

Intimate partner violence in Illinois

By Jennifer Hiselman

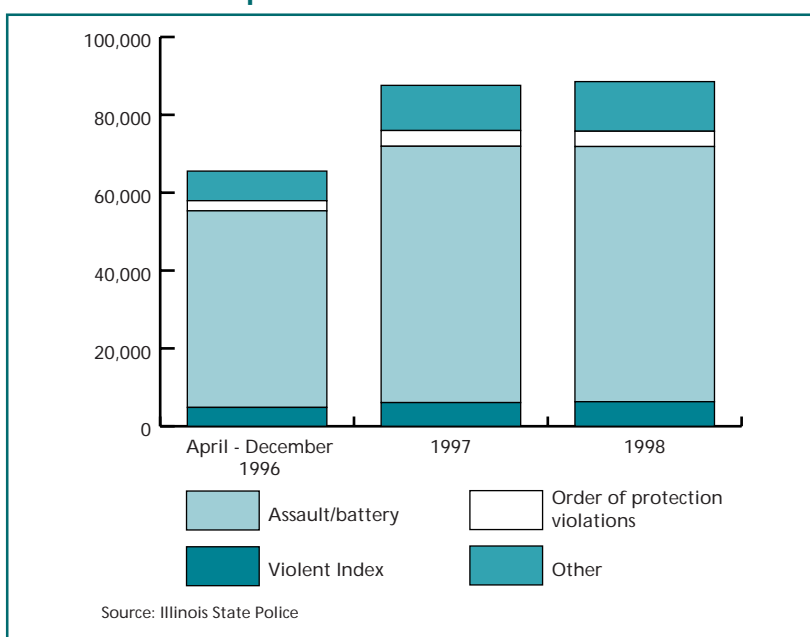
In 1998, more than 88,500 offenses between intimate partners were reported to police in Illinois. That same year, nearly 54,000 orders of protection were entered into the statewide Law Enforcement Agencies Data System (LEADS).¹ In state fiscal year 1999 (July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999), domestic violence programs funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) served more than 50,000 victims. While these numbers are substantial, they most likely underrepresent the actual amount of intimate partner violence in Illinois. Methods used to identify intimate partner violence trends in the state are limited. While new data collection systems have been implemented, they are not yet used effectively by state and local agencies across Illinois. In addition, the general underreporting of intimate partner violence by victims limits the amount and type of data collected.

Several initiatives are under way to improve the data on intimate partner violence in Illinois. This report examines the extent to which intimate partner violence can currently be measured in the state, the limitations encountered in measuring this kind of violence, and efforts to improve data collection in this area.

Intimate partner violence data collection

The Illinois Domestic Violence Act of 1986 defines domestic violence as an act of abuse, neglect, or exploitation committed against a person by another

Figure 1
Intimate partner offenses reported to Illinois State Police
April 1996 - December 1998



person or persons related to the victim through a family or household member relationship, which includes current and former intimate partner relations.² Although the act is considered landmark legislation, and serves as a national model for domestic violence law, data collection in this area remains a challenge to state agencies.

This update describes a few data collection systems that provide some measure of intimate partner violence in Illinois, but not without limitations. One of the greatest obstacles in collecting domestic violence data is that these crimes are defined by the relationships between the victim and the offender, rather than by the nature of the act itself. Some data

collection systems do not include an indicator for the relationship between victims and offenders. Systems that do record this information often cannot provide separate counts of intimate partner incidents because they do not have the ability to filter records for this information.

The difficulty in combining data from agencies of different disciplines, and the need to ensure victim confidentiality, create even more barriers to quality data collection. Agencies from criminal justice, health care, or social service areas all play substantial roles in a support system for victims of intimate partner violence. Often these agencies use different definitions for basic categories, making comparisons

nearly impossible. Moreover, since many agencies maintain sensitive information on victims, they must limit access to the data they collect. These safeguarding practices hinder the ability to uncover clear patterns in domestic violence.

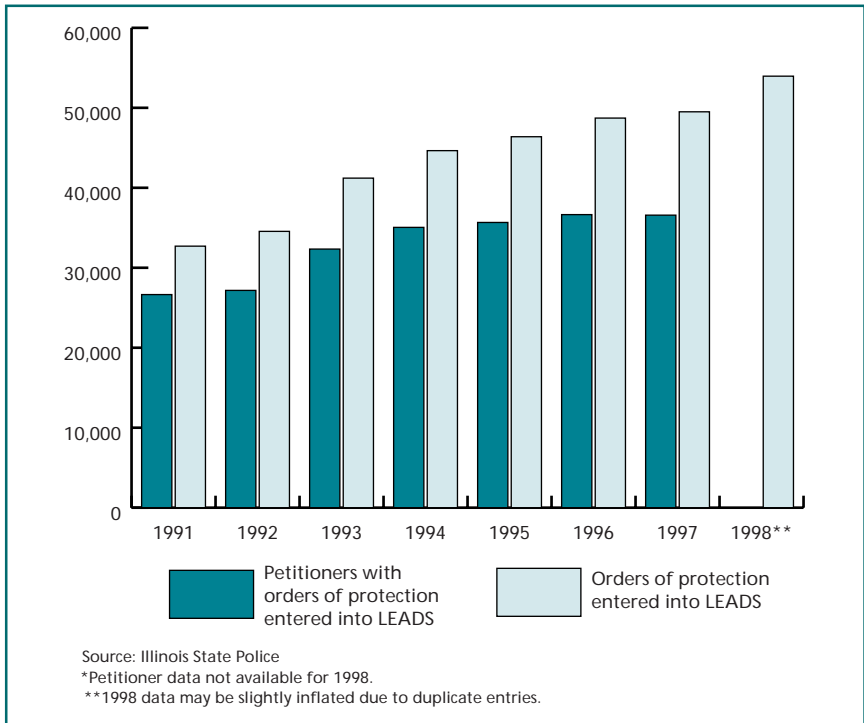
Although intimate partner violence data collection has been recognized as a problem area for some time, most attempts at improvement in this area have been only moderately successful. Recent changes in the law have mandated that the Illinois State Police (ISP) implement a new data collection system designed to track domestic violence cases. However, this system is in its preliminary stages and requires time to improve reporting compliance and consistency.

Intimate partner violence reported by local law enforcement agencies

Illinois law has required local law enforcement agencies to report domestic offenses to ISP since April 1996. Police agencies are to report all offenses of abuse, neglect, or exploitation occurring between family or household members. In 1998, data was collected from agencies representing 83 percent of Illinois' total population. This percentage is expected to increase as local law enforcement and ISP become more familiar with the system.

From April to December 1996, 65,549 intimate partner offenses were reported to police in Illinois. In 1998, 88,537 intimate partner offenses were reported. Of those, 74 percent were assault/battery offenses, and 7 percent were violent index offenses. Four percent were violations of an order of protection (Figure 1). About 90 percent of intimate partner offense reports in 1998 indicated whether a weapon was used in the offense, and the type of weapon used. Nine percent of the reports revealed the use of knives, firearms, and other objects.

Figure 2
Orders of protection and petitioners entered into LEADS, 1991-1998*



Orders of protection entered into LEADS

ISP maintains a database of orders of protection issued by Illinois courts, as required by the Domestic Violence Act. This law specifies that orders of protection must be entered into LEADS by county sheriff's departments on the day they are issued. This information is then available to police officers responding to domestic violence situations. While this practice is mandated by law, compliance with the act has not been tested.

In 1991, 32,702 orders of protection were entered into LEADS. By 1998, this number reached 53,957 — an increase of 65 percent (Figure 2). Because some victims seek multiple orders against one or more alleged abusers over time, the number of petitioners for orders of protection entered into LEADS between 1991 and 1997 is less than the number of orders entered.³ The number of petitioners entered into LEADS increased from 26,648 in 1991 to 36,578 in 1997. Thus, while the

number of orders increased 51 percent during the same period, the number of petitioners increased only 37 percent.

More than 65 percent of orders of protection entered in 1998 were emergency orders, which are in effect for up to 21 days. Four percent were interim orders, which remain in effect for up to 30 days. Ten percent of those entered in 1998 were plenary orders of protection, which stay in effect for up to two years. Fifteen percent of orders were effective for more than two years. The remaining orders did not indicate an expiration date.

Victims assisted by domestic violence programs

The Authority, the Attorney General's Office, and DHS, through its Domestic Violence Prevention and Intervention Program, provide financial and technical support to programs for victims of domestic violence. Service providers primarily offer shelter, transportation, crisis hotlines, counseling, and legal advocacy to victims.

Victim service data were collected differently in state fiscal years 1998 and 1999 than in prior fiscal years. In fiscal year 1998, most DHS programs began using a new database developed by the Authority to collect victim service data — the InfoNet. The data presented in this report were collected from DHS annual reports for state fiscal years 1994 to 1997, and from the InfoNet and individual programs for fiscal years 1998 and 1999. Although the InfoNet can provide much more detailed information on the victims served by the programs, and on services provided, this change in data collection clouds comparisons between fiscal years 1998 and 1999 and earlier years.

In fiscal year 1994, DHS domestic violence programs assisted 43,391 victims. By fiscal year 1999, this number reached 50,444 — a 16 percent increase. The number of service hours provided by DHS programs also increased between fiscal years 1994 and 1999, from nearly 431,000 to more than 494,000 — an increase of 15 percent.

While the number of clients increased 16 percent from 1994 to 1997, the number of service hours increased 15 percent (Table 1). The number of service hours provided to individual clients dropped slightly from an average of 9.93 hours to 9.78 hours. In addition, the number of shelter nights provided to clients by DHS during that period decreased 7 percent, from 181,244 in fiscal year 1994 to 167,724 in fiscal year 1999.

Relationships between victims and abusers

The data sets used for this report included information on victim-abuser relationships, and indicated different patterns of relationship types. Among intimate partner offenses reported to ISP in 1998, nearly 65 percent occurred between boyfriends and girlfriends, and 29 percent occurred between spouses. Four percent of reported offenses occurred between ex-spouses, and the remaining

Table 1
Services provided by intimate partner violence programs, fiscal years 1994 - 1999

Category	FY94	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98	FY99	Percent change FY94-FY99
Individuals served	43,391	46,262	47,287	51,566	*	50,444	16%
Hours of service	430,989	447,846	458,929	502,653	404,000	443,067	3%
Average hours per client	9.93	9.68	9.7	9.75	*	9.78	-2%
Shelter nights provided	182,244	177,320	175,344	181,206	164,240	167,724	-7%

*Data are not available due to change in the collection process.

Sources: Data for fiscal years 1994 through 1997 were collected from the Illinois Department of Human Services. Data for fiscal years 1998 through 1999 were collected from Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence and individual domestic violence programs.

offenses occurred between unmarried parents, common-law spouses, and intimate partners of the same sex.

Conversely, DHS grantees reportedly served slightly more married victims than unmarried victims of intimate partner abuse through their programs in fiscal year 1999. Forty-two percent of victims served were spouses of their abusers, while 38 percent of victims served said they were never married to their abusers. Another 7 percent of these victims were ex-spouses of their abusers, while the remaining victims reported other, non-intimate partner relationships with their abusers.

Among orders of protection entered into LEADS in 1998, 22 percent of all orders entered involved spousal relationships between petitioners and respondents, while 21 percent of orders indicated boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. Four percent of orders indicated the petitioner and the respondent were ex-spouses.

More than 50 percent of protection orders entered into LEADS indicated the petitioner and the respondent did not have an intimate partner relationship. However, because most of these entries contained abuser classifications of “other family

member,” these relationship types may have been incorrectly entered.

Overall, the data indicated that unmarried victims of intimate partner violence sought assistance from police more often than married victims, while DHS domestic violence programs were sought only slightly more often by married victims than unmarried victims. Orders of protection were sought about equally by married and unmarried victims.

Identifying trends in intimate partner violence

Available data indicated increasing reports of intimate partner violence in Illinois. However, other events may have influenced these patterns. First, the data sets examined for this report are relatively new, especially the data set containing the number of domestic offenses reported to police. Typically, compliance rates and consistency in reporting increase as data collection systems mature. Also, increased awareness of intimate partner violence as a serious crime may have affected these trends. The increase in funding for domestic violence victim services also could be fueling the rise in the number of reported events and victims seeking assistance.

Other data collection strategies

Efforts are under way to improve the ability to identify intimate partner violence trends in Illinois. The Authority will continue its collaboration with the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the Attorney General’s Office, and DHS to implement the InfoNet, a data collection system for programs that provide direct services to victims. The Violence Registry, maintained by the Illinois Department of Public Health, and Cornerstone, another data management system operated by DHS, also are assisting in efforts to collect information on victims which may provide intimate partner violence data from a health perspective.

In addition, the Authority recently completed a report that

describes the nature and extent of family violence in Illinois based on available state data sets. The report also identifies gaps existing in these data, and provides some recommendations for addressing them.

While tools are limited to identify intimate partner violence trends, these initiatives offer potential for substantial improvements to data collection in the near future.

1 This number may be slightly inflated due to orders of protection being entered into LEADS by more than one law enforcement agency.

2 For specific definitions of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and family or household members, see the Illinois Domestic Violence Act of 1986, (750 ILCS 60/103).

3 Petitioners have not yet been calculated using 1998 data.

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