

Peace at Last or Just a Piece of Paper? Assessing the Utilization and Efficacy of Civil Protection Orders and Reported Violations

Ph.D. Dissertation

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Abstract

Academic interest in domestic violence has grown substantially in the past 50 years with feminist and family violence scholars leading the way. Although once thought to be a uniform experience, scholars have since recognized that a variety of patterns of violence exist. As such, several typologies have been proposed to better understand the varied experience of domestic violence. Among the most notable are Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's typology of domestic abusers (1994) and Johnson's typology of violent relationships (1995).

As domestic violence became better understood and seen as a public, rather than a private matter, which had been traditional, responses to domestic violence expanded greatly. One of the most common resources utilized by survivors are civil protection orders (POs) which set conditions to regulate future interaction between abusers and survivors in an attempt to deter subsequent abuse. If conditions of the PO are violated, however, survivors may report such actions to the court.

Despite the relative explosion of academic research concerning domestic violence in recent years, formal responses by criminal justice agencies, including civil courts, have not always been theoretically informed. The disconnect between theory and practice, therefore, presents a logical area of focus by which to improve the efficacy of POs to better protect survivors.

This dissertation uses data from 305 POs filed in St. Louis County to better understand the use of POs among domestic violence survivors. Special attention is given to the specific types of violations commonly reported (e.g., assault, communication, etc.) as well as the efficacy of POs as it pertains to different patterns of violence identified by popular typologies.

Results indicate that a number of different PO violations are reported and that individual conditions of the PO do very little to deter specific types of subsequent abuse. Moreover, there is limited evidence to suggest that POs are more effective for some patterns of violence recognized by common typologies than for others. To this end, a variety of policy implications are presented to improve the efficacy of POs as it pertains to specific types of violations as well as broader patterns of violence within a relationship.