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Police Discourses on Policing Domestic Violence

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Abstract

Explicit statements regarding the unacceptable use of violence against intimate partners have been advanced within New Zealand society in recent years. The adoption of an arrest policy in 1987 by the New Zealand Police, the Domestic Violence Act 1995 and an extensive media campaign all unequivocally asseverate such violence is a crime and will not be tolerated. However, domestic violence continues to be a serious problem in New Zealand. This research forms part of a larger, ongoing research project, which addresses domestic violence from the perspective of its victims, offenders and other service and intervention providers. This project explores police officers' experience of policing domestic violence using discourse analysis. The methodological approach stems from a social constructionist paradigm, which postulates that language is active and constructive in maintaining, contesting and transforming social reality. To this end, 12 front line officers were interviewed to discuss domestic violence, the Family Violence Policy, and some of the controversial issues that have arisen from previous research in this area that have plagued the policing of domestic violence. The interviews were transcribed and a discourse analysis was used to identify shared social resources or discourses used by police officers in their understanding of domestic violence, the people encountered in its policing and the problems experienced in relation to the pro-arrest policy. Officers made use of a variety of, often contradictory, discourses in their understanding of domestic violence, the people involved in it and their role in policing it. While the analysis suggests officers continue to draw on discourses that blame victims and exonerate offenders, it also points to a discursive shift in police discourses on policing domestic violence, particularly with regard to its seriousness and dangerousness, the importance of policing it and the utility of arrest.

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