



Embedding Social Work into a Police Department in the South: Insights from Implementation and Baseline Departmental Attitudes

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In 2020, the Fayetteville Police Department (FPD), located in a small urban community in Arkansas, began efforts to develop alternative responses to crisis related calls for service. The main motivation for this effort was the influx of calls related to crises involving substance use, mental health, and homelessness both before and during COVID-19, although the George Floyd protests during that summer also played a meaningful role. FPD collaborated with the University of Arkansas School of Social Work (UA) to develop an MSW internship within the department with the intent of ultimately creating a co-response program. It is crucial to determine a baseline of staff attitudes when developing a new program or implementing organizational change to assess any subsequent shifts over time. As such, this paper presents baseline data from a survey assessing attitudes among sworn and civilian staff at FPD toward incorporating a social worker into the department. Data from semi-structured interviews provide a deeper understanding of these attitudes along with insight into lessons learned during the implementation of the internship and the eventual Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT). Survey results indicated that overall, FPD staff were supportive but somewhat hesitant about the programmatic change, particularly regarding safety concerns when bringing unarmed civilians into the field. Themes from the interviews showed that although there was certainly doubt among FPD staff initially, the intentionally collaborative efforts made by FPD administrators and UA faculty to support organizational acceptance of the program produced early successes. By highlighting crucial aspects of the implementation process and the lessons learned along the way, the results from this study can guide future replication efforts in similarly situated localities.

Keywords: Co-Response, Police Attitudes, Crisis Response, Police Social Work

INTRODUCTION

Co-response approaches to policing have existed for decades but have become an increasingly popular approach since 2020. In 2020, massive protests – the largest in US history – erupted in response to well-publicized killings of unarmed Black Americans by police officers in cities across the US, highlighting the need for alternative approaches to policing and other societal reforms (Subramanian & Arzy, 2022). It is well documented that although most people killed by police are White, Black Americans are killed disproportionately, at a rate more than two times that of White Americans (Schwartz & Jahn, 2020). Furthermore, people with mental health conditions are almost 16 times more likely to be shot and killed by police (Edwards, et al., 2019; Saleh, et al., 2018). With public outcry reaching a zenith in the summer of 2020, lawmakers and police forces took notice. In response, many police forces made efforts to explore alternative modes of policing. One such department was the Fayetteville Arkansas Police Department (FPD). Although they began the process well before the 2020 protests, in 2020 FPD intensified its efforts to establish alternative responses for people experiencing crises related to substance use, mental health, and homelessness. This effort entailed partnering with the University of Arkansas School of Social Work (UA) which ultimately resulted in a full-time social worker working alongside a Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) officer as part of a co-response effort dubbed the Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT).

Co-response programs focus on de-escalating people experiencing crisis and connecting them to appropriate services as an alternative to arrest, criminal charges, and/or incarceration. These teams typically include a mental health/social service professional and a CIT law enforcement officer but can also include emergency medical personnel. As such, they are trained and equipped to provide a comprehensive response to people experiencing crises, particularly those related to mental health, and may be better situated to mitigate volatile situations without inflicting bodily harm or death (Blais et al., 2020; Ghelani, 2022).

These programs are not without their critics as they still rely on law enforcement to deal with community issues that are not inherently criminal (Marcus & Stergiopoulos, 2022). Yet, the steady divestment from social services starting in the 1980s and the expanding criminalization of public nuisances related to substance use, homelessness, and mental health since that time, have made law enforcement the de facto first responder to the individual crises stemming from these systematic issues (Wacquant, 2009). Advocacy efforts to address the systemic divestment in community/social services are underway and certainly necessary to reduce this reliance on police to deal with social problems moving forward (Marcus & Stergiopoulos, 2022). However, it is also important to explore immediate changes to policing that limit legal consequences for and offer supportive interactions to people experiencing crisis at the point of contact. Perhaps, enhancing mental health services and adopting additional crisis training for officers through the incorporation of co-response models can lower the risk of violent police encounters, improve outcomes for people in crisis, and free up funding for supportive follow-up services (Balfour et al., 2022; Blais et al., 2020; Ghelani, 2022; Lum et al., 2022; Subramanian & Arzy, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explores some contextual factors regarding the implementation of co-response programs, their possible benefits, and the limited nature of literature on these programs. First, we briefly discuss the impacts co-response programs can produce for emergency response systems and individually for both people experiencing crisis and those providing services (i.e., law enforcement). Then, we consider the literature on the positive impact of CIT training on officer attitudes toward people experiencing mental health crises and how co-response programs might further enhance these efforts. Lastly, we touch on the need for further examination of the effectiveness of co-response programs. These are some important factors to consider when attempting to implement and build support for co-response programming given the resistance co-response programs have faced from some in both law enforcement and social service provision, as well as the communities they serve (Bailey, et al., 2018).

First Responder and Taxpayer Burdens

Beck et al. (2020) report that annually, there are more than 290 million calls made to police departments in the United States. While these calls vary in nature, it is estimated that up to 15% are mental health-related and can include suicide threats, mental health crises, and overdoses, among others (Balfour et al., 2022; Pence, 2022). First responders are tasked with responding to the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of crisis-related calls, and must also consider the financial component of the time they spend on each call. Balfour et al. (2022) estimate that the cost of transporting subjects with severe mental health concerns to both hospitals and jails can be as much as \$918 million annually across the nation. As such, one goal of incorporating a co-response program is to gradually reduce both emotional and fiscal pressure on first responders (Blais et al., 2020).

Leaders within law enforcement agencies are aware that mental health calls can require more time to process than some other calls (Lum et al., 2022; Watson & Fulambarker, 2012). Time is a limited resource and can be used up quickly when officers are tasked with deescalating a situation, transporting a client, and performing other procedural requirements including documentation (Lum et al., 2022). Additionally, officers must often wait at hospitals with clients through the admissions process, which can take multiple hours (Balfour et al., 2022). The time spent in the process can feel like a misuse of resources, particularly if the person is not admitted. Balfour et al. (2022) offer some evidence suggesting that co-response teams can address this concern. They found that when a co-response team responded instead of a police-only team, this resulted in a decrease in arrests and time spent on mental health-related calls. Notably, Blais et al. (2020) suggest that when co-response teams were present, taxpayer-supported hospital transportations were reduced by the co-responders' ability to utilize existing social supports like family or friends as part of the process. Their findings also suggest that co-response teams can connect clients with community resources that help alleviate major stressors and the client's subsequent desire for hospitalization, resulting in shorter (less expensive) call response times (Blais et al., 2020) and less psychiatric hospitalization. For example, in Maricopa County, Arizona, the addition of crisis response in the police department as part of an investment in their community-based crisis system helped save an estimated \$260 million in inpatient psychiatric expenses in one year (Balfour et al., 2022).

Overall, co-response models may be able to reduce fiscal burdens on first responders and the communities they serve. When interacting with a person in crisis, co-response programs can effectively connect people to community resources that meet their needs instead of relying on expensive approaches such as jail and hospitalization. Also, through de-escalation techniques, co-response programs may be able to reduce instances of violent interactions producing bodily harm or death, along with the resulting emotional burdens on victims, families, communities, and law enforcement officers themselves (Balfour et al., 2022; Blais et al., 2020; Lum et al., 2022; Watson & Fulambarker, 2012).

Mental Health Stigma and Crisis Intervention Training (CIT)

Research on Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) suggests a reduction in stigma toward those experiencing mental health issues among officers receiving training (Ellis, 2014; Nick, et al., 2022). Reduced stigma among CIT officers is also associated with a reduction in the use of force for those experiencing a mental health crisis (Rogers et al, 2019; Willis, et al., 2023). Additionally, researchers have determined that officers receiving CIT have a better overall understanding of the characteristics of mental health, and their level of understanding directly impacts their compassion for people experiencing a mental health crisis (Compton et al, 2014; Nick, et al., 2022). Overall departmental culture regarding mental health can also be positively impacted simply by the presence of CIT officers as they model effective de-escalation and exemplify alternative, compassion-based responses to mental health crisis calls (Ellis, 2014, Nick, et al., 2022). As such, the implementation of co-response programs and the inclusion of mental health professionals might further the department-wide use and acceptance of compassion-based approaches to mental health-related calls including substance use and homelessness (Lamin & Teboh, 2016; Nick, et al., 2022).

Limited Empirical Evidence

While there are numerous studies on the CIT model of policing (Nick, et al., 2022; Rogers, et al., 2019; Watson, et al., 2017; Willis, et al., 2023), the opposite can be said for co-response models that specifically incorporate social workers. Watson and Fulambarker (2012) found the incorporation of CIT into law enforcement training was associated with a decrease in arrests and an increase in public safety. Moreover, it appeared that there was also an increase in the amount of voluntary (as opposed to involuntary) mental health transports to psychiatric facilities for people experiencing crises by police. Consequently, adding mental health clinicians or social workers with CIT officers may result in more variety of service options – and possibly better outcomes – for those experiencing crisis (Lamin & Teboh, 2016). However, data supporting the collaboration between law enforcement and behavioral health workers to decrease arrests or prevent fatalities is minimal (Lamin & Teboh, 2016; Marcus & Stergiopoulos, 2022; Shapiro, et al., 2015). As such, Balfour et al. (2022) argue that additional examination of co-response teams is necessary to assess if they can be considered a best practice and whether they can impact outcomes important to the communities and people they serve, along with the police departments that deploy them.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND IMPLEMENTATION

During the summer of 2020, FPD and UA collaborated to design a Master of Social Work (MSW) internship embedding a social worker within the department. Project coordinators considered the frameworks both disciplines operate within, the associated obstacles, and the potential opportunities for the project to succeed. Multiple stakeholder meetings helped foster a shared vision and created vital programmatic protocols. The initial programmatic documents that emerged from these meetings included an internship liability release, internship code of conduct, and affiliation agreement between FPD and UA.

With the assistance of UA faculty, FPD staff surveyed law enforcement agencies throughout the US to determine best practices for co-responder programs. While FPD staff gained insight into feasible program models, they determined that the programs surveyed lacked uniformity and varied significantly based on factors like local laws, police culture, demographics, and funding sources. FPD staff then conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis regarding the implementation of a co-response program locally. The results indicated that a successful program would need to be capable of pivoting as successes and failures dictated. Ultimately the program survey and SWOT analysis produced four goals to guide the program. They are as follows:

- 1) Reduce the criminalization of people who suffer from substance abuse, homelessness, and mental health issues.
- 2) Identify victims of crime who would benefit from additional community resources and counseling.
- 3) Enhance and increase the community's trust in the Fayetteville Police Department.
- 4) Collect data to evaluate program effectiveness.

During the first quarter of 2021, CIRT (consisting of a UA intern at the time) identified documentation needs, determined data collection methods, built relationships with community stakeholders, and fostered buy-in among the other FPD staff and officers. Immediately, CIRT realized that many of the people they served did not have a permanent address or other reliable contact information. This prohibited them from following up with many of the individuals that were referred to them. Furthermore, when a crisis was resolved, individuals were frequently unlikely to accept follow-up services or referrals. These issues were compounded by the fact that the UA intern had a full course load and a cap of 24 weekly internship hours.

To address these issues, FPD paired the UA intern with a CIT officer during the summer of 2021 and this staffing pattern has continued. Instead of the intern completing only follow-up calls, this team was now authorized to respond to calls for service after the scene was deemed safe by the patrol officers initially responding to the call. CIRT primarily responded to calls for service involving people dealing with mental

illness, homelessness, substance use, and those threatening self-harm. All client documentation was made digital and CIRT was equipped with tablets to facilitate quick connections to support services and capture data in real time.

CIRT staff and FPD administrators worked to intentionally build the program with a focus on strengthening relationships with patrol officers, community members, and most importantly, clients. As seen below in one of the themes, the implementation leaders presented an “A-Political” attitude as public scrutiny of law enforcement continued and CIRT made efforts to engage positively with as many community members as possible. These interactions, along with internal discussions, led to the decision that CIRT would wear plain clothes, utilize unmarked vehicles, and use every effort to avoid typical law enforcement actions (i.e., arrest, citation, etc.).

At the end of the summer internship, in August 2021, CIRT had received approximately 90 referrals from patrol officers, city government, and general community members and successfully contacted 40. These people expressed the most need in the following areas: housing (18), mental health (14), employment (8), substance use (7), suicidal ideation (5), legal aid (3), and domestic violence (1). The program recognized that connecting to under 50% was problematic, hence the need for growth. Operating as an internship where it was only one person working for 20 hours a week, made it difficult to respond to people in a timely manner. Also, a large number of referrals were in need of secure housing resulting in problems with follow up due to the constant changing of locations and phone numbers. CIRT has expanded since the summer of 2021 and instead of only the UA social work intern it now consists of two-full time Social Service Advocates, two UA social work interns, and a CIT-trained police officer.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To support the project going forward, it is essential to document the development process of this collaborative effort. It is also crucial to evaluate the initial and subsequent perceptions of the FPD officers and staff during program implementation and when the program becomes fully operational. This paper provides baseline data on attitudes among FPD officers and staff during the development of the co-response program and explores the implementation process from the perspective of key FPD staff and UA faculty. The main research questions we aimed to answer are as follows:

1. What are FPD officer and staff attitudes toward implementing a co-response program?
2. How did the program come to fruition and what were the obstacles and/or successes encountered in this process?

METHODS

To gain a nuanced understanding of the lessons learned and initial FPD perceptions regarding the development of a co-response program, this project uses a mixed-method approach with qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey. The initial survey collected during spring 2021 was sent out by FPD management to explore sworn officers' and staff's understanding of a social worker's role in a police department and staff perceptions regarding the project. The qualitative interviews were completed during the summer of 2021. UA researchers that were not involved with the implementation or development of the co-response (CIRT) program completed these interviews. The qualitative interview participants included sworn officers, civilian staff, and two UA faculty considered the “implementers” of the project. The study was approved as exempt by the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative

Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit the qualitative participants. Recruitment occurred via email and word of mouth. Participants emailed the researcher, and an interview time was set up either via Zoom or face-to-face. Each interview used a semi-structured format to explore perceptions of the implementation process. Survey questions explored the participants' experiences and examples of social work collaboration within the FPD, and strengths and challenges to this collaboration and the implementation process. The participants were also asked if they recommended and changes for future growth. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. The audio recordings were then transcribed and analyzed by hand and no qualitative software was used. Thirteen participants were interviewed and included: Sworn Officers (5); Records (3); Dispatch (2), Intern, and Social Work Faculty (2).

The qualitative interviews were reviewed by two of the main researchers. The rigor of qualitative analysis is conveyed through the reliability and validity of the study process. Cypress (2007) describes the qualitative necessity to involve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, regular meetings were held with the research team members to review the findings. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest using grounded theory coding techniques to find emerging themes. Researchers review each transcript individually in the first round of open coding to identify major themes. Short texts in the transcripts are highlighted and the major themes are written in the margins of the document. Once various themes emerged, they were shared with stakeholders to check on the validity of the themes (Bricki & Green, 2007). Lastly, triangulation of both the data sources and investigator perceptions enhanced the validity of findings in this study (Patton, 1999).

Quantitative

The participants for the survey portion of this study were all FPD staff including both sworn officers and civilians employed at the time of the survey. The survey was sent out to FPD staff in April of 2021 and FPD administrators required all staff to complete the survey. The survey received 164 responses which included 119 (72.6%) sworn officers and 45 (27.4%) civilian staff. At the time of the survey, the MSW internship/CIRT program was in its early stages and did not involve an in-time response to calls for service. Consequently, these data represent the attitudes of FPD staff before the implementation of any substantial co-response programming. However, staff were aware that co-response programming was in the development stages and would eventually become part of the FPD response to crisis-related calls. As such, this paper offers baseline descriptive data of overall FPD staff attitudes toward the implementation of a co-response program.

Measures. The survey for this study was adapted from previous research exploring the perceptions of police officers about community policing programs implemented in Chicago in the 1990s (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994) and was modified to specifically assess staff perceptions of incorporating social workers into FPD. The survey contains 14 items, 10 of which are specific to perceptions of incorporating a social worker into the FPD and four others that assess knowledge of social work more generally. Participants were asked to rate how much they agree/disagree with the statements contained in the survey where the following scores indicated 1 definitely agree, 2 somewhat agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 somewhat disagree, and 5 definitely disagree. For these items, more definite agreement indicated a positive attitude toward incorporating social workers. It should be noted that items 8 through 10 ask for a level of agreement with possible problematic outcomes of incorporating a social worker into FPD. For example, item (8) reads: *“Having a social worker will cause an increase of unreasonable demands on the police.”* In the case of these three items, more definite agreement indicated a more pessimistic attitude among FPD staff toward the incorporation of social workers (See Table 1). Lastly, the survey included one open-ended item worded: *Are there any areas of your work as a law enforcement officer or civilian employee where you think a social worker would be beneficial? Please explain.*

The qualitative data from this question was coded in the same manner as the data from the Semi-Structured interviews and is included in the qualitative results section.

RESULTS

Quantitative

Overall, the results indicated some ambivalence among FPD staff toward incorporating social workers into the department as most of the mean scores fell between 2 somewhat agree and 3 neither agree nor disagree. However, scores did range from 1 to 5 on all items, indicating that some FPD staff had strong opinions regarding incorporating social workers into the department. Also, for items 8 through 10, scores indicated that FDP staff foresaw some issues regarding workload and citizen expectations as overall means again fell between 2 and 3, leaning toward agreement with statements such as: *Having a social worker will lead to a greater burden on the police to solve all community problems*. FPD staff also leaned toward disagreement with item 2 *Having a social worker will lead to a reduction in crime rates*. The mean for this item fell between 3 neither agree nor disagree and 4 somewhat disagree (See Table 1). So, overall, while FPD staff reported some optimism about any impact of incorporating social workers into the department, they hardly viewed this as a cure-all to the challenges they faced at the time and even foresaw some possible added complications regarding workload and community expectations.

Table 1. Overall FPD Results

Question	Mean	SD
Having a Social Worker will:		
1) <i>lead to better response to calls for police service</i>	2.56	1.21
2) <i>lead to a reduction in crime rates</i>	3.31	1.21
3) <i>expand police capability by reducing the mental stress on officers</i>	2.63	1.27
4) <i>foster better police-community relationships</i>	2.15	1.08
5) <i>foster greater resolution of neighborhood problems</i>	2.64	1.12
6) <i>lead to greater willingness of citizens to cooperate with police</i>	2.81	1.05
7) <i>foster better police relations with marginalized groups (MH and SU)</i>	2.57	1.13
8) <i>cause an increase of unreasonable demands on the police</i>	2.92	1.09
9) <i>lead to greater citizen demands on police resources</i>	2.77	1.00
10) <i>lead to greater burden on police to solve all community problems</i>	2.86	1.18
I am knowledgeable about or aware of:		
11) <i>the profession of social work</i>	2.57	1.06
12) <i>what individual social workers do</i>	2.58	1.11
13) <i>the strengths of social workers</i>	2.42	1.06
14) <i>the limitations of social workers</i>	2.46	1.15

Qualitative

Following the initial implementation, the researchers wanted to reflect on the lessons learned to better understand the process. As presented earlier, the existing literature on this topic is inconclusive and does not include research on smaller urban communities in the American South. As a result, the authors were unsure how the sworn officers and the staff would perceive this new role created in the department. Some of the data presented in this section confirm the hesitancy presented above in the quantitative survey but also provide other emerging, more in-depth themes on implementation successes. These themes include steps taken to enhance buy-in within the department, gaps filled by the social worker, unforeseen positives brought to the department, and challenges experienced with the new role. Subthemes also emerged and will be presented. Participant responses were categorized as coming from an FPD participant or a UA participant.

The FPD participants are those in dispatch, records, or sworn officers. UA participants include faculty and the intern from the University of Arkansas School of Social Work.

Theme 1: Steps Taken to Enhance Buy-In

The interview participants presented some characteristics of the collaboration which encouraged successful buy-in. As presented below, these steps were intentional and deliberate to develop a relationship that was based on collaboration, and trust. Other subthemes that supported buy-in included the slow-building process, and intentional group and divisional meetings throughout the department.

Collaboration. Consistently, the participants from both FPD and UA commented on several efforts to bring the social work intern into the department in a thoughtful and measured capacity. These attempts facilitated a process that FPD participants appreciated. Conjointly, the UA participants specifically relayed a perceived sense of collaboration. For instance, one UA participant stated, “It’s important to be sure that you truly desire to partner and support and not, you know, and I’m not speaking against the police or want police abolition.” These efforts were also recognized by FPD participants. One FPD participant commented on this mindset, “They came with collaboration in mind. There was a strong initial trust with the implementors.”

Trust. Like above, another emerging subtheme included UA faculty making concerted efforts to build trust through transparency and openness. A UA participant stated, “We made sure we were all on the same page and sharing information. They shared information about what their needs were. We listened.” Additionally, the UA implementers recognized that it was important to bring in an intern with a similar demeanor of openness. One UA participant commented, “We needed to be very picky as to who was going to be the right person there. Because again, it’s a unique atmosphere.” Both FPD and UA participants noted that the first intern was a perfect match for the needs of this internship, and all viewed this fit as essential to the process moving forward. The following statement from a FPD participant reflects this sentiment, “I think it really helped having (the intern’s-name deleted) experience, you know, he’s worked in corrections and stuff like that. So, he’s well aware of some of the safety risks that could go on when dealing with people in crisis and stuff like that. I was impressed with his connections also.”

Slow-Build. Additionally, participants agreed that it was important to bring the intern in slowly and with a conscious effort to allow FPD officers and staff to get comfortable with the new social worker role. As seen above, there was hesitancy and questioning within FPD regarding what the social worker’s role would be and how it would impact the department. Both FPD and UA participants mentioned the need for a slow deliberate process during interviews, stating, “That first semester was about building, implementing, and developing relationships,” and “We also made the decision that the student would start office based mostly and helping from there. Not so much really going out and responding. Now it has kind of grown in that way.”

Group Meetings with Various Divisions. Another emerging subtheme of efforts to produce buy-in is the meetings set up with the assorted divisions located within FPD. These meetings allowed the sworn officers and division staff to ask questions and express concerns. The participants spoke to the importance of listening and also educating during these meetings to achieve maximum buy-in. An FPD participant described these efforts in the following quote: “It’s a unique perspective and one that you kind of have to sell. But I think once they saw it in place, they can see the benefits of it. And so again, I think you just do that through education and demonstration.” In describing a meeting where officers presented some concerns, the same participant noted, “When I mentioned home visits they initially freaked out. I then explained that social work interns go to home visits all the time by themselves with DHS and other organizations.” This example highlights the importance of allowing FPD officers and staff to voice concerns and providing reassurance through education in helping gradually build acceptance of the program.

Theme 2: Gaps Filled by the Social Worker

Based on the qualitative data collected summer 2021, there were specific types of calls/callers that FPD and UA participants agreed the intern was well suited to assist. The types of calls noted by the participants along with quotes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Calls/Callers and Corresponding Quotes

Mental Health Crisis	“The majority of our calls are for things that I think that our social worker that would be very beneficial for, you know, like we’ve got people in mental crisis. People, you know, might be drug induced crises, but still like they need rehab or they might need a mental health unit. They don’t need the police.”
Chronic Callers	“I think there was some hesitancy to begin with, but if we can say really address the needs of what we would call a frequent flier, those people that have repeated contacts with the department and we can really get to the heart of what their issue is and if it's not a police matter.”
Underserved People	“The police department is kind of a natural sanctuary for people to come. We might not be able to help them from a law enforcement standpoint. I like to think of us as maybe air traffic controllers that can point them in the right direction as to where they need to land and at least try to give them some good information. I feel like we accomplished that so much more when we have a social worker on board.”
Substance Abuse or Use	“Someone that is drug addicted instead of taking them to jail, we find some way, some other way that can help them besides taking em' to jail. In the past, we would have either taken the dope from her and sent her home, or she would’ve gone to jail. But, she was really wanting help. We were able to give her that help.”

Spring 2021 when the social worker had only been involved for three months, participants were asked an open-ended question on the quantitative survey. There were 117 participants that responded when asked about the benefits of social workers. These are presented below in Table 3. Seventeen participants responded to this question with a negative response and will be discussed later in the manuscript.

Table 3: Open-Ended Responses Quantitative Survey

Mental Health Assistance (n=44)	“I work with a lot of mental health complaints and calls for service. While I have passion for this type of work, I feel having a social worker who can dedicate his or her time to the mental services needs of our community will not only benefit the community but allow officers to better serve citizens by having more time to respond to calls for service.”
Follow-up calls after initial contact (n=11)	“A social worker can assist with follow up, referrals for services, and filling in those gaps that officers cannot fill, which is the job of a social worker. Social workers cannot take the place of law enforcement officers, but can work in conjunction with the agency to address those unique needs of underserved citizens.”
Provide community resources (n=31)	“As a sworn officer, I could see a social worker being beneficial in assisting certain citizens in directing where to go for legitimate help. The knowledge social workers have of the resources as well as the ability to speak about resources far exceeds that of the average police officer. Having a social worker in a position to respond to these certain citizens could vastly increase the chances of an individual receiving the help that is needed.”

Assist with training/responding to officers (n=7)	“I think that LE [Law Enforcement] needs all of the resources we can amass. I think that officers being aware that they have resources outside of what would be considered conventional resources available at this time is a great thing for everyone. Supporting officers is going to have a huge dividend for the community.”
Assist with homeless population (n=7)	“In situations we respond to where there is no criminal action. I think they would bolster the ‘serve’ aspect of policing. Particularly for homeless people, it seems when we can’t quite help them with a relatively simple problem that is out of our means, referring them to a social worker can help, too.”
Total (N=117)	

When exploring these two lists, it is interesting to view the differences in when the data was collected. The first data set (Table 2) was completed after the social worker had been working with the FPD for approximately 8 months. At this time, the social worker had begun to go out with the officer on actual calls. The second data set presented (Table 3) was collected only 3 months after implementation and the social work internship was still in its infancy and establishing protocols. In this data, responses were often vague and lacked nuance and at times negative. The quotes from data collected 5 months later conveyed a clearer understanding of the role and usefulness of the intern.

Theme 3: Unforeseen Positives Brought to the Department

The FPD participants highlighted some additional benefits stemming from incorporating a social work position. Subthemes emerged regarding personal gains and increased community trust and visibility. These additional positives were presented as a surprise by FPD participants. These subthemes include: 1) helps us feel better about our job; 2) the officers are embracing the social work position; and 3) strengthening our relationship with the community.

Helps us Feel Better About Our Job. Most of the research participants from FPD (n=7) expressed the new social work role helped make their jobs more rewarding. In the past, they often perceived their hands were tied when it came to supporting certain community members. As a result, they were sometimes frustrated. One FPD participant commented, “The highlight for the records division is knowing that we have that other layer of assistance and that a social worker can help them in ways that my staff would not be able to help assist them.” Another person from dispatch stated, “Hey,.....I’m yes, ‘I’m going to take this report down, but let me also go and let you speak with our social worker here, and they’re going to be able to get you some more services.” This person described that many times people call or walk in off the street and dispatch would often have to turn them away because there was nothing they could offer. One sworn officer added, “So our job is not going to change per se, but I think it’s a better quality of service that we are providing now. So, it didn’t add to our work. It enhanced our work.”

Officers are Embracing the Social Work Position. One of the strongest indications of the success of the internship project is that the officers are beginning to send referrals to the social worker regularly. A FPD participant stated, “One of the biggest successes has been the embracing by the officers.” Like the subtheme above, the social worker gives officers another tool to use when working with the diversity of community needs experienced by FPD officers and staff, and this extra support enriches their job. When discussing this added strength, one officer noted, “You know, that’s what officers want. It’s if you can help someone at the end of the day, that’s why we’re here.”

Builds Community Relationships. Lastly, many of the participants (n=5) of the qualitative survey reflected that they personally received positive feedback from community members on the new social work role. One participant stated, “It seems to strengthen our relationship with the community. I’ve had someone come up to me who knows I work for the FPD. They told me ‘I really love what you are doing at the police department.’” Another officer reflected, “Also just to show to the community and the citizens that, hey, we’re

not just merely going to respond to you when you call or try to harass this person. We're really going to try to get to the root of what their issues are and really try to serve them as a whole person.”

Theme 4: Challenges

As with any new project, one related to major societal issues and intense media coverage, there were some negative perceptions expressed about the program. These subthemes emanated from the comments of FPD participants, particularly sworn officers. These include: 1) resistance due to extra stress/burden placed on the officer; and 2) fear of safety and increased risk. The data in this theme are supported by some of the negative comments received from the open-ended survey questionnaire completed in March 2021.

Extra Stress. This subtheme expressed itself through officer perceptions of additional burdens and stretching of already minimal resources in the department. This change was often seen as something that they “had to do...not that they had a choice.” An example of this can be seen in the following comment, “It's just this it's so foreign, it's so new, and then you got to take a... I'm a patrol officer. I've got 10 years of experience, you know, it's a brand-new thing. Yeah, we'll work on it. You really have to dedicate a lot of money resources, which is quite a strain on the patrol side.” Another instance of this additional negative burden is when this officer stated, “I just think that bringing them out into the field is just like it's another layer of stress that wouldn't be helpful for us.” A similar comment came from the survey and noted, “Having a social worker will only add one more person on scene that an officer is accountable for their safety during a high stress situation.”

Fear of Safety for The Social Worker. Consistently, the officers relayed that the feeling of being responsible for another person was problematic. The officers often saw the addition of the social worker as a burden. From the quantitative survey, one officer's statement concludes:

Having a social worker present during calls will only expose him/her to the dangers of police work. Anyone can research dash and body camera footage on even the most basic calls and discover that people act unpredictably. I believe that problematic or mentally disturbed people are likely to react worse knowing they are interacting with a civilian of no authority or means of protection.

Another officer during the interview stated, “What kind of keeps me skeptical is because I'm responsible if something ever happened to them. It's another person you have to watch out for.” Another excellent example of this subtheme is reflected in this statement, “It's still nerve wracking that we have to bring a civilian in the field. A person might be OK one moment, but a lot of people we deal with have those highs and lows,.....they might be OK, right? Then we bring them in, and he attacks the social worker.”

DISCUSSION

Growth

In the fall of 2020, two UA faculty members began working closely with the FPD Chief of Police and other FPD administrators. Together, they developed the initial internship program which included thorough research of other police/social work models. They found that these models varied widely depending on location and most programs were in areas with different demographics than Fayetteville, AR. However, programs that had been successfully implemented typically had dedicated CIT trained officers assigned to them and FPD had multiple CIT trained officers available. And although there is a lack of consensus in the literature regarding what co-response models are most effective, the UA faculty and FPD administrators were able to incorporate experiential knowledge from previous collaborations and internship development to get the project off the ground. Findings present ways that the program has been successful to this point and the ongoing challenges of this unique relationship. These early findings have helped build the programmatic knowledge of the CIRT program and can inform other police departments and schools of social work looking to develop similar collaborations.

During the first two semesters approximately 90 referrals were received from patrol officers, detectives, special task forces, dispatch personnel, and local legislators. This is important considering that much of the first semester was dedicated to initiating the referral process and developing the internship and ultimately the CIRT protocol. During the initial semester, the social work intern did not work in real time with individuals in crisis but followed up on these referrals. The evolution of the program during the summer of 2021 to include a dedicated CIT officer allowed the team to respond to calls in real time. This increased their interaction with people experiencing crisis and the general Fayetteville community.

The program's initial success led to FPD being awarded a Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing (COPS) grant to hire two social work-oriented positions, which FPD labelled Social Services Advocates. Additionally, the Fayetteville City Council authorized the creation of two CIT officer positions to be assigned solely to the co-response team. A police sergeant was also assigned to the team. The program still incorporates an MSW-level intern, and an additional BSW-level internship was developed to offer more programmatic support. These positions, along with the two newly formed CIRT teams, solidify this program and increase the team's capacity to accept referrals and provide real-time assistance during calls for service. The growth of this unit, and the expansion of allocated resources, signal the success of this collaborative effort up to this point.

The Importance of Buy-In

According to the FPD Chief, "if there's anything that I have learned about police officers is that they are so reluctant to change. So reluctant, and I don't know why that is, it's just the culture of being a police officer." (personal communication, January 4, 2023). This hesitancy was apparent in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Similar challenges are also seen in the literature regarding other policing reforms (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Nix, et al., 2018; Willis, 2022). Thus, the program implementation required intentional organizational-wide buy-in efforts to foster a collaborative environment where FPD staff could assume a strong stakeholder position and cultural change could slowly occur.

The results of this study document these buy-in strategies. These efforts included FPD leadership and UA faculty meeting with numerous officers individually and during roll call briefings. Additionally, an FPD participant reported that this team also "identified and pursued one-on-one informal conversations with both sworn and non-sworn leaders within the agency." It was also essential that these "conversations were collaborative and not coerced," as one FPD participant phrased it. These efforts led to numerous officers who were initially skeptical or opposed to the program becoming advocates for the program.

Additionally, the results highlight the slow and thoughtful process, including strong efforts to build trust within the department. This deliberate process allowed staff and sworn officers to adjust to the program at a comfortable pace as the FPD Chief noted, "I think initially, yes, I think there was a fear that they were trying to replace the police with social workers. But once I think the program was explained and that communication was opened up, I think the FPD and the officers welcomed the program" (personal communication, January 4, 2023). The FPD Chief placed a high priority on the success of the program, was an ardent supporter, and participated in the initial program development. This sort of championing has been highlighted as crucial in departmental, and even legislative, change (Mourtgos, et al., 2021; Nix et al, 2018; Sliva, 2017).

Lastly, results showed increasing support from the FPD as the project finished the second semester: More referrals were made (approximately 90); the co-response team began responding in real-time to crisis events; and FPD participants offered comments about increasing job satisfaction and mentioned the positive reception of the program in the community. These are important factors considering the spike in voluntary officer resignations related to the sociopolitical environment in the U.S. after the George Floyd protests and continued departmental difficulties retaining officers nationwide (Mourtgos, et al., 2021). Factors cited as contributing to the exodus of police include opportunities in the private sector, concerns about police

legitimacy, rigid hiring practices, and baby boomers entering retirement age (Wilson, 2022). These results indicate that co-response programs might be able to boost officer morale and aid in retention efforts.

Implications for Social Workers

This evaluation process served as a valuable feedback tool to enhance knowledge for building police/social work collaborations and co-response teams. Also understanding the existing challenges and attitudes of a department before programmatic and cultural shifts are implemented is essential to move forward and measure change over time. This type of broad comprehension helps future implementers avoid pitfalls common to efforts at organizational and programmatic change.

Starting a co-response team within a police department by first establishing a social work internship has been a successful approach so far in Fayetteville, AR. However, not all communities house a research university or even a school of social work, so this model may not be universally appropriate. Still, the results suggest that this process allowed FPD staff to slowly accept and find value in the program. Also, social workers understand the central importance of building connections, rapport, and community collaborations. These efforts were highlighted in the study and can be replicated in other communities with similar capacities and community interest.

Future Research

In the fall of 2022, UA researchers were awarded a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) grant to further evaluate the CIRT program. Thus, this overall evaluation project will continue into its second and third years, allowing for the collection of longitudinal data and analyses highlighting any changes over time. There will be a second wave of FPD interviews and the FPD survey regarding attitudes toward incorporating social workers into the department. Additionally, future data will include surveys and interviews with general community members to identify and explore community perceptions of the program, the FPD more generally, and whether these perceptions change over time. Participants of the CIRT program will also be surveyed and interviewed to explore their personal experiences with the team, their perceptions of the program and FPD, and whether those perceptions change over time. The evaluation plan calls for recidivism analyses looking at subsequent arrests and citations for people served by CIRT. The plan also includes an assessment of CIRT's impact on subsequent positive interactions with FPD. These data and analyses should help gain a better understanding of the CIRT program's effectiveness and may serve as a blueprint for other localities looking to evaluate similar programs. These analyses effort will establish some universal assessment outcomes for co-response programs that can be coupled with more localized options in future. Standard outcomes are lacking in the co-response literature and will be crucial in building a more general understanding of the effectiveness of co-response programs at the national or even international level (Shapiro, et al., 2015).

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper describes the implementation process for this program, and the lessons learned in developing an internship (and ultimately a professionally staffed program) using baseline results from the initial surveys and qualitative interviews completed with participants from the FPD. The information gathered yields exploratory data that can be used to inform future collaboration efforts as the program expands. While this effort occurred in a small urban area of Arkansas, and the results are not generalizable, these strategies have some universal appeal and can be implemented elsewhere and subsequently evaluated. Despite these limitations, this manuscript fills a gap in the literature by highlighting crucial elements of the implementation process and can serve as a resource as others attempt to implement co-response programs in their communities.

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