

## POLICING REPEAT AND HIGH-RISK FAMILY VIOLENCE: A COORDINATED MODEL IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

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### Summary

This study qualitatively evaluated 'Alexis – Family Violence Response Model' – a joint police-social services approach to family violence in the State of Victoria (Australia). Interviews were conducted with 17 stakeholders (7 police members and 10 community service providers) to examine how the model reduced recidivist family violence and how it differed from other policing approaches to family violence. Five key themes were extracted from the data via thematic analysis: (i) collaboration between police, an embedded family violence worker and other agencies; (ii) increased police accountability; (iii) the adoption of a proactive major crime approach; (iv) emphasis on professional development; and (v) the allocation of dedicated time and resources. Implications for future policy development are discussed, with the findings highlighting promising practices for policing high-risk and recidivist family violence.

### Key words

family violence; domestic violence; intimate partner violence; specialist taskforce

It is now well established that family violence<sup>1</sup> is a prevalent issue across the globe, with significant consequences for both victims and states. Recent Australian statistics have noted that reports of family violence to police have increased over the past 10 years, with a record-breaking 74,385 incidents occurring in the state of Victoria in 2015 (Millsteed, 2016). Statistics also revealed that recorded recidivist family violence has increased over time, and that repeat offenders were responsible for almost 75 per cent of all recorded incidents between 2006 and 2015 (Millsteed, 2016). The following paper discusses how police have traditionally responded to cases of family violence, as well as current and future directions in policing repeat and high-

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the following article, the term family violence is used to respect the preferences of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to reflect Victorian legislation (*Family Violence Protection Act* s 5).

risk family violence. Drawing on a pilot of a coordinated approach to family violence in the State of Victoria (Australia), known as 'Alexis – Family Violence Response Model', this paper explores one evolving police model that successfully applies a 'major crime' focus in responding to family violence.

There is consensus in much of the international literature regarding historical and indeed continuing inadequacies of police responses to family violence across many jurisdictional settings. It is well documented in Western democracies that police have routinely treated family violence as a *private matter* between family members rather than a *criminal justice matter* (Berk, Loseke, Berk, & Rauma, 1980; Segrave, Wilson, & Fitz-Gibbon, 2016; Whetstone, 2001). In the United States (U.S.), for instance, family violence was not often regarded as a serious crime and arrest rates were typically low compared to other crimes (Blackwell & Vaughn, 2003). A general reluctance to approach family violence seriously or effectively was thought to be due to several reasons: low prosecution and conviction rates that decreased police motivation to investigate such matters; police attitudes that mimicked broader patriarchal attitudes about women and the preservation of families; as well as the dangerousness of the work where officers were at risk of assault and injury when attending family violence callouts (Balenovich, Grossi, & Hughes, 2008; Berk et al., 1980).

Around the 1970's and 80's a change in the police response to family violence in many Western democracies began to occur. The women's movement drew attention to limited criminal justice responses and called for more active legal responses to family violence (Melton, 1999). Different jurisdictions adopted different approaches to this call for greater state intervention into the family home. In Australia, for example, several government enquiries into 'criminal assault in the home' recommended that civil options such as protection, intervention and/or restraining orders were preferred over criminal responses in light of the 'special' features of family violence which might make women victims reluctant to seek police assistance if they knew criminal charges against their partner or ex-partner would result (see Murray & Powell, 2011). Meanwhile, in the U.S., the widely cited 'Minneapolis Experiment' revealed results that arrest was more effective than other measures to deter future family violence (Sherman & Berk, 1984). Subsequently, many police departments in the U.S. and abroad adopted mandatory or pro-arrest policies as core features of their legal response to family violence. Such policies either mandate or strongly encourage police to arrest the perpetrator where family violence is suspected. These reactive approaches are still prevalent in many Western police forces, and are most relevant to frontline police officers who attend the majority of domestic violence call outs.

While such police responses continue today, the past few decades have also seen a rise in more *proactive* approaches to policing family violence. One notable method is a coordinated multi-agency response, where (in general) different service providers (e.g., police, child protection, housing support) work together to intervene and prevent violence against women (DePrince, Belknap, Labus, Buckingham, & Gover, 2012). The first version of a coordinated community response to family violence was established in Duluth, Minnesota in 1980: The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP), or commonly referred to as the "Duluth Model" (Shepard & Pence, 1999). Subsequently, there has been an influx of coordinated responses to family violence across the U.S. (Salzmann, 1994; Whetstone, 2001), the United Kingdom (U.K.) (Robinson, 2006; Robinson & Payton, 2016), New Zealand (Balzer, 1999), and Australia

(ANROWS, 2016; Meyer, 2014). In the U.K., for example, a best-practice coordinated model to family violence now involves 'MARACS': Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences. A MARAC is a fortnightly meeting where multiple agencies (e.g., police, health, housing, children's services) discuss and share information relating to individual and high-risk cases of family violence (Robbins, McLaughlin, Banks, Bellamy, & Thackray, 2014). In other words, independent agencies come together to gain a comprehensive picture of a case in order to decide on the best action forward.

Other popular coordinated models include specialist police family violence units and joint police-social services teams (Klein, 2009; Segrave et al., 2016). Such programs typically involve the coordination and/or co-location of police and other professionals (e.g., counsellors, social workers, family violence workers, victim's advocates) to target family violence hotspots, and provide joint services to victims and perpetrators. Officers are often responsible for perpetrator intervention and the criminal justice response, while social workers provide victim support, education, and referrals to relevant services (Corcoran & Allen, 2005; Exum, Hartman, Friday, & Lord, 2014; Meyer, 2014; Whetstone, 2001; Willson, McFarlane, Malecha, & Lemmey, 2001). These units tend to be staffed with specially trained officers and typically support investigations of family violence that are complex and high-risk.

Evaluation studies of specialist family violence units and coordinated teams have delivered some mixed results. In the U.S., Hovell and colleagues (2006) found that repeat incidents of violence actually increased in families who received intervention from a police-social services team compared to a control group. The authors suggested that results may be due to increased reporting rates, but also raised concern about the overall intervention model and victim's safety. Other studies have found benefits of dedicated family violence and coordinated teams: higher arrest, prosecution, and conviction rates of perpetrators in the U.S. and Australia (Corcoran & Allen, 2005; Klein, 2009; Phillips & Vandenbroek, 2014; Whetstone, 2001); high victim and police satisfaction in the U.S. (Corcoran, Stephenson, Perryman, & Allen, 2001; Whetstone, 2001; Willson et al., 2001); significantly lower repeat calls of family violence in the U.K. (Farrell & Buckley, 1999); and significantly lower reoffending rates in the U.S. (Exum et al., 2014; White, Goldkamp, & Campbell, 2005). Overall, while indicating varied results, the literature points to a pattern that coordinated approaches to family violence have benefits over traditional policing approaches to family violence.

Evaluation studies have shed light on the outcomes of coordinated family violence models, however, given the variation in the structure and function of teams and units, it is difficult to understand what components lead to the success or failure of models. Some studies have speculated about the mechanisms underlying the success of particular family violence units. For example, Exum and colleagues (2014) suggest that lower rates of family violence recidivism in North Carolina were due to more intensive police investigations conducted by the unit, greater levels of victim assistance, and the fact that the unit targeted perpetrators who committed more severe acts of family violence. Likewise, Farrell and Buckley (1999) speculate that dedicated staff, interagency cooperation, up-to-date records, as well as proactive engagement and support for victims of family violence were all factors in a special unit that contributed to a decline in repeat calls to family violence incidents in North West England. More research is needed to directly understand the components, and particularly the *policing* components, that contribute positively to police models of family violence prevention.

The current research sought to qualitatively evaluate a pilot of a coordinated police-social services approach to repeat family violence in Victoria, Australia: 'Alexis – Family Violence Response Model' (A-FVRM). The pilot, which commenced in December 2014, operated in three local government areas and focused on high-risk recidivist households, where police attended three or more times regarding incidents of family violence in the previous 12 months, or where an attending police member believed that future significant incidents of family violence were likely. The pilot's ultimate objective was to reduce recidivist family violence for women and children in the household, and to hold recidivist offenders accountable through the enhancement of interagency cooperation and collaboration. A quantitative evaluation of the pilot indicated that the pilot successfully achieved such an objective, with data revealing an 85% reduction in family violence recidivism for clients managed by the A-FVRM taskforce. As of April 2017, 75 out of 111 clients of A-FVRM had their cases closed for 12 months or more, and the average number of call outs per client decreased from 5.5 to 0.8 after A-FVRM intervention ([Removed for Review]).

While quantitative data is a promising indicator of the model's success, it is unable to explain what exact mechanisms or components of the model have contributed to reductions in recidivist family violence. A qualitative analysis was a vital supplement to such findings to explore *why* the A-FVRM was working, as well as what components of the model could be improved. Such questions are important when considering the future rollout of similar models to other communities. In particular, the current component of the evaluation aimed to understand how police and other agencies perceived the A-FVRM, and how it differed from other policing approaches to family violence. What was it about the *policing* approach that was important to understanding the success of A-FVRM?

## **ALEXIS – FAMILY VIOLENCE RESPONSE MODEL BACKGROUND**

A-FVRM was developed as a partnership between Victoria Police and The Salvation Army in Victoria, Australia. The pilot was designed following data that indicated many families (especially recidivist households), were not successfully engaged with family violence specialist services. The pilot was also situated in a context that involved increasing change and attention to the issue of family violence in Australia. Indeed, in 2015, a Royal Commission into Family Violence occurred in Victoria, resulting in 227 recommendations to improve the response to and prevention of family violence—many of which were directed at police and social services (State of Victoria, 2016).

The A-FVRM is based on similar principles to international coordinated responses to family violence, such as the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (Shepard & Pence, 1999), and is similar in structure to joint police-social services responses in the U.S. (see Whetstone, 2001; White et al., 2005). Specifically, it comprises three main components: (i) a family violence specialist (key) worker who is embedded within a police unit (ii) a coordination team, and (iii) an executive group. The family violence key worker is responsible for supporting women, children and offenders, and their engagement with relevant services, while police are responsible for case management and the criminal justice response. The coordination team is convened by Victoria Police and comprises key agencies (e.g., child protection, corrections, allied social services) that meet on a monthly basis to discuss families (e.g., new families, or families

where there is concern that community service engagement is not occurring as planned). Their main goals are to ensure stronger integration of services, provide a streamlined interface for clients working with multiple agencies, promote re-engagement of clients where disengagement occurs, and share information amongst agencies. The executive group comprises senior representation from all agencies on the coordination team. Their objectives are to ensure the sustainability of the model, deal with systematic issues that might arise in the coordination meetings, and identify areas for further improvement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A-FVRM is a new approach to family violence in Victoria, therefore, a qualitative interview research design was deemed most appropriate and fruitful for exploring stakeholder's perceptions regarding the model. Stakeholders were invited to take part in an individual interview if they had professional experience responding to family violence either within or in collaboration with the A-FVRM. They were identified and contacted through their organisation, resulting in a final sample of 17 stakeholders: 7 past and present Victoria Police members, and 10 community service providers including A-FVRM key workers and members from child protection, justice and allied social services. Following police and university ethics approval, interviews were conducted in-person by one or two of the lead researchers between 2015 and 2017.

Interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours in duration. The main areas of inquiry related to the stakeholder's professional background and experience dealing with family violence matters; stakeholder's involvement with and knowledge of A-FVRM (e.g., key features, intended outcomes); a reflection on the day-to-day operation of A-FVRM; the strengths of the model in responding to family violence; and any challenges or suggestions for improvement of the model. Stakeholders presented their personal views and experiences. With individual consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were read and thematically analysed by the authors using a web-based analysis application called Dedoose. Key themes were coded and subsequently discussed, reviewed and refined by the researchers. The coding process was deductive in nature, and themes were latent, analyst-driven, and demarcated by their relevance to the research questions (i.e., how A-FVRM differs from other policing approaches and how this may help to reduce recidivist family violence).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Overall, stakeholders' perceptions regarding A-FVRM were overwhelmingly positive. Some acknowledged that family violence could be challenging work, but that the Alexis model was largely operating successfully to integrate services, increase reporting, engage victims in services, manage and police high-risk offenders, and reduce recidivism. While stakeholders working within or in collaboration with A-FVRM held positive views of the model, they also expressed that it had gained a positive reputation with the police force more broadly, particularly because of its role in reducing workloads for other police units responding to family violence. When concentrating on the policing approach in A-FVRM, and how it might differ from other policing approaches to family violence in Victoria, five key themes were extracted from the interviews and will be discussed in turn under the following headings: (i) collaboration; (ii) accountability;

(iii) proactive major crime approach; (iv) professional development; and (v) dedicated resources. Suggestions for the refinement of the Alexis model will be weaved throughout.

## COLLABORATION

Traditionally, police and welfare agencies have worked separately, and there has been a lack of understanding of each other's roles, as well as a lack of communication regarding incidents of family violence (Stanley, Miller, Foster, & Thomson, 2011). Stakeholders in our study voiced that a unique component of the A-FVRM was its emphasis on timely collaboration between police, the key family violence worker and other relevant agencies (e.g., child protection). In particular, three elements of A-FVRM were thought to facilitate collaboration: the embedded key social worker in the police team, co-location of the police and key social worker, and the coordination meetings between different agencies managing family violence cases. Each element will be discussed in turn.

### *Embedded Key Worker*

Previous research has indicated that core structural and ideological differences between police and social workers can make collaborating on family violence cases a challenging task (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2008). Indeed, the majority of police in a recent study in the U.S. held the view that social workers would not be beneficial at the scene of a family violence incident (Ward-Lasher, Messing, & Hart, 2017). Conversely, stakeholders in the present study spoke very positively about the embedding of a key social worker into the police team, and identified a number of benefits to their role. Firstly, police members stated that the key worker was an important bridge to contacting and communicating with welfare agencies because they possessed the relevant language and knowledge. As one member articulated:

'With the support agencies, we really struggle as police. Our jargon isn't understood by other people and we don't understand the jargon of welfare agencies and the key worker spoke that language and learnt how to translate for us. So when there was something that needed to be done, they knew not only who to call, but how to talk to them as well.' [Interview 6]

Secondly, police members appreciated that the key worker could focus on the social work elements of family violence cases (e.g., mental health, substance abuse issues) so that they could concentrate on what they perceived to be the more pressing policing aspects of the job (e.g., holding offenders accountable). One interviewee explained that police often feel they do not have the time, expertise or passion to deal with the support needs of victims of family violence. As one member put it, 'police cannot fix family violence on their own—they have to use other agencies' [Interview 15], and another, 'people do not join the police-force wanting to become social workers' [Interview 5]. Nevertheless, they viewed this work as important and highlighted the benefit of having the key worker to get families engaged with services and reporting criminal matters to police—something that police alone had trouble with previously. Key workers were thought to provide a more approachable avenue for victims to disclose family violence, particularly for those that held negative perceptions of police.

Overall, both police and key workers reported being able to work well together, and that the embedding of the key worker into the police team was a vital component of the A-FVRM's success in



reducing recidivist family violence. Other studies have also identified the role of a family violence worker as a significant contributor to the success of their programs in the response to family violence (Barton, 2015; Meyer, 2014; Robinson & Payton, 2016). One noteworthy point that was raised by stakeholders, however, was that the individual characteristics of the key worker were integral to collaborative success. Police members commented that the key worker would need to be able to 'gel well' and get along with others in the police team. This is an important factor to consider when planning the replication and rollout of the A-FVRM in other communities.

#### *Co-Location*

Stakeholders also identified the co-location of police and the key social worker as an important mechanism that helped to facilitate collaboration and in turn work successfully on family violence cases. The co-located setting enabled members to draw on each other's expertise in order to actively reflect on cases and problem solve. The office setup where all members of A-FVRM were located in the same physical space was also thought to make the information sharing process quicker, easier, and more efficient. According to one child protection worker:

'I think sometimes there are just delays in not being together and just trying to find each other. There's an ease of conversation and the ease of exchange of information if you actually work together all the time. Because again, that's relationship-based too. To be able to sit around the table and say, "hey, this has just come in, let's have a chat about it," is a bit different to, "I'll read it and then you read it and then we'll ring each other"' [Interview 7]

The proximity of members not only helped to break down the physical barriers to communication, it also helped to break down social barriers. Participants expressed feeling more comfortable sharing information when police members and the key social worker were co-located because trusting relationships had been built up through regular contact over time. Merkes (2004) also found that mutual trust, frequent communication, and established informal relationships between services were central factors to successful collaboration in a local council group working to help families experiencing violence in Victoria, Australia.

It should be made clear, however, that members emphasised that co-location was most effective when social workers were embedded within a police team (as opposed to a multidisciplinary hub model). One member articulated how a multidisciplinary centre could possibly impede collaboration because different agencies have distinctive identities, cultures, and focuses [Interview 8]. It may be difficult for agencies to build trust if they are constantly cautious about what information they can share or what language they can use around each other. Conversely, a social worker that is embedded into a police team can integrate into the police culture while simultaneously working towards a shared goal of reducing family violence. This is an important point to consider given the Victorian Government's plans to roll out a network of Support and Safety Hubs (coordinating Child Protection, Victoria Police, the courts, and the Victims Support Agency) to end family violence (Victoria State Government, 2017).

#### *Coordination Meetings*

It was clear from the interviews that the monthly coordination team meetings helped to facilitate inter-agency work on family violence cases, and that they were critical in developing coherent case plans for complex families (e.g., victims or perpetrators with complex needs,

families with children involved). These meetings brought together social service partners and police for a detailed discussion on what was known about a family; who was working with the family; whether individuals within a family were engaging with services; and whether services were delivering on their commitments with a family. In each meeting, various agencies shared relevant information which resulted in a more holistic understanding of the family, with a clearer picture of the risk to the victim, and a greater sense of what needed to happen to hold the perpetrator accountable and prevent further violence (i.e., the best possible response for that particular family). One police member emphasised the importance of information sharing between agencies in the meetings:

'I think the information sharing was pivotal in making sure that everyone knew what was going on... it gives everybody a good overview of what's happening—a full picture.' [Interview 5]

Information sharing amongst agencies and the ability to collectively identify problems and discuss solutions has been noted as key successful aspects of family violence coordination committees in prior research (Clark, Burt, Schulte, & Maguire, 1996; Robinson, 2006). Information from the coordination meetings came together in the form of new referrals to partner services, ensuring that victims and perpetrators were connected to necessary services. Previous research has found that efforts to coordinate services are associated with higher rates of contact with family violence services (Klevens, Baker, Shelley, & Ingram, 2008). Overall, this may suggest that the coordination team meetings and subsequent engagement of families in coordinated services are playing an integral role in A-FVRM's success in reducing recidivist family violence, although future research could examine this link in greater depth.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Another key way that A-FVRM is different to other policing approaches to family violence is its emphasis on accountability, both for members within A-FVRM as well as wider police members dealing with family violence incidents. Stakeholders spoke about how the A-FVRM appeared to increase police responsibility for family violence cases, largely through three mechanisms: clear and consistent procedure, case management of families, and overall monitoring of family violence cases.

### *Clear and Consistent Procedure*

Police members explained that the policies of A-FVRM reinforced to members that they needed to follow procedure, regardless of verbal advice by others. In other police units, a culture might develop where people are advised not to progress with a family violence application because there is an assumption that evidence is lacking and it will get rejected. Other Australian research has indicated that officers frequently failed to follow current procedures in family cases, commonly due to a misunderstanding of family violence laws; for example, some police did not take action because the victim had no visible physical injuries (Goodman-Delahunty & Crehan, 2016). Conversely, the A-FVRM emphasised strictly adhering to procedure and completing an application for remand, even if the evidence appeared to be weak. This mentality was thought to have benefits at both a personal and broader level: formally documenting and lodging applications would help to 'cover yourself if something else happened' [Interview 5],



but it would also result in greater numbers of remands because applications would often be approved, sometimes to the surprise of the officers. It appeared the clear and consistent procedural guidelines of A-FVRM helped to increase police answerability and in turn police action in cases of family violence.

### *Case Management*

Police members of A-FVRM are allocated a specific number of families to case manage. This ensures there is active ownership of matters relating to a specific family over time. For many of the police members, this was significantly different to their experience of general policing. In general policing, members talked about how their responsibility in family violence cases often concluded when they had confirmed the wellbeing of the parties present and general public, ensured charges or breaches of orders were followed through, and completed the required paperwork. Alternatively, in A-FVRM, members felt they had an ongoing responsibility for an address. The importance of an 'address' is worth noting. The physical address a family resides at is the point of reference for a call out—police are called to an address, with the nature of the incident, and they engage with the people they find there. In A-FVRM the police member's involvement continues beyond that initial engagement. As one police member described:

'I guess the focus for us was to reduce the recidivism, keep those recidivists off our list. So whatever we could do or ideas we had to try and make that happen, and whether it be around rehabilitation, engagement with [the key worker], that sort of thing, then that's something that we would put forward and try to get it done.' [Interview 5]

Many police members also described being in the office and constantly having an ear open for one of 'their' addresses coming over the internal police radio (which is constantly broadcast through the station). For individual police members, this was characterised as listening for one of 'my' addresses; for senior police members of the team it was characterised as listening out for 'one of our addresses.' Members had a sense of the history with a family, and described developing a 'vested interest' and 'emotional investment' in the cases that they personally managed. Overall, it appears that case management may be a key contributing factor to A-FVRM's success in reducing recidivist family violence. Although we did not measure victim's experiences of A-FVRM, previous research has found that end-to-end case management was associated with better police practices involving victims of rape and domestic violence (e.g., keeping victim's informed and supported throughout entire criminal justice process: Madoc-Jones, Hughes, & Humphries, 2015). Future research on A-FVRM could perhaps investigate the impact of police case management on victims' satisfaction rates.

### *Overall Monitoring*

Part of the role description of A-FVRM police members is to hold the rest of the family violence unit and police members to account, ensuring recorded data following family violence incidents has been completed to an adequate standard and that all follow-up work has been completed as per the Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence ([Removed for Review]). Such a role appears to be effective, as police members in our interviews reported an increased compliance with family violence procedures with the knowledge that their reports and cases were being monitored by an A-FVRM member. A-FVRM members gave direct constructive feedback to other police members following review of their reports,

however, the knowledge alone that police members were being monitored appeared to lift their standards, as there was now an 'understanding or expectation that [the family violence job] was done properly' [Interview 5]. For example, one police member reported how the extra supervision encouraged members to 'do the right things', follow-up and take action where appropriate, making sure statements were comprehensive and future risk to victims had been more fully assessed [Interview 5]. The overall gaze of A-FVRM members, therefore, appears to be important in increasing accountability and improving the policing response to family violence.

## PROACTIVE MAJOR CRIME APPROACH

Traditional police approaches to family violence have typically been reactive in nature, whereby police have randomly patrolled and responded to particular incidents of violence (Melton, 1999; Sarre & Prenzler, 2018). Several of the police managers interviewed in the present study articulated a shift to thinking about family violence as a *major crime*, which required a proactive 'intelligence-led policing' model, rather than a 'keeping of the peace' and an immediate risk diffusion model. An intelligence-led policing model seeks to proactively ascertain information relating to a circumstance (in this context a family) or a perpetrator in such a way as to support an effective intervention over time (Ratcliffe, 2016). This includes applying investigative techniques that are beyond the resourcing capacity of day-to-day divisional police. One senior member talked in detail about working with new members of A-FVRM to get them to realise their job was now to 'take the time' to investigate and to think through the collection of evidence beyond 'he said, she said statements' [Interview 15]. An example was provided of accessing mobile phone tower location systems and canvassing neighbours to identify inconsistencies in a respondent's statement. Another example is described by one police member as follows:

'I started looking at jobs a little differently. Do we start using some covert investigation techniques like cameras at a house? Say we've got a victim that's constantly reporting breaches from the perpetrator attending her address at all hours in the morning. It's his word against hers. He gets picked up a couple of days later, interviewed and he goes, "No, I was over here in [location] with my brother." Okay, what if we get some covert cameras into that address because it's constantly happening and we've now got CCTV footage of him breaching. Now we put him in a show cause situation, have him remanded, and that previously might not have been considered because that's more a crime-orientated investigation tool.' [Interview 4]

Stakeholders discussed how the application of investigative techniques (like the use of data recording systems and cameras) had led to stronger briefs of evidence and consequently, better accountability of family violence perpetrators. As one police member put it, using a 'major crime' lens was important in the development of A-FVRM practice and process [Interview 3]. In a major crime investigation, officers are uncertain of the perpetrator but gather evidence with a view that evidence will be important in the development of a brief for prosecution. While the perpetrator is known in a family violence matter, the nature of the crime (which can relate to patterns of behaviour) requires the same strong development of an evidentiary base if a case is to be successfully prosecuted. This proactive approach is also likely to be a key reason for A-

FVRM's success in reducing recidivist family violence. Indeed, one study in the U.S. found that a specialist police unit that involved more intensive investigations into family violence resulted in lower rates of reoffending compared to cases dealt with by a standard patrol (Exum et al., 2014). Together, these points highlight the strengths of treating family violence incidents as serious crimes to investigate, solve and prosecute rather than isolated incidents to respond to.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A fourth overarching theme in the interviews relates to the professional growth that A-FVRM presents to police, and how this has a positive impact on their work on family violence cases. Stakeholders in our interviews noted that family violence has traditionally been perceived as unattractive and dead-end police work, something that has also been echoed in other Australian research (Segrave et al., 2016). A-FVRM, however, has provided police with specialist knowledge and skills that help to advance their policing careers. For example, police members talked about the enormous value of learning specific investigative techniques that would ensure they had the evidence required to hold perpetrators accountable for specific breaches of intervention orders and for their violence more broadly. These techniques involved evidence gathering (e.g., using CCTV and mobile phone towers to confirm or contradict respondent's statements) and new evidence and case recording software normally used within detective roles. While they all understood the broad idea of gathering evidence that could be relied upon for a conviction theoretically, their experiences in A-FVRM developed their actual skills and provided them with a supportive environment where these skills would be successfully put into application.

Working in A-FVRM also equipped members with specialist knowledge about the nature of family violence and the most appropriate responses to family violence—something that was perceived positively by police members outside of A-FVRM. Once members had worked for a period in A-FVRM, there was a sense amongst the broader police force that A-FVRM members were experts in family violence matters. According to one police member:

'I think they become go-to people for family violence for the first instance, even the family violence liaison sergeants would probably seek them out at station level for advice and opinion, which is an incredible mark of respect from them... I believe that once they've come to A-FVRM, they go back to their stations with a wealth of knowledge and probably a newfound sense of responsibility when it comes to managing family violence incidences and in some cases newfound respect from supervisors and peers. There's no doubt that family violence is still a bit of a grey area when it comes to responding on the van. To have that assurance of someone that's been at a specialist unit for six months or 12 months, it's a huge benefit.' [Interview 4]

The above quote also illustrates how the professional development of A-FVRM members has positive flow-on effects to other police members, as they are subsequently exposed to A-FVRM member's knowledge, experience, and methods. Moreover, positive perceptions of A-FVRM members appears to create a positive cycle: members are developing specialist knowledge and investigative skills, this provides opportunities for career progression, and then this attracts more quality members to A-FVRM who can in turn strengthen the investigative work in family violence cases.

## Dedicated Resources

The final theme surrounding the success of A-FVRM and how it differs to other policing approaches to family violence is the focused allocation of time and resources. Stakeholders commented that A-FVRM was well-resourced and that members had reasonable access to practical support items such as cars and phones. Resourcing appeared to be particularly important for the family violence key workers interviewed; they could confidently support a victim in the knowledge that police resources would be allocated to pursue and prosecute a perpetrator. If they were working with a perpetrator, they could confidently provide them with the choice: engage with services to stop using violence or you will be charged and held accountable. Sufficient resourcing has been identified in other research as a key facilitator in collaborative work to reduce family violence (Merkes, 2004).

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of having ample time to properly investigate family violence cases, complete paperwork and support victims—something that was perceived to be lacking in other police units responding to family violence. Police members acknowledged the value of having extra time to adequately follow-up and spend time with families to figure out a suitable management plan. They also commented on the personal bonus of having the temporal space to regularly meet deadlines, which relieved a sense of pressure and enabled feelings of workplace satisfaction. One police manager explained A-FVRM's distinctive approach to time resourcing in the following quote:

'I guarantee you that the divvy van guy that rocks up to a domestic violence incident two hours before the end of his shift is either thinking about the next job he's got to get to and clear before he goes home, all the paperwork he's got to do when he gets back to the office, how can he do that as quickly and easily as possible. It's not a matter of not doing his job properly, it's a matter of his mindset is to get through this job "as quick as I can to get to the next one, to the next one, to the next on." A-FVRM members, I don't care if they're entire shift is one job. As a manager, I'm not relying on them to get to the next job, to the next job, to the next job. They come in the next morning and go, "We spent six hours with John and Betty Smith and we did X, Y and Z and put this intervention order in place and these management issues are dealt with." I'm rapt. They've done their job.' [Interview 4]

## CONCLUSION

A-FVRM is a model of policing that has shown success in reducing recidivist family violence (an 85% reduction for clients 12 months post exit from A-FVRM: see [Removed for Review]). The current study aimed to understand which components of A-FVRM contributed to its success, and how the policing approach in A-FVRM differs to other policing approaches to family violence. From the perspective of stakeholders involved in the execution of A-FVRM, the qualitative components of the evaluation revealed five key themes: (i) collaboration between police and other agencies reinforced by an embedded family violence worker and monthly coordination meetings; (ii) increased police accountability reinforced by clear and consistent procedures, the case management of families, and an overall monitoring process; (iii) the adoption of a proactive 'intelligence-led' major crime approach; (iv) emphasis on professional development; and (v) the allocation of dedicated time and resources.

Together, the extant literature and stakeholder interviews highlight how police have traditionally perceived and treated family violence as unappealing work that requires a fast-paced reactive response, resulting in an uncoordinated approach and limited justice outcomes. A-FVRM, on the other hand, demonstrates the effectiveness of a coordinated police-social services approach, and points to the strengths of treating family violence as a major crime that requires in-depth investigations and intelligence-led proactive problem-solving. It was also evident that the allocation of time and resources to the taskforce facilitated strong investigations and management plans. Although it is understood that budgets in police forces will always be limited, A-FVRM's success in reducing recidivist family violence indicates it is one area of policing that seems to deliver on the investment.

Our findings appear to support the idea of using specialist police units with dedicated training to address recidivist family violence. There is still debate in the literature regarding whether police should engage in a generalist or specialist approach to family violence cases. Advocates of a specialist approach believe that pervasive negative police attitudes towards domestic violence and dissatisfaction with domestic violence work are significant barriers to force-wide initiatives (Segrave et al., 2016). Alternatively, many police forces have moved away from specialist models due to their narrow focus, possible marginalisation of domestic violence work, and low impact on frontline officer's abilities to respond effectively to domestic violence incidents (Burton, 2008, 2016). Our study indicated that the overall monitoring process inherent in A-FVRM helped to improve police accountability and performance at the frontline. Moreover, the model's emphasis on professional development appeared to strengthen the perception of family violence as core police work rather than a low-priority duty. A-FVRM equipped members with specialist knowledge and skills about family violence investigations which helped to inform their responses to family violence and attract further members to the taskforce. The case management structure within the taskforce also appeared to increase members' enthusiasm, dedication and ongoing skill in responding to family violence jobs. There are features of the A-FVRM which therefore seem to distinguish it from past specialist police units, and suggest that there is value in including specialist police approaches as part of a wider coordinated community response to family violence.

While our study helped to clarify which components of policing in A-FVRM contributed to its success, some caveats should be made. Interviews were not conducted with clients of A-FVRM (i.e., victims and perpetrators) because the size and geographical location of the pilot meant that the confidentiality of clients could not be guaranteed. The lack of client interviewees poses a significant limitation in trying to understand why the pilot was successful because it was not possible to definitively establish why perpetrators reduced their use of violence or how the interventions provided by partner services supported a victim and family members. The absence of client interviews has also hampered an understanding of family circumstances after the closure of their contact with A-FVRM.

Despite this limitation, the current study has highlighted some promising practices for the policing of recidivist and high-risk family violence. Other studies have noted the success of coordinated police taskforces in reducing family violence, but have largely provided speculative and theoretical explanations for their success (Exum et al., 2014; Farrell & Buckley, 1999). Our qualitative evaluation with stakeholders provides a more in-depth exploration of which aspects of a policing model contribute towards its success in reducing family violence. Police forces

across the globe may look to all or some of the components in their efforts to improve the response to and prevention of family violence.

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