

# The **COURAGE** in Policing Project

The COURAGE in Policing Project (**COURAGE = Community Oriented and United Responses to Address Gender Violence and Equality**), based out of University of Miami School of Law's Human Rights Clinic, works with community-based organizations, police departments, and national leaders on gender violence and policing to enhance law enforcement responses to domestic violence and sexual assault. The project aims to improve access to safety and justice for all survivors, with a particular focus on women of color, immigrant women, disabled women, indigenous women, LGBTQI individuals, and other underserved populations. By focusing on the local and national levels, the project promotes coordinated community efforts and offers resources and promising practices to enhance implementation of the U.S. Department of Justice's groundbreaking **2015 Guidance on Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence (DOJ Guidance)**.<sup>1</sup>

Several reports underscore the importance of addressing gender bias in policing and enhancing the law enforcement response to gender violence. For instance, a 2015 survey of victims who called the National Domestic Violence Hotline revealed a strong reluctance on the part of many victims to turn to law enforcement for help, as well as significant barriers that many victims encounter when they do seek law enforcement assistance.<sup>2</sup> While domestic and sexual violence calls comprise the majority of 911 calls to many police departments and are among the most dangerous assignments for responding officers, improving the response to gender violence is often not a law enforcement priority. Moreover, national conversations about bias in policing have tended to focus more on race and national origin than sex or gender identity, and also fail to address the intersection of these issues.

The 2015 Guidance on Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence (DOJ Guidance) reflects input provided by a wide array of stakeholders and experts, including police leaders, victim advocates, survivors, and civil rights advocates.<sup>3</sup> It aims to advance more trauma-informed and victim-centered approaches in police response to domestic violence and sexual assault. The Guidance highlights 8 key principles for law enforcement agencies to integrate into trainings, protocols, and practices, to reduce potential gender bias in policing and develop more effective responses. These include:

- 1 Recognize and address biases, assumptions and stereotypes about victims;
- 2 Treat all victims with respect and employ trauma-informed interviewing tactics;
- 3 Investigate sexual assault and domestic violence complaints thoroughly and effectively;
- 4 Appropriately classify reports of sexual assault or domestic violence;
- 5 Connect victims to appropriate services;
- 6 Properly identify the assailant in domestic violence incidents;
- 7 Hold officers who commit sexual assault or domestic violence accountable; and
- 8 Maintain, review, and act upon data regarding sexual assault and domestic violence to improve the law enforcement response.

# The **COURAGE** in Policing Project seeks to:

- **Develop model community assessments and climate surveys**, to assess how law enforcement is responding to domestic violence and sexual assault at the community level, and to identify priority issues for local advocates;
- **Provide tools for use of research and data monitoring** in order to identify and prevent gender bias in law enforcement responses to domestic violence and sexual assault;
- **Develop a repository of information and resources through a special COURAGE webpage**, to assist organizations and communities with implementation of the DOJ Guidance through improved trainings, policies, supervision protocols, and systems of accountability;
- **Develop a community toolkit** to complement the impact campaign associated with HOME TRUTH, a documentary that focuses on the life and activism of Jessica Lenahan (formerly Gonzales), whose case to compel greater law enforcement accountability in enforcing orders of protection went to the U.S. Supreme Court and ultimately the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights;
- **Bring an intersectional gender lens** to this initiative to identify resources and promising practices for improving law enforcement responses to better serve survivors from marginalized populations who face additional barriers, including women of color, immigrant women, disabled women, indigenous women, LGBTQI individuals, and other underserved populations;
- **Facilitate ongoing engagement between communities and police departments**, through the use of the tools described above; and
- **Facilitate a national conversation among local communities** to foster innovation, enhance coordinated community responses, and support peer learning to advance national and local momentum on improving the law enforcement response to gender violence.

The **COURAGE** in Policing Project builds upon the work of human rights frameworks and structures at the local level, such as municipalities that have passed resolutions declaring that “**Freedom from Domestic Violence is a Fundamental Human Right**”<sup>4</sup> and “**Cities for CEDAW**.”<sup>5</sup> These communities can use COURAGE to engage with their local police departments on efforts to implement the key principles of the DOJ Guidance. The project will also build upon the promising practices in communities that are developing pilot projects to implement the DOJ Guidance through grants from the DOJ Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC).

As we collectively experience this current watershed moment on gender violence in the U.S., we must think creatively about how to move from **#MeToo to #RealChange**. A coordinated and systematic response to gender violence in every sector—including law enforcement—is needed to create lasting change.

The COURAGE in Policing Project is supported by the Roddenberry Foundation. If you are interested in learning more about how to establish the COURAGE in Policing project in your community, please contact:

**Professor Caroline Bettinger-Lopez** at [clopez@law.miami.edu](mailto:clopez@law.miami.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, U.S. Department of Justice (Dec. 2015) (<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-issues-guidance-identifying-and-preventing-gender-bias-law-enforcement>).

<sup>2</sup> Who Will Help Me? Domestic Violence Survivors Speak Out About Law Enforcement Responses, National Domestic Violence Hotline (2015) (<http://www.thehotline.org/resources/law-enforcement-responses>); see also a national survey of victim advocates and professionals, Responses from the Field: Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, and Policing, ACLU, et. al. (2015) (<https://www.aclu.org/issues/womens-rights/violence-against-women/responses-field>) and a 2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigration

Survivors (<http://nationallatinonetwork.org/images/2017%20Advocate%20and%20Legal%20Service%20Survey%20Key%20Findings.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence: A Roundtable Discussion, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, Police Executive Research Forum (2016) (<https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-w0796-pub.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> Freedom from Domestic Violence as a Fundamental Human Right: Resolutions, Presidential Proclamations, and Other Statements of Principle (<http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/womenandjustice/DV-Resolutions.cfm>).

<sup>5</sup> Cities for CEDAW webpage (<http://citiesforcedaw.org>).

