

Intervening in Domestic Violence as a Police Task: Legal Reform and Policing versus Citizens' Perspective

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Abstract

Violence in Western societies has received increased public and legal attention during the past few decades, while simultaneously, evidence of decreased violent behaviour has been identified. A specific type of violence that has undergone changes in visibility and increased legal intervention is domestic violence (DV). Have people become more sensitive to all kinds of violence? In this case, DV would not stand out as a crime demanding increasing police intervention. In this article, the public's perceptions of the importance of intervening in DV as a police task are analysed. Comparisons with the assessed importance of other types of police tasks are made to evaluate the changes in a broader attitudinal context, and official police statistics are reflected against the trends identified from the survey data. In the results, DV stands out in the comparison of change in the importance of police tasks. The hypothesis of increased cultural sensitivity is not confirmed concerning all types of crimes or even violent crimes. The results can be understood to support the theory about increased cultural sensitivity concerning an issue previously seen as a private matter rather than a criminal act and police matter DV.

Keywords: domestic violence; family violence; violence in close relationships; police; cultural sensitivity; legal reform

Introduction

Cultural perception of behaviours and what is considered violence and a crime change over time. In a long term perspective of the past several thousand years, violence between humans has decreased in Western societies because we have undergone processes of civilisation and our inner control has become more important (Eisner, 2014; Pinker, 2012). These changes have occurred simultaneously with other societal changes, such as industrialisation, the growing role of national states, bureaucratisation, modernisation and the increasing importance of equality and individual rights (Tonry, 2014, pp. 48–54). All this has resulted in a paradox, whereby violence between people has been decreasing while increasing attention has been paid to it. As Kivivuori (2014) stated, we have become more sensitive to violence. It is therefore appropriate to ask what signs of a sensibilisation process to violence we can identify in our recent history.

In the Western world, at least one type of violence has begun to receive increased recognition as a more serious crime in recent years: domestic violence (DV) and, in particular,

violence against women (see, e.g., Von Hofer, 2000; Straus, 2010; Zolotor & Puzia, 2010) When battering a wife started to be recognised as something other than a man's rightful duty to discipline his wife, this also meant changes in the legal system and mandates for law enforcement to intervene. The police are often the first responders to DV, and work as gatekeepers to the justice system, which makes their role crucial in the institutional intervening in DV. Much of the research concerning DV is focused on men's violence against women, but in recent decades, studies have also brought men as victims of DV to public attention (e.g. Brown, 2004; Douglas & Hines, 2011; Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2014)

In Finland, legislation has changed remarkably in recent years to better protect the physical and psychological integrity of women and children. As Kotanen (2013; 2017) has noted, Finnish legislation on violence against women has changed under the pressure of international demands. As Kotanen writes (2017, p. 8), ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 and the European Convention on Human Rights in 1989 'led to increased pressure for amendments to Finnish legislation' In the late 1980s and early 1990s, domestic actors such as the Finnish Advisory Board for Equality were quickly involved in this debate. The issue of violence against women was also prominently raised in the media in the 1990s, which contributed to the development of legislation. It has been estimated that in international comparison, Finland belongs to the intermediate countries, together with, for example, France, Germany and Spain, when it comes to the starting point of the renewal of the legislation related to DV. The 'early-bird countries' in this comparison seem to be the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden (Corradi & Stöckl, 2016)

While sensitivity to violence has usually been studied via reporting propensity, the current study offers a new and supplementary perspective on the subject. In this paper, we ask how the legislative changes are reflected in ordinary people's expectations of policing DV in Finland. Police are faced with many different expectations from the public. How accurate do people see the prevention of DV as a police task compared to other tasks, and is there any change in this regard during the last two decades? Has DV become a more serious security problem than other issues that may also threaten people's sense of security?

The structure of our article is as follows. First, we discuss the idea of cultural sensitivity on violence and whether there are credible reasons to believe it has increased. Second, we discuss proneness to report as an indicator of sensitivity and factors associated with it. Third, to make the context of this study understandable, we present the changing demands towards policing DV in Finland. Fourth, we introduce our research questions, materials and methods. Fifth, we present the results and finally proceed to discussion

Has sensitivity to violence increased?

In his essay *Understanding Trends in Personal Violence: Does Cultural Sensitivity Matter?*, Kivivuori (2014) draws attention to the paradox that we mentioned above: Even though violence has diminished in the face of many objective indicators, we are paying more attention to it. We measure violence with more sensitive indicators and formulate political recommendations that call for tackling violence in new areas of life.

Kivivuori (2014) bases his analysis mainly on three theoreticians that help us understand why our Western culture seems to evolve in a direction where violence is increasingly seen as a political and social problem. First, he refers to Ulrich Beck's (2006) idea of a risk society, as Western societies are characterized by the tendency to increasingly control the various threats to security. Second, he refers to the writings of Furedi (2002), who describes the growing climate of fear and the attempt to avoid various risks. The spectrum of Furedi's examples is extensive from health and environmental hazards to fears of crime. Third, Kivivuori (2014) refers to a study by Garland (2000), who looks at the change in attitude towards crime mainly in the UK and the United States since the early 1970s. According to Garland, the middle class has started to react to criminality in a new way, which is reflected in increasing punitivity and preparedness for the risks of crime.

Sensitisation to violence can thus be seen as part of a wider cultural transformation of Western societies. Kivivuori (2014) has collected a lot of empirical material, mainly from Finland and from the previous decades, which seems to support this idea. For example, he finds that forms of violence that are relatively reliable to measure have diminished. The number of homicides has fallen in Finland like in most Western societies. At the same time, the occurrence of milder forms of violence has increased. This may be because our ways to interpret acts as violence have changed, and these changes are reflected in both official crime statistics and, for example, victimisation surveys. It is therefore important to study the subjective interpretations of violence and its occurrences.

Hans von Hofer (2000) has examined developments in juvenile delinquency in Sweden and found a particular 'enforcement wave' in the last decades of the 20th century. The crime of juvenile delinquency has begun to be dealt with more seriously. Von Hofer lists four reasons behind this development. First, science and, in particular, the development of medicine has led us to increasingly focus on controlling the uncertainty that nature causes. As the welfare state evolves, we control more closely the illnesses as well as the social disturbances that threaten a predictable and safe life. Our ability to tolerate physical suffering as well as social disadvantage is reduced. Second, people become more aware of violence through media. Media stresses serious forms of violence, raises fears and generates growing intolerance towards violence. Third, von Hofer mentions the feminisation of the Swedish society. The development of the welfare state has meant increasing

gender equality In the struggle of gender equality, violence has become a means of showing inequalities in the realities: violence has been seen primarily as male violence against women. Fourth, von Hofer mentions a further change in the Swedish criminal policy that has become more offensive and responsive as its reactions to crimes

Proneness to report as an indicator of sensitivity

In the 1960s, a person being hit during a ‘domestic conflict’ without sustaining severe injuries would not likely have been reported in a victimisation survey as an assault. The likelihood of reporting an assault in the aforementioned situation is much higher in the 2010s (Lynch & Addington, 2015; Tonry, 2016). Evidence based on a U.S. study of a small, female-biased sample of people in one city suggests that the percentage of people regarding violence against women as never justified increased when comparing 1987 and 1997, while this direction of development was not uniform for all forms of violence (Johnson & Sigler, 2000). In addition, measures of violent crime victimisation have changed in victimisation surveys. Lynch and Addington (2015) have described how the National Crime Victim Surveys in the United States have become more sensitive to indicate DV as a crime between the years 1992 and 2012. This change, however, has not been unambiguously proven because studies on changes in sensitivity to violence based on repetitive samples are not easily found.

The Finnish Crime Victim Survey (FCVS) plans to address measures for sensitivity in Finland by repeating a series of questions asking whether people regard certain behaviours as violence (Kivivuori, 2014). Concerning prevalence, the latest information from the FCVS indicates that 3% of men and 5% of women were physically victimised by their spouse, former spouse, partner or former partner during the 12 months preceding the survey (Danielsson & Kääriäinen, 2016) According to the previous sweep of the same survey, only 3% of the DV experienced by men and 10% of DV experienced by women was reported to the police (Danielsson & Salmi, 2013).

As Kivivuori (2014) points out, sensitivity to seeing conflicts as violence does not equal reporting propensity, but perception is the prerequisite for reporting. Nonetheless, it is very difficult to measure sensitivity as such; thus, reporting propensity is one of the best available indicators of sensitivity. When analysing the changes in reporting propensity, they also reflect factors other than sensitivity, including technological changes in police data processing (unreliably stored paper reports versus electronic reports that create a system log and are more difficult to ignore); organisational efficiency of the police; new technologies as both arenas for offending and evidence of it (e.g., text messages as evidence of threats); and legal reforms and changes in police culture, improving perceptions and trust in the police (Kivivuori, 2014; Tonry, 2016; Baumer & Lauritsen, 2010).

In addition to cultural shifts in time, people differ in sensitivity for violence and what is seen as violence. Based on analyses of the FCVS, women are more likely than men to see conflicts as violence (Kivivuori, 2014). Similar results concerning ‘domestic conflicts’ have been reported in the United States (e.g., Carlson & Worden, 2005). Interpreting domestic conflicts as violence is also associated with education; people with higher education are more likely to perceive conflicts as violence (Kivivuori, 2014, p. 292). The effect of the level of education should be assessed bearing in mind the general increase in the number of people with higher education. This should be considered when interpreting the increased sensitivity to violence. In other words, with more highly educated people, the more likely there are also people who are sensitive to violence.

Kivivuori (2014) additionally points to Sweden, deriving from theorisations of juvenile violence by Von Hofer (2000), that social variation – namely wealth and longer life expectancy – are associated with propensity to define conflicts as violence. Concerning age, older people are less likely to define slapping as violence (Carlson & Worden, 2005). This is congruent with findings from FCVS, in which young age was among the factors associated with proneness to see conflicts as violence (Kivivuori, 2014). As the population in general is aging, age might, on one hand, be an intervening factor similar to education in increasing sensitivity, only in reverse since older people would not be as sensitive to violence as younger people. On the other hand, people aging in the 2010s are likely to be generally more sensitised to violence than those who were aging, for example, in the 1950s.

Changing demands on policing domestic violence

The pronounced critique towards policing, and the lack of policing, DV first emerged in the United States in the 1970s (Jordan, 2002; Leisering, 2012). Before this, DV was seen not as a matter of the law and police but as a private matter concerning only the people involved (Tonry, 2016). When the critique started to emerge, police were criticised for being reluctant to intervene in DV by, for example, making an arrest (Sherman & Berk, 1984). This in turn led to increased demands of reporting and intervening especially by means of pro arrest and mandatory arrest policies. Even though the effectiveness of arrests in tackling DV has, since the Minneapolis experiment (Sherman & Berk, 1984), been questioned, arrest as so-called hard policing still seems to remain as a pertinent solution in police interventions to DV especially in the United States (e.g., Felson, Ackerman & Callagher, 2005).

Cultural changes in sensitivity to crime (Kivivuori, 2014) mean that the public’s proneness to report DV to the police in general has increased over time, as was presented in the previous section of this paper. It has happened partly in line and parallel with political pressure and

the legal changes following it. To this day, Finnish legislation does not recognise a DV offence as such. Some attempts, however, to legislatively regulate DV have been made beginning in the 1990s. In 1995, assaults perpetrated on private premises became subject to public prosecution, although this change was undermined by adding an article according to which the public prosecutor could waive prosecution if the complainant firmly requested it of their own free will. In 1999, the law about restraining orders came into effect, and in 2005, restraining orders within a family became possible. Simultaneously in 2005, the article concerning the possibility to waive prosecution of an assault based on the complainant's request was removed from the Criminal Code. On the other hand, both laws about restraining orders were enacted separate from the Criminal Code, which has been interpreted by some scholars as a governmental will to treat DV separate from the criminal justice process and not as a serious criminal issue (Kotanen, 2013, p. 135; Niemi Kiesiläinen, 2004, p. 260).

Since the 2011 reform in the Finnish Criminal Code, all assaults, including petty assaults, when occurring in close relationships can be investigated and prosecuted even without the consent of the victim. Violence in close relationships, referred to here as DV, ceased to be a complainant offence even in its mild forms. Close relationships according to the Criminal Code include spouses and former spouses, children and their parents, siblings, people who live or have lived in a joint household together or otherwise are or have been in a corresponding personal relationship with each other. The police, among other authorities in Finland, also have a legal duty to intervene in DV based on the Social Welfare Act (30.12.2014/1301), which obligates them to contact social services for the assessment of need of help for a person who is in evident need of social services.

The official status quo in Finland can be described as seeing DV as a police matter when looking at legislation and instructions for the police. This means that DV is recognised both in the Criminal Code and in the call out and offence labelling definitions for the police – in the former as violence in close relationships and in the latter as DV or family violence. The definition of a police DV call-out for the Finnish Police is the following: ‘violence or noises referring to violence in an apartment. The parties are not necessarily family members’ (National Police Board, 2014). The police also have a DV classification, or more specifically ‘family violence’ classification, for recording offences that include violence between family members, in which both violence and the family relations should be understood broadly according to the instruction for classification (Fagerlund, 2016). Compared to violence in close relationships, the wording used in the Criminal Code, the concept and definition of DV in instructions for the police is narrower.

The difference in wordings is noteworthy when considering the changed demands for policing DV. The concepts of DV and family violence have been criticised by some scholars for being too general and gender neutral in presenting violence as a family problem instead of recognising the

gendered features of violence (e.g. Holma & Partanen, 2008) In police DV call outs and for operational preparations, the place of the incident is particularly meaningful. DV call-outs for the police indicate preparing for violence that is occurring on private premises – often in a house or apartment that is a family's home or a home of one person where violence is also likely to occur between people who are family or otherwise know each other.

The descriptions of classifications for police DV call outs and recorded DV offences have remained the same since at least the beginning of the 2000s, while at the same time the legal regulation of DV has changed, and the expectations for the police were extended to cover violence in close relationships, as explained above. Therefore, we cannot deduce the possibly changed demands for policing DV from the statistical trends of DV call outs and crime reports alone. We can, however, compare these statistics with the publicly perceived importance of DV as a police task

Research questions, materials and methods

Our research questions in this paper are:

- 1) Has the proneness to report DV as an emergency and the number of recorded DV offences in Finland changed between 1999 and 2016?
- 2) Have the citizens' perceptions of the importance of intervening in DV as a police task changed between 1999 and 2016, and more specifically, has it changed in relation to other police tasks?
- 3) Which factors previously recognised as meaningful for the cultural sensitivity to violence are associated with the perceived importance of DV as a police task, and are the factors similar in 1999, 2007 and 2016?

One of the clearest signs of people's proneness to report DV are those that can be seen in police statistics concerning contacts related to DV. We should keep in mind the other potential factors besides increased sensitivity influencing reporting to the police, such as internet and mobile phones as means of reporting and possible changes in the tendency of the police to accept reports (Kivivuori, 2014). However, when we have long time series of statistics that have not changed in terms of criteria and definitions, we may also be able to reach conclusions about the actual changes in reporting behaviour.

To answer the first research question, we use official statistics from the PolStat system, the national data warehouse of the police. We use statistics on emergency calls labelled as DV and assigned to the police as call-out tasks and statistics about offences recorded by police officers and

labelled as DV. These statistics form a context for our study where DV call-out tasks can be seen as public demands, and recorded offences as a form of police response to it.

Primary data used come from the Finnish Police Barometer, which is a national survey that measures public opinion on the Finnish police and experiences of internal security in the country (Vuorensyrjä & Fagerlund, 2016). The Police Barometer has been conducted nine times between 1999 and 2016, and the nine data sweeps are from 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. The data, collected as quota sampling, represent the population aged 15–79 in mainland Finland (i.e., excluding Åland). For the English translations of variables used in this article, the codebook of the Police Barometer 2014 was utilised (Finnish Social Science Data Archive, 2017) with small grammatical modifications made by the authors. The basic reporting of the data consisting mainly of frequencies of variables has been published in Finnish (e.g., Käyhkö & Hannonen, 2015; Vuorensyrjä & Fagerlund, 2016), but further analysis and international studies conducted with this data are scarce (see, however Kääriäinen, 2008). The hypothesis of cultural sensitivity has not been previously tested using the Police Barometer data, nor have the changes in trends of the publicly perceived importance of police tasks been analysed together with police statistics.

We will first assess the changes in means of perceived importance of different police tasks. For analysing the changes in perceived importance in different years (i.e., data sweeps of the Finnish Police Barometer), statistical means and ordinal numbers based on means of importance are presented from 1999 to 2016. Because means are sensitive to general patterns in answering each year, ordinal numbers are used to analyse the changes in importance in relation to other types of crimes and police tasks besides DV.

The 2012 and 2014 data samples differ from all other years in that the following question was asked in the beginning of the questionnaire: Are you, any member of your family or a close relative currently working for the police? Based on this screening question, those working for the police, their family members and close relatives were excluded from the study. All other data sweeps of the Police Barometer include these people, forming 9–12% of the sample each year, so the question can be used to assess differences between those working for the police and their family members and other people. Crosstabulation and Chi Square tests show that there are no significant differences between these groups in how important they perceive intervening in DV as a police task, except for in 2003 ($\chi^2 = 6.997$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$) when the proportion of people who perceived intervening in DV as a very important police task was higher among those who were not working for the police or who did not have family members working for the police (64% vs. 51%). Because there were no significant differences between these people in any of the other samples, it was decided that this group would be included in the merged data set analysed in this paper.

The factors associated with the importance of DV as a police task are analysed using data sweeps from the years 1999, 2007 and 2016. These data sets were chosen to include the first available data, the middle point and the latest available data and three surveys conducted between the first (1999) and the second (2007) as well as the second and the latest data sweep (2016)

Variables in the analysis

The main question of interest is the importance of police tasks. The importance of police tasks is enquired about in the Police Barometer surveys as follows: How important do you consider the following tasks to be in police work? The tasks included in all nine data sweeps of the barometer are: responding to emergencies, investigating and preventing violent crimes, intervening in DV, investigating drug related crimes, investigating house break ins, patrolling and other visible police activities, solving financial offences (e.g., fraud, pin data theft), cooperation between authorities and other cooperation aiming to prevent crime, preventing economic crimes, traffic control, investigating automobile thefts, permit and license issuing service and taking intoxicated people into custody. Respondents assessed the importance on a scale from 1 to 4 (1=not at all important, 2=not very important, 3=quite important, 4=very important). For comparability, the question items that were only available for some of the data sweeps are excluded from this analysis.

Descriptive statistics of the merged data are presented in Table 1. Almost 66% of the respondents from 1999 to 2016 found intervening in DV as a police task being very important. For this reason, the dependent variable for binary logistic regression was recoded as 1, indicating very important, and 0, indicating all other responses. From all data sweeps between 1999 and 2016, the following background variables were available: gender, age group, level of education and household income. In the merged data set, 52% of respondents were female. The proportion of 15–34-year-olds was 35%, 38% for 35–59 year olds and 26% for people aged 60 or older. Basic education was the highest level of education for 28% of the respondents, 54% had upper secondary education and 17% had higher education. The household yearly income variable was adjusted for each piece of data and recoded using yearly change coefficients for the value of money (Statistics Finland 2017). More than 30% of the respondents had yearly household income less than 20 001€, 22% earned 20 001–35 000€, 16% earned between 35 001€ and 50 000€ and 18% had yearly income over 50 000€. The proportion of missing information was considerable; almost 14% did not want to report their income.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the data-sets 1999–2016

	n	%
Respondents in data sweep		
1999	997	
2001	986	
2003	1005	
2005	1012	
2007	989	
2010	1027	
2012	1018	
2014	1015	
2016	1007	
Gender		
Male	4373	48.3
Female	4683	51.7
Age		
15–34	3190	35.2
35–59	3467	38.3
60–	2399	26.5
Level of education		
Basic education	2544	28.1
Upper secondary education	4882	53.9
Higher education	1580	17.4
Household income per year		
Less than 20 001€	2733	30.2
20 001–35 000€	2031	22.4
35 001–50 000€	1446	16
Over 50 000€	1606	17.7
Missing	1240	13.7
Importance of DV as a police task		
Not at all important	27	0.3
Not very important	271	3
Quite important	2739	30.2
Very important	5972	65.9
Missing	47	0.5

Results

Change in proneness to report and police response to it

The change in proneness to report DV in Finland can be illustrated in the yearly numbers of emergency call tasks labelled as DV and assigned to the police. Reflected against the number of these call-out tasks, the number of recorded DV offences gives some indication about the magnitude of

police response to DV The number of these tasks and the number of recorded DV offences from 1999 to 2016 are presented in Figure 1.

Some precautions must be taken when interpreting Figure 1. First, DV offences come to the attention of the police also in other ways besides emergency calls – for example, in conjunction with the police’s investigation of other offences and when people report previously occurred violence at a police station. Still, the clear majority of the recorded DV offences have resulted from a DV call out. Second, there are known problems in the use of the DV label by the police in written recordings of the offences. This has been illustrated with a sample of repeated assaults from 2011. The DV labelling of the offence was missing in almost half of the cases in which it would, based on all the information on the crime report, have been appropriate (Kotanen & Smolej, 2014). Similar problems have been reported concerning the labelling of hate crimes in Finland (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017; Tihveräinen, 2016). Third, Figure 1 only includes emergency calls labelled as DV, while sometimes the police visit a scene because of a task labelled as ‘disturbing noises’ and find out it is actually a DV incident On the other hand, some tasks labelled as DV prove to be something else – for example, ‘disturbing noises’ at a party (Fagerlund, 2016). Labelling of the emergency calls are made by Emergency Response Centre operators with the information they receive during the call, and sometimes the information is neither sufficient nor accurate.

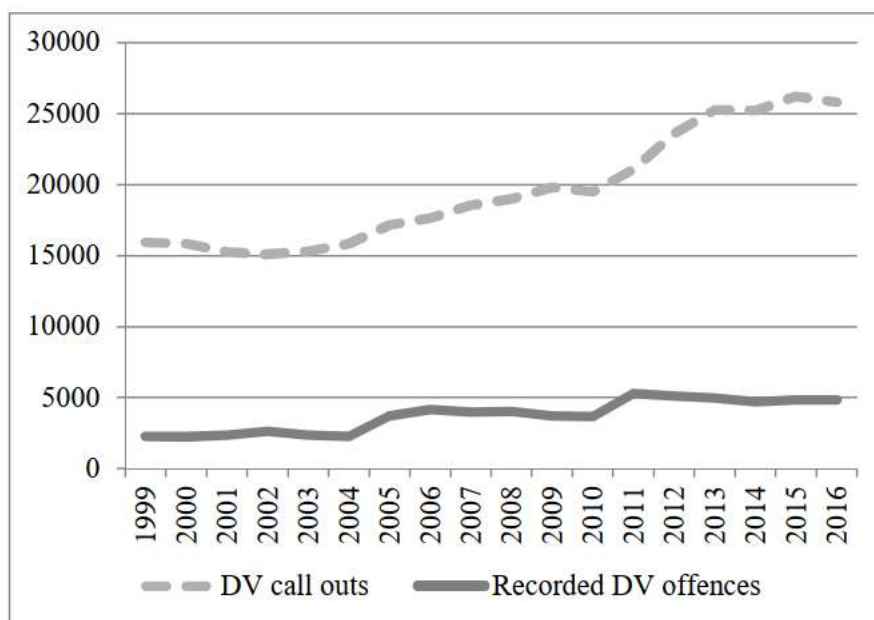


Figure 1. Police DV call outs and recorded DV offences in Finland, 1999–2016 (PolStat 2017a, c).

Figure 1 shows that while the annual number of DV call outs from 1999 to 2016 increased remarkably from 15 000 to more than 25 000 calls, the increase in the number of recorded

DV offences has stabilised to less than 5000 per year. Even though being only a rough estimate about the gap between citizens' tendencies to report DV to the police and police recording behaviour, Figure 1 should be interpreted as picturing the differing trends in the two. It can be assumed that the aforementioned problems in call-out labelling and other issues affecting the statistics have stayed relatively the same from the start to the end of the time series, thus not affecting the conclusions drawn from the differing trends of the two. The trends illustrated in Figure 1 suggest that, while people in 2016 were perhaps more sensitive to DV and more willing to call for help from the police in this matter than before, the police's recording behaviour has not followed this development or has done so to only a minimal extent (see also Fagerlund, 2016; Fagerlund, Kääriäinen & Ellonen, 2017 about police recording behaviour). A brief increase in recorded DV offences can be noted in Figure 1 following the year 2011, probably due to a legislative change concerning petty assaults occurring in close relationships, which had to be recorded, investigated and prosecuted even without the demands or willingness of the victim. With supplementary information of the changes in task rankings of police DV call-outs (PolStat 2017b), it seems that the proportion of most urgent DV police call outs (class A call-outs) has increased remarkably since 2008, thus indicating that the public may be reporting DV of all levels of seriousness more often than before, and not only milder incidents create the increase in police DV call-outs.

Trend in means and orders of importance

The ordinal numbers presented in Table 2 are based on mean importance, with a result of 1 indicating the highest importance. As some police tasks had the same mean importance in some of the years, they also get the same ordinal number for that particular year, meaning that the total number of ordinals varies between years. For example, in 1999, both investigating house break-ins and patrolling and other visible police activities were the fifth most important police tasks. Intervening in DV and cooperation between authorities were the sixth most important police tasks, and preventing economic crimes and investigating automobile thefts were the seventh most important tasks in 1999. This altogether resulted in ordinal numbers from 1 to 10. However, in 2007, all police tasks included in the survey had different mean importance, resulting in ordinal numbers from 1 to 13.

Ordinal numbers are not sensitive to the general trend in answering to Police Barometers that most of the police tasks got a higher mean importance in 2016 compared to 1999 (see Appendix 1), and ordinal numbers are, thus, more informative when comparing the perceived importance of different police tasks with each other. For instance, patrolling and other visible police activities, investigating financial offences and cooperation between authorities all got a higher mean importance in 2016 than

1999, but in the internal comparison, those tasks got a bigger ordinal number, meaning that compared to other police tasks their importance decreased (Table 2).

Table 2 Ordinal numbers for the perceived importance of police tasks in 1999–2016

	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2010	2012	2014	2016
Importance increased									
Responding to emergencies	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Investigating and preventing violent crimes	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Intervening in domestic violence	6	6	4	5	4	4	4	4	3
Importance remained the same									
Investigating house break-ins	5	4	7	6	6	5	5	5	5
Importance decreased									
Investigating drug-related crimes	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4
Patrolling and other visible police activities	5	6	5	4	5	6	7	6	6
*Investigating financial offences (fraud,	4	5	6	7	7	5	6	5	6
**Cooperation between authorities and...	6	7	10	9	9	7	8	7	7
Preventing economic crimes	7	8	9	10	10	8	10	9	8
Traffic control	8	9	8	8	8	9	9	8	9
Investigating automobile theft	7	9	11	11	11	10	11	10	10
Permit and licence issuing services	10	10	12	12	12	11	12	11	11
Taking intoxicated people into custody	9	11	13	13	13	12	13	12	12

* Investigating financial offences (fraud, pin data theft etc.)

** Cooperation between authorities and other cooperation aiming to prevent crimes

Based on ordinal numbers in 1999 and 2016, the perceived importance increased in responding to emergencies, investigating and preventing violent crimes and intervening in DV. The importance remained the same in investigating house break-ins. Importance decreased for investigating drug-related crimes, patrolling and other visible police activities, investigating financial offences, cooperation between authorities, prevention of economic crimes, traffic control, investigating automobile thefts, permit and licence issuing services and taking intoxicated people into custody (Table 2).

Of all the police tasks included in the Police Barometer, the increase in perceived importance was greatest concerning DV. In 1999, DV was the sixth most important police task, and in 2016 it was perceived as the third-most important. The importance of responding to emergencies and investigating and preventing violent crimes were on top to begin with and rose only by one ordinal number. The decreasing of importance was most visible in investigating drug related crimes, investigating automobile thefts and taking intoxicated people into custody, which all dropped down in importance by three ordinals.

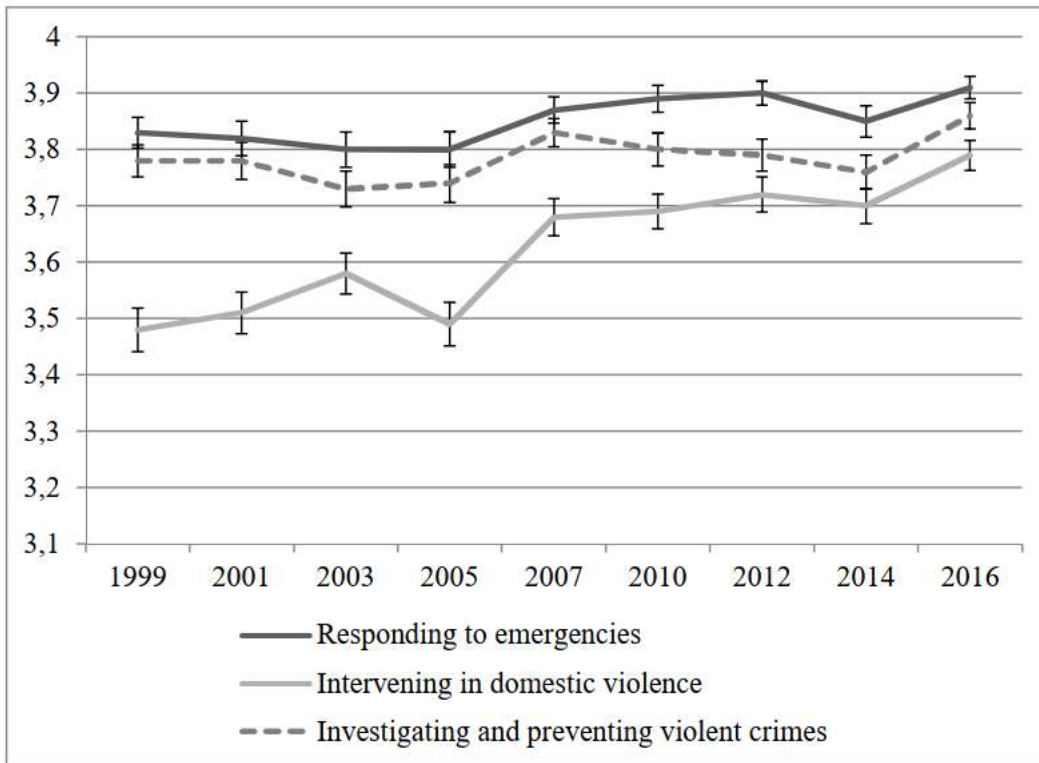


Figure 2. Assessed importance of intervening in DV, responding to emergencies, and investigating and preventing violent crimes 1999–2016, means and confidence intervals, scale 1–4 (1=Not at all important, 4=Very important)

Figure 2 presents the changes in means of perceived importance in all three police tasks that increased their importance from 1999 to 2016. The importance of responding to emergencies in 1999 differs from that of 2016 at the 95% confidence level. In investigating and preventing violent crimes, the differences are significant when comparing 1999 with both 2007 and 2016. Concerning DV, the perceived importance in the year 1999 as the starting point, 2007 as the middle point and 2016 as the latest information all differ from each other at the 95% confidence level. Figure 2 illustrates that responding to emergencies and investigating and preventing violent crimes were perceived as very important police tasks from the beginning of the Police Barometer surveys, while regarding the task of intervening in DV, the change in attitudes has been more noticeable.

Factors associated with high perceived importance of DV as a police task

Table 3 presents the results of logistic regression models for high perceived importance of DV as a police task. Being female increases the likelihood of perceived importance in all selected data sweeps, and gender effect is the strongest in 2016 data (OR 2.1). Age was significant in the 2016 sample so that people aged 35–59 (OR .49) and over 60 (OR .38) were less likely than the youngest age group to perceive intervening in DV as a very important police task. A similar pattern can be seen in 2007

concerning the oldest age group of people over 60 compared to the 15–34-year olds (OR 47) Education and yearly household income were not significant in explaining the likelihood of perceived importance of intervening in DV as a police task. With the restricted number of explanatory variables available for analysis, the models explain 3–7% of the variation in the dependent variable (Nagelkerke R Square).

Table 3 Perceived importance of intervening in DV as a police task: Binary logistic regression models for 1999, 2007 and 2016

	1999		2007		2016	
	Odds Ratio	<i>p</i>	Odds Ratio	<i>p</i>	Odds Ratio	<i>p</i>
Gender (ref. male)						
Female	1.694	<.001	1.956	<.001	2.057	<.001
Age (ref. 15–34)						
35–59	1.033	.829	.990	.958	.488	.003
60–	.952	.799	.473	<.001	.381	<.001
Education (ref. basic education)						
Upper secondary education	.816	.185	.712	.061	.989	.961
Higher education	.695	.147	.982	.949	.972	.923
Household income (ref. less than 20,000€/year)						
20 001–35 000	.843	.339	1.045	.815	.847	.500
35 001–50 000	1.170	.395	.864	.521	.809	.447
More than 50 000	.928	.707	1.070	.780	1.010	.971
Constant	1.051	.791	2.501	<.001	5.666	<.001
Nagelkerke R Square	.031		.066		.066	
Observations	947		870		831	

Dependent variable: Importance (0=other, 1=very important)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the theory of cultural sensitivity in relation to citizens' perceptions of the importance of intervening in DV as a police task in Finland. We examined the change in Finnish people's perceptions on the importance of intervening in DV as a police task from 1999 to 2016 and made comparisons to other types of police tasks to understand the extent of the changes. Factors increasing the odds of perceiving DV as a very important police task in 1999, 2007 and 2016 were analysed to include variables previously found meaningful for variation in sensitivity to violence: age, gender, education and wealth. We considered the statistics on public reporting behaviour and police response to DV in the form of emergency calls and recorded DV offences and reflected these against the findings from the survey data.

There is strong global evidence about the general trajectory of decreasing violence between people as part of the civilisation processes during the past several thousand years (e.g.,

Pinker, 2012) More recent indications of development have been found to support the notion that the definition of violence – and particularly DV – has undergone changes that are reflected in increased numbers of reporting these acts, as well as mild forms of violence, to the police (Kivivuori, 2014; Tonry, 2016)

Differing trends in the public's reporting behaviour (i.e., calling for help in DV incidents) and police recording behaviour (i.e., DV offences recorded) can be recognised based on the evidence presented in this article. The number of DV emergency calls has increased significantly during the past 17 years, and during that time, the number of recorded DV offences has also doubled. These two trends have not, however, followed each other after 2011, from which the yearly number of DV emergency calls has continued to increase above 25 000, while recorded offences have stabilised to around 5000 per year.

The numerical changes from 2011 should be interpreted in conjunction with the changes made in the related legislation. Even petty assaults occurring in close relationships ceased to be complainant offences, unlike petty assaults between strangers, which may have sent a strong societal sign about the non-acceptance of DV on a national level. Extreme forms of violence such as homicide, attempted homicide and aggravated assault, whether in the context of DV or not, are likely to almost always come to the attention of the police and highly unlikely to involve any police discretion in whether a crime has occurred. Thus, the statistics concerning these crimes are not affected by changes in cultural sensitivity to violence, whereas sensitisation to milder forms of violence may result in an increase in police statistics. Therefore, it seems logical that when petty assaults in close relationships ceased to be complainant offences in 2011, there was a slight increase in the number of recorded DV offences in police statistics. Since then, around 5000 recorded DV offences can be seen as the somewhat stabilised magnitude of police interpretation of DV as a crime, while people seem to be simultaneously reporting increasing numbers of DV incidents that do not meet the police criteria for a criminal act. Even with the precautions taken to compare these two statistics (emergency calls and recorded offences), they seem to support the hypothesis that police response to DV has not undergone a change as remarkable as the public's willingness to report it.

The findings concerning the change in the public's perception of DV are supported by our analysis of the nine data sweeps of the Police Barometer between 1999 and 2016. Intervening in DV rose from being the sixth to the third most important police task when comparing the first and the latest survey. No other police task measured in all nine Police Barometers has undergone ascension of this scale, whereas an equal drop down in importance as a police task was found concerning investigating drug-related crimes, investigating automobile thefts and taking intoxicated people into custody. The latter change is congruent with public debate initiated in the media by former

and current Ministers of the Interior and then the Chief Director of the Police Force about transferring the responsibility of taking intoxicated people into custody from the police to social services, fire and rescue services or private security firms (e.g., Yle, 2011; Manssila, 2012; Puupponen, 2016). Contrary to those public comments that implicate taking intoxicated people into custody as a less important police task, or that it should not be a police task at all, the debate in the media and focus on DV and violence against women in research gained substantial publicity in the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g., Piispa, 2006; Kotanen, 2013). These can be seen as major factors of the sensitisation process to violence in Finland. Changes illustrated by our data are also congruent with von Hofer's (2000) ideas about the reduced ability to tolerate physical suffering and social disadvantage, as well as the role of the media in raising awareness, fears and generating intolerance towards violence.

Of the factors found to significantly affect the perceived importance of intervening in DV as a police task, gender was the only one found to increase the likelihood in the three measuring points (1999, 2007 and 2016) so that women more often than men perceived it as a very important police task. The effect of age was not quite as straightforward. In the 1999 data, age was not a significant factor. In 2007, the likelihood of perceiving DV as a very important police task was smaller for people aged 60 and over compared to the youngest age group of 15–34 year olds. In 2016, being in the 35–59 and the 60 and over age groups reduced the likelihood of perceiving DV as a very important police task compared to the youngest age group. These findings are in line with previous findings by Kivivuori (2014), according to which being female and young were associated with seeing conflicts as violence, in addition to university education and a white-collar job. Education level and income were, however, not significant in our model for the likelihood of perceiving DV as a very important police task, and work status could not be examined here because of the incoherence of the used variables to measure it in different data sweeps of the Police Barometer.

The results can be reflected and understood against the general development in attitudes towards violence in Finland and in Western societies in general. On the European level, Finland has historically emerged in the statistics concerning violence in an unflattering way (Piispa et al., 2006; Ganpat et al., 2011; Lehti, 2017). Still, recent years have shown some indications of a more positive development, especially concerning lethal violence. The number of homicides has been decreasing for the past 20 years, with 2016 marking the lowest level ever during the time that modern statistical information has been gathered in Finland, and the historically high number of women as a proportion of the population killed by their current or former spouses or partners has decreased in recent years (Lehti, 2017). Attitudes towards violence against children in the form of corporal punishment have tightened based on national surveys conducted by the Central Union of Child Welfare (Sariola, 2014),

and this apparent change in attitudes is also reflected in actual experiences of Finnish children (Fagerlund et al., 2014).

Some limitations should be considered in our study. First, merging all nine Police Barometer data sets from 1999 to 2016 causes the most restrictions to our analysis. While the survey offers a valuable time series based on questions that have remained the same for the entire history of the survey, the questions measuring demographical and other background variables have changed several times during the history of the survey. This has caused them to be incommensurate. There are only a few comparable explanatory variables available for our logistic regression models; thus, the logistic regression models presented can only explain 3–7% of the variation in the perceived importance of DV as a police task. Some of the factors – namely age and gender – previously recognised as meaningful for the sensitivity of seeing certain acts as a crime, and therefore a police matter, were significant in explaining the importance of DV as a police task in our analysis. Yet, a wider set of factors is needed to be able to form a more comprehensive model to account for the variation in the perceived importance of intervening in DV as a police task.

It should also be noted that sensitivity to crime does not equal how important people perceive intervening in certain types of criminal behaviours as a police task. We can, however, deduce the other way around – if a person is not particularly sensitive to DV and does not see it as a criminal offence (irrespective of the prevailing legislation), he or she is not likely to see it as a police matter either. Sensitivity has previously been studied via reporting propensity and questions incorporated in victimisation surveys asking about whether certain behaviours constitute violence. Our results supplement the existing literature with a slightly different approach and method to the sensitivity process.

Conclusions

The general trend in Western societies indicates increasing sensitivity towards violence. This sensibilisation is particularly interesting to examine in comparison to investigating drug related crimes, for example, which in this study was found to have lost some of its importance as a police task. Finnish people seem to have become less sensitive to drug related crimes as far as considering it a police task but think that intervening in DV is, after responding to emergencies and investigating violent crimes, the third-most important police task to tackle. This sensitisation to DV is a big change in a country that criminalised rape in marriage as late as 1994. Furthermore, investigating violent crimes overlaps to some extent conceptually with intervening in DV, which highlights the relevance of this type of conflict in relation to so-called victimless crimes, such as drug-related crimes. The increased importance of DV is the most remarkable change in the public's perceptions of the

importance of different police tasks in the nearly 20-year history of the Finnish Police Barometer survey.

The police's role in intervening in DV is crucial in many ways. They are often the first responders when DV is reported to authorities. Police work as gatekeepers to the justice system while assessing the essential elements of an offence as part of the pre-trial investigation, which is the first step of the criminal justice process. The aim of changing the attitudes towards DV and violence against women has been the driving force behind the changes made in the Finnish legislation starting from the 1990s. The somewhat steady rise in DV call outs assigned to the police had already started before the remarkable change of bringing petty assaults in close relationships under public prosecution in 2011, which, however, seems to have had little or no influence on police recording behaviours of DV offences. While the number of DV emergency calls has continued to rise, the number of recorded DV offences has stabilised to a relatively low level, despite the legal reform.

The campaigning, national research projects and increased public debate about DV in its different forms and in varying terms are likely to have affected the public's opinions. While the legislation, in which the police lean on in their work, has also changed remarkably concerning this type of crime during the past 20 years, the attitudes and perceptions about the definition of DV among the Finnish police have not yet been studied. To what extent the sensitisation of the public and of the criminal justice system towards DV actualises in police-citizen encounters is a question of its own. Therefore, and because of the limitations of the statistical data utilised in this study as a measure of police response to DV, the possible discrepancy between the public's perceptions, official statistics about DV and police response to DV requires further research.

Appendix 1 Mean importance of different police tasks in Police Barometers 1999, 2007 and 2016, scale for mean 1–4.

	Year	N	Mean	Std deviation	Mean error	95% C.I. for mean	
						Lower	Upper
Responding to emergencies							
	1999	997	3.83	0.441	0.0274	3.8026	3.8574
	2007	989	3.87	0.372	0.0232	3.8468	3.8932
	2016	1007	3.91	0.318	0.0197	3.8903	3.9297
Intervening in domestic violence							
	1999	997	3.48	0.622	0.0387	3.4413	3.5187
	2007	989	3.68	0.524	0.0327	3.6473	3.7127
	2016	1007	3.79	0.431	0.0267	3.7633	3.8167
Investigating and preventing violent crime							
	1999	997	3.78	0.455	0.0283	3.7517	3.8083
	2007	989	3.83	0.405	0.0253	3.8047	3.8553
	2016	1007	3.86	0.377	0.0233	3.8367	3.8833
Investigating drug-related crime							
	1999	997	3.84	0.411	0.0255	3.8145	3.8655
	2007	989	3.78	0.482	0.0301	3.7499	3.8101
	2016	1007	3.74	0.544	0.0336	3.7064	3.7736
Investigating house break-ins							
	1999	997	3.54	0.577	0.0359	3.5041	3.5759
	2007	989	3.54	0.581	0.0363	3.5037	3.5763
	2016	1007	3.62	0.542	0.0335	3.5865	3.6535
Patrolling and other visible police activities							
	1999	997	3.54	0.597	0.0371	3.5029	3.5771
	2007	989	3.57	0.609	0.038	3.532	3.608
	2016	1007	3.59	0.571	0.0353	3.5547	3.6253
*Investigating financial offences (fraud,							
	1999	997	3.56	0.59	0.0367	3.5233	3.5967
	2007	989	3.53	0.589	0.0368	3.4932	3.5668
	2016	1007	3.59	0.575	0.0356	3.5544	3.6256
**Cooperation between authorities and...							
	1999	997	3.48	0.599	0.0372	3.4428	3.5172
	2007	989	3.45	0.635	0.0396	3.4104	3.4896
	2016	1007	3.58	0.576	0.0356	3.5444	3.6156
Prevention of economic crime							
	1999	997	3.39	0.703	0.0437	3.3463	3.4337
	2007	989	3.39	0.665	0.0415	3.4085	3.4915
	2016	1007	3.52	0.664	0.0411	3.4789	3.5611
Traffic control							
	1999	997	3.31	0.67	0.0416	3.2684	3.3516

	2007	989	3.46	0.647	0.0404	3.4196	3.5004
	2016	1007	3.43	0.662	0.0409	3.3891	3.4709
Investigating automobile theft							
	1999	997	3.39	0.638	0.0397	3.3503	3.4297
	2007	989	3.35	0.662	0.0413	3.3087	3.3913
	2016	1007	3.33	0.665	0.0411	3.2889	3.3711
Permit and licence issuing services							
	1999	997	2.91	0.781	0.0485	2.8615	2.9585
	2007	989	3.07	0.759	0.0474	3.0226	3.1174
	2016	1007	3.23	0.74	0.0458	3.1842	3.2758
Taking intoxicated people into custody							
	1999	997	2.92	0.798	0.0496	2.8704	2.9696
	2007	989	3.02	0.788	0.0492	2.9708	3.0692
	2016	1007	3	0.779	0.0482	2.9518	3.0482

* Investigating financial offences (fraud, pin data theft etc.)

** Cooperation between authorities and other cooperation aiming to prevent crime

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