutenants. Lieutenants are convincing the sergeants and the sergeants convince the troops.

Theme Three: Progressive Department

Most participants (n=8) described the FPD's culture as progressive in that it is open to trying new things, works to be ahead of policing trends, and serves beyond just enforcing laws. One participant explained it this way: "We do try to think outside of the box, and we really try to figure out what the problem is, what the root of it is, what's the best solution for it with the tools that we have." Another participant connected the CIRT program to the department's progressive mindset:

> I do think this is something the community wants. I won't say expects, but the trend is growing, and so Fayetteville is out in front of it saying we're one of the

> first in the area, we got x amount of officers that are CIT trained, whatever it is, just solidifies that hey, we're getting ahead of this. We're progressive. We're identifying this problem and going out in front of it before it's too late. We're not 10 years from now saying we really need to get this CIRT program going. Everybody else has done it. I guess we need to. We're right out in front of it.

A third participant shared similar sentiments about the FPD's CIRT program being ahead of the policing trends by commenting, "It's very forward-thinking, trying to think ahead about where policing is going and how we can best navigate where policing as a whole, the culture is going in society and in this area."

Theme Four: A-Political Program

The national politicization of policing and social work professions was alluded to in several of the interviews. Participants wanted to stay away from making political comments, but three made direct statements about the how the CIRT program should not be political. One participant explained the a-political intentionality when creating the CIRT program:

> It was late 2020 when we started the conversation, 2021 when we rolled it out. So, they're (officers) seeing all this national stuff, and it's very political, which we were very intentional in our design to make this apolitical…I wanted to make sure we did everything we could to make it not political.

Another participant remarked on the reality that politics have an influence in policing but that they should be limited as much as possible:

> A lot of people try to politicize police work. Well, it's not political. You know? It is politicized, but it's not political… And so politicians come in and tug us both ways – anti-cop, pro-cop, you know, just, I would say, try to remove social work from the political spectrum as much as possible. Obviously, it needs political support because of funding and grants and stuff like that, but I would say it needs to be as bipartisan as possible.

Theme Five: Partnership

Another emerging theme was the partnership (n=6), both between police and social workers, and between the FPD and UA School of Social Work. Participants noted a complementary skill set social workers brought to the FPD. The gap social workers fill involve

the knowledge of mental health issues. An example is illustrated in this participant's comment, "We are working with experts. So, I want people to understand that just because there are police officers involved, I mean, we don't think we're experts in mental health. That's why we're working with other people." Another participant spoke of the mutual benefit:

> I know that the chief has a vision to grow that and continue that relationship with the university and attract those students, and I hope that they will see that working side-by-side with police officers is a worthy position to be in from your position, and I want my officers to see you all as a valuable tool, as well.

There was also discussion on the benefit and importance of the intuitional partnership between FPD and UA. One participant reflected on how this partnership led to obtaining a grant that provided funds for the program. He called the grant one of the program's "biggest successes."

Two participants commented on both parties maintaining an openness to the partnership as key for making it possible. This is seen in the comments of one participant recalling the initial meetings between the two institutions:

> On both sides, it was definitely them being open to it. Even at our first few meetings, you could tell there was a little, some barriers, and they quickly went away. And who knows who gets credit for all that. I think it was a group effort...And I think just coming in there from our standpoint of being like, hey, we know we don't have the answers. We need help...instead of, hey, we're the police. We know everything.

Another participant commented on the uniqueness of open dialogue between the FPD and UA:

> I feel like we've actually developed a pretty transparent and open relationship, and I don't know if that would happen everywhere...In Fayetteville for some reason, we've been very lucky when it comes to this. Anybody I've met with on this program, we've been able to communicate openly with. So, I do wonder, because I've had conversations with other agencies in totally different regions, and they don't have those relationships, period.

Progress That's Been Made

Four themes were identified when considering program and department improvements since CIRT's inception. Those themes include: 1) increased buy-in; 2) additional tool/resource; 3) workload ease; 4) decrease in high utilizers.

Theme One: Increased Buy-In

The concept of program buy-in was brought up by most participants (n=9). Nearly all of those talked about initial hesitancy of the program and increased buy-in since the program implementation. For instance, one participant commented:

> I think we've done a really good job of actually proving to them that it is a resource, and it literally just makes your life easier…Certain officers in particular that I know were not fans of this program because they thought it was not going to work are now making referrals to it.

Another participant talked about officers being put at ease once they knew more about the program and its intent:

> I feel like there's been minimal pushback from the officers once the program was explained to them. And once they realized the idea is not to replace officers. It's not to reduce the amount of officers that are on the street. It's a resource to help the officers. And so, I think it's been well received, no pushback that I'm aware of.

It should be noted that a few participants (n=2) mentioned that some continued hesitancy or uncertainty about the program. An example of this can be seen in the following comment:

> I don't really see any sentiment that people are outright against it, but I've definitely seen some sentiment where people are like well, I don't know how effective it really is, so we'll see. Some of that, too, is that it's still early days for the program.

Another participant shared a similar sentiment when stating, "I would say the general sentiment has been positive. … There's just a little bit of uncertainty about how much it will be able to do. Just personally, I think that will start to go away as we see results."

Theme Two: It's Another Tool, Resource

Participants (n=7) referred to the CIRT program as "another tool" that could be used for the department to serve the community. For instance, one participant commented, "It's a hundred percent something else that we can use that helps us do our job and helps us relate to the community." Another stated, it is "just one more resource that we can provide for people...understanding that we're not going to have our only options as jail or a hospital." One participant explained that there has been an increase of people seeking social services at FPD since the COVID 19 pandemic. She stated: "I feel like we have more tools now to assist them and not necessarily criminalize or sweep it under a rug where we're not really addressing what they need." Another participant explained how the CIRT program complemented the department's "fundamental job" to serve the community:

> This is just a tool to help us do that…Our core aspect of who we are and what we do hasn't been altered by the addition of the social workers. It's made our core job easier, and it's given us more options and more tools to work with.

Theme Three: Workload Ease

Another consistent theme (n=9) shared was that the CIRT program eased the workload of different department divisions. Some participants were explicit in stating that the program has done this. For instance, one participant stated, "It has freed up our time to respond to priority calls." Frequently, participants commented on how the police are "garbage collectors" in that they are tasked with various responsibilities that do not have to do with enforcing a law, including responding to mental health calls. One participant explained the CIRT program allowed police to focus on police work:

> There aren't a lot of people who like going to a mental health crisis call. Removing that and saying we got this then cool; I got more time to stop cars or look for drugs or whatever I want to do.

Two other participants commented that the CIRT program was a "win-win" in that it alleviated work from the patrol division but also provided better assistance to those experiencing a mental health crisis. Some participants were less explicit about CIRT providing ease to others' workloads but hopeful that it would as it continued to grow. This is seen in one participant's remarks:

> When it's fully implemented, I do think it's going to make officers' careers happier because I'm telling you, it can really make you jaded like going to these calls, not having that resource. I think it'll be more effective in that it'll actually let officers get back to doing police work.

Another participant quantitatively generalized how much of an impact the CIRT program could ease the patrol workload when stating, "We go to 50,000 calls roughly a year, and just looking at the calls, 10% of those were calls that we felt like police officers didn't need to be responding to and that this program could be responsible for."

Theme Four: Decrease in High Utilizers

A success of the CIRT program has been a decrease in interaction with some of the department's "high utilizers," according to participants (n=4). As one civilian participant stated, "Some individuals you would see them once a week, or they would come in five times a day. We've seen that decrease with some individuals." A sworn officer reported similar experiences when commenting, "Being here on patrol, I deal with the frequent calls of particular individuals, and once you guys get involved, it seems like those are curtailed significantly." Another participant spoke specifically about the success of one individual:

> She has called the police department and shown up here multiple times. We've dealt with her for years since I've worked here, and I have not seen her in probably eight weeks…I know for a fact she has had a follow up with a mental health doctor. I'm hoping she's gotten some medication adjustments, hooked up with some other services, and I haven't seen her in a while. So, I'm hoping that she's getting the help that she truly needs.

Another participant tells of the experience with a different high utilizer:

> When I first came to patrol, we had a woman that was just, I mean calling nine times a day. She would call me personally. She would call (the CIRT Sargent) personally. She would call me, say I want to cut myself, hang up the phone. I mean, what do I do with that right now? I have to go, even though she's already said it multiple times and hasn't done it, I still have to go. That's a major drain on my ability to supervise really the police department for an entire city. And once we ended up doing the commit on it, and (CIRT) Sergeant's crew followed up, and she hasn't been a problem since.

Ways to Improve

The FPD Chief has stated that his goal is to grow the CIRT program to have seven, two-person teams to provide 24-hour, 365-day-a-year coverage within five years (personal communication, January 4, 2023). The program is still in its early days. Three themes were identified when participants discussed how the program could improve as it continues to develop. Those themes are: 1) Expansion; 2) increase training/exposure; and 3) provide results/follow-up from referrals.

Theme One: Program Expansion

Consistently, the need for more social workers, more officers, to cover more hours was the single most-identified ways participants (n=10) reported that the CIRT program could be improved. One participant commented, "That is what ultimately is going to be able to ensure that this program grows and is successful." The program currently operates with two, two-person teams who are scheduled from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. Many participants commented on the need to have CIRT teams available at night, including this participant who stated, "If there's an acute mental health crisis at 2 a.m. they're kind of stranded. Yeah, they can…do the older ways of doing things. The luxury that…day shift has, of having that team ready to go isn't there." Another participant explained there has been times when the CIRT team has not been available, and continued, "it was like, okay, we'll have to figure something else out.

But if there were more, it should be all day every day. There should be someone available cause the midnight guys don't have one either." The sentiment was shared by another participant, who summed it up succinctly: "Yeah, it's just not 24/7…More officers and more social workers. At the end of the day, isn't that what everybody wants?"

Theme Two: Increased Training/Exposure

While the CIRT program has seen some success, five participants noted that more training and exposure about the program could increase its utilization within the department. One participant commented, "In my training, we haven't really talked about social work." Another participant offered suggestions on the information that should be shared: "What they can and can't do, what they do and don't do. Definitely the hours worked…Maybe also what the process is like once the social workers get there. What's actually happening?" Another participant said joint trainings between divisions could be helpful and commented:

> Maybe there's something we could be doing better, and maybe there's something you're not aware of, as well. Knowledge is powerful, and information, and just trying to figure out if there's something we could be doing to make your life easier and visa versa.

The fact that the CIRT program is so new is another variable to consider, one participant pointed out by stating, "Y'all's is so ever-changing right now because you're still building it. I think that constant communication with the boots on the ground is probably very, very valuable." One participant explained that education about the CIRT program should extend to the public:

> I think that the general public needs to understand what the program is. I don't know how exactly that would happen, but I looked up some Facebook posts about it. Even the initial one, Hey, we've got an intern. Hey, we hired (our first social worker). And people were like, oh my God, you're just going to send 'em out there, and they're going to get shot. And then, well, they should be sent to all the mental health crisis calls without the police. It just goes on and on. They really don't understand what's going on with it. I don't know what the simple terms would be to explain that to people, but I think that would help a lot.

Theme Three: Provide Results/Follow Up About Referrals

Several participants (n=5) commented that they do not know what happens after they make a referral to the CIRT program. For instance, one stated, “I don't know if they take that information and what happens with that or if it’s even beneficial.” Participants suggested that it would be beneficial if the CIRT team provide some of their results. This can be seen in one participant’s statement, “It would been neat to be able to see some of the success stories that come out of the program so that people in the department can see that these social workers are doing some good for the community.” Another shared a similar sentiment, stating:

> I feel like they’ve been successful. I’ve seen enough people in here talking to him and coming back multiple times to talk to him that I feel like progress has to have been made. I just don’t, I don’t know. They don’t keep us as privy to the second half, I guess.

One participant mentioned that the lack of reporting on referral outcomes is ok:

> I have no idea what the outcome was. And quite honestly, I don't bother with knowing. I have full trust in (the CIRT Sargent) and his abilities to do his job and do all that stuff. So, I don't waste my brain power and my energy on worrying about if you guys are doing your job. I expect that you are. And I go back to worrying about the welfare of my subordinates and that they're doing their job ethically and professionally.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Results

There are factors that have allowed the CIRT program to successfully operate in its early inception. Those interviewed identified the importance of the department being one that is progressive in that it is open to ideas and trying new techniques. Participants talked about the FPD seeing a need and meeting it with this new program. Along with that, there was emphasis placed on how the department leadership prioritized the CIRT program. Thus, buy-in for the program trickled down to those with most community interaction. There was also pressure to back what the leadership pushed. Participants also mentioned the importance of having the right people, both for the officer and social worker, selected for the CIRT program. They need to have certain temperaments and a mutual respect for the others' profession for the collaboration to work.

Results also indicate how the CIRT program has seen improvements since it began two years ago. Participants reported that buy-in to the program as increased, though a few commented that there are still some holdouts. Suggestions, such as reporting results of referrals, were made to further increase program buy-in. Wood and colleagues (2017) report that most mental health crises that police respond to do not include criminal activity or law violation signifying an increase in duties to police that go beyond law enforcement. Results affirm this and expound that police responsibilities to the community continue to increase and often do not include criminal behavior. Participants explained how this program has been another resource they can use to help meet those increased responsibilities, which has also been the case in s similar program (Morabito et al., 2018). The specialized division has also lightened the workload of some FPD employees. Others are hopeful it will as CIRT expands.

Furthermore, results show recommendations for how the CIRT program could be more effective as it continues to be developed. There was a high desire for the program to be available more hours of the week. Though no one on night shift was interviewed, several participants commented how beneficial it would be for CIRT to have a team operating overnight. Yet, staffing the Patrol Division is one of the largest challenges to CIRT expansion. Adequate staffing is a current challenge in police agencies around the country, including FPD who is seeing about a 70 percent reduction in applications since 2020 (Police Chief, personal communication, January 4, 2023). Participants also suggested that there be more internal training about the CIRT program throughout the department. This, along with providing results from referrals, could help program buy-in continue to increase.

Limitations

This study sought to explore the perceptions of the FPD employees regarding the CIRT program, which incorporates social advocates and social work interns. The term social advocates includes licensed social workers. While there was a range of representation from various divisions within the department, no one from night shift was included, thus leaving out a segment of the FPD workforce. Nor was the study's design such to include participants who are social advocates. Also, all the study participants were in support of the CIRT program. Some participants mentioned that they have heard continued hesitancy or skepticism about CIRT in the department, but no one who has hesitancy offered to participate in this study. Furthermore, the results in this study are limited in their generalizability as certain factors are specific to Fayetteville, AR.

Implications

Practice

FPD employees expressed that a challenge of their job was meeting people in need for non-criminal calls but not knowing how to help. They explained they would make sure that there was no threat to anyone, leave the scene, only to be called back again later. A few participants shared that some FPD employees would Google services to provide more assistance. Unfortunately, those efforts would consume valuable time that should be spent on other tasks. Having social advocates embedded in the department provides more expertise on mental health as well as connections to social services in the community.

There is also opportunity for social workers in police departments to provide mental health support to officers, who routinely experience stressful events. One of the U.S. Department of Justice recommendations for improving the mental health of law enforcement officers is to embed mental health clinicians within their departments (Spence et al., 2019). This would provide clinicians who are culturally competent to the law enforcement experience, and it may help reduce stigma around officers seeking mental health support (Spence et al., 2019). It is important to note, however, that the role of a social worker who would provide counseling to officers would have distinctly different role than a social worker who was embedded in the CIRT or other co-response model.

Policy

The FPD does not currently have a policy specifically outlining the functions and procedures of CIRT since the program is new and still in development. Creating policy about CIRT would help increase exposure and awareness of what it does and how it operates throughout the department. It would also provide accountability and guidance for CIRT

operations. The team currently operates under other department policies that relate to its specified work, such as how to deal with individuals in a mental health crisis.

On a state level, law enforcement officers are required to receive certain training on behavioral health crises and encourages agencies to have at least 20 percentage of their force CIT trained (AR Code §12-9-119, 2020). It would be reasonable for future laws to expand the current requirements regarding how law enforcement agencies handle people in a mental health crises or people with other social needs. Being able to evaluate department-initiated programs may help inform future policy should co-response divisions eventually become mandatory. One research participant explained this potential:

> I think there will be more laws and rules and regulations implemented as far as how we deal with people who are having a mental health crisis, and if we just sit back and let that happen, then we don't have a say. You know, they don't know our side of it. This way we can shape how all of these rules, regulations, and laws over the next several years come down and have a voice in all of it.

Research

This study is part of a larger research effort to evaluate the CIRT program. It is the second round of interviews of FPD employees. UA researchers conducted the first round two years ago. A third round is anticipated next year. Quantitative data is also being collected annually through a survey on internal FPD perceptions of incorporating social advocates into the department. The overall program evaluation also includes qualitative research regarding community members' perceptions of FPD and its CIRT program as well as CIRT program participants' experiences with the program. Additional quantitative research will measure various program outcomes. This research may help other agencies in similar communities begin a co-response program.

More efforts should also be made to include participants who work overnight as they operate in a different environment than those who work in the day. Research should look at how

that affects CIRT's ability to support officers who work nights and the feasibility of hiring CIRT units for night shifts.

Future research should also be conducted on similar programs throughout the United States as the generalizability of this program is limited to many contextual features. As mentioned earlier, it will also be important that future research includes the perceptions of the social workers in co-response programs as their outlook, perspective, and training are different than law enforcement's. Confidentiality is the challenge of researching the social workers' perspective in this CIRT program because there are only two.

Summary

Police agencies throughout the country are experimenting with various programs that incorporate social workers, social advocates, mental health clinicians, and behavioral health specialists to more effectively respond to calls regarding mental health crises and other situations involving people in need. The idea of law enforcement and social work collaborating is not new, but a best-practice model has yet to be established. The collaboration between the FPD and UA School of Social work has been fruitful with the launch of a co-response program, CIRT. The program has two full-time teams as well as two interns. The FPD's goal is to build the program to seven teams that provide coverage every hour of every day all year. This study provides insight into needed factors to set a program up for success as well as what changes could be made to increase its likelihood for effective growth.

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Appendix A: Demographic Questions

1) What is your rank/title and division you work in?

2) What shifts do you work?

3) How long have you been with the FPD?

4) Have you completed the CIT training?

Appendix B: Qualitative Questions

1) Have you been involved with the social worker or a social work intern since the spring 2021? If so, please describe that involvement.

2) What is your understanding of how the social worker supports the work you do? Has that understanding changed over the past year and a half since a social worker has been working in the department?

3) In regard to having a social worker on your team, what happened that you expected and what were some unexpected experiences?

4) Can you describe the process of getting the social worker involved in a particular case you may encounter?

5) What were the highlights or successes that you are aware of in regard to having the social worker on your police force?

6) What challenges did you encounter in regard to incorporating social workers into the department?

7) Did you see your work or job change at all by having the social worker on the team? If so, how?

8) From your perspective, what could make the program more successful?

9) What other changes would you like to see in the program?

10) What would you like to tell other police departments and the community about this new program?

11) What three words would you use to describe the FPD culture? Why?

12) How do you see the CIRT program affect/relate to those characteristics?

Appendix C: IRB Exemption

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

To:	Melissa Gute
From:	Douglas J Adams, Chair IRB Expedited Review
Date:	10/28/2022
Action:	**Exemption Granted**
Action Date:	10/28/2022
Protocol #:	2209423673
Study Title:	Social Workers Partnering with Police: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Kim Stauss, Investigator
Mark P Plassmeyer, Key Personnel
John M Gallagher, Key Personnel

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Appendix D: Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
Fayetteville, Arkansas
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title: Social Workers Partnering with Police: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation
Principal Investigator: Melissa Gute, graduate student, School of Social Work
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kimberly Stauss, professor of Social Work

Description: This exploratory research study seeks to understand the perceptions from members of the Fayetteville Police department after a social work intern was embedded in the force. In the spring 2021 the Fayetteville Police Department agreed to use their department as a field placement for School of Social Work interns. The department has since hired one full-time social work, is the in the process of hiring another, and has expanded the internship program to include a BSW and an MSW. This study will document perceptions, successes, and opportunities for growth in the program.

Procedure: In this study, I will conduct interviews with 10-15 different members of the Fayetteville Police Department. These interviews will consist of police administrators, police department staff, and police officers. These individual interviews will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

Risks and Benefits: Your participation will significantly contribute to improving and refining the social work positions and field internship placements. There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation.

Confidentiality: Information from the interviews will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Your identity will not be disclosed to your department. Interviews and research information will be kept on the researcher's password-protected computer.

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the interview is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time or simply decline to participate. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences to you or your program. Also, you are free to decline answering any questions that you do not wish to answer, or you may stop the interview at any time.

Rights as a Research Subject: If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Melissa Gute at [redacted] or Ro Windwalker from the Research Integrity & Compliance Office at 479-575-2208 or irb@uark.edu.

Consent to Participate:
I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. By participating in this interview, I am giving my informed and free consent for my responses to be used in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent.