

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COORDINATING COUNCIL
ANNUAL DVDRT REPORT
October 2015**

INTRODUCTION

The Sacramento County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC) is presently chaired by District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert, represented by Assistant Chief Deputy District Attorney Paul Durenberger.

The DVCC has three active committees: the Community Subcommittee, the Law Enforcement Subcommittee and the Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVDRT). Each subcommittee is comprised of agency and/or community representatives with expertise in these distinct areas. The committees work independently and are multi-disciplinary in nature.

DVCC SUBCOMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

The Community Subcommittee known as the **Domestic Violence Prevention Collaboration (DVPC)** continues to remain very active in addressing the needs of domestic violence victims in Sacramento County.

As the District Attorney's Office continues to close the gap on a venue for the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center, DVPC members have been finalizing their commitments and operational plans so their agencies will be open for business when the Family Justice Center opens its doors in the months to follow.

In addition to their collaboration on creating a Family Justice Center, DVPC held their annual awards ceremony where community members who have dedicated themselves to victims of domestic violence were honored.

DVPC is co-sponsoring an all-day seminar for law enforcement and health care providers on November 4, to train them on how domestic violence affects children in the home and how to document children's reactions to violence.

The Law Enforcement Subcommittee has met a number of times during the year to discuss issues they currently face. The District Attorney's Office has updated our domestic violence training and it is available for all local patrol and detective law enforcement personnel. Law enforcement agencies regularly attend the other subcommittee meetings.

The Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVDRT) is a subcommittee of the Sacramento County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC). The DVDRT is authorized to exist pursuant to Penal Code Section 11163.3. Formed in the spring of 1998, the team meets on a monthly basis.

This is the DVDRT's 16th annual report. The first report was released in the fall of 2000. The reports are released in October, to coincide with Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The team is presently chaired by District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert, represented by Keith Hill, supervisor of the District Attorney's Domestic Violence Unit.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the DVDRT is to bring together a multi-disciplinary team to review domestic violence related homicide cases (including homicide-suicide cases) in Sacramento County. The team tries to develop strategies, policies and procedures to improve the system's response to domestic violence to reduce and prevent future incidents of domestic violence related homicide-suicides and injuries. Domestic violence continues to be a widespread problem in our county. In the last 12 months, approximately 3,950 fresh arrests were made for domestic violence and 2,100 warrants were requested, for a total of over 6,000 cases reported to law enforcement. The District Attorney filed and prosecuted over 2,400 cases in that same time period. Eighty percent of those cases were fresh arrests and the other twenty percent were warrant arrests. The principal reason a case was handled by warrant rather than fresh arrest was that the perpetrator fled the crime scene before law enforcement arrived, preventing immediate arrest. This often requires law enforcement to conduct follow-up investigations.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 11163.3, the meetings of the DVDRT are confidential. Every representative of a constituent agency or institution who attends DVDRT meetings signs an agreement of confidentiality.

MEMBERSHIP

The DVDRT is a multi-disciplinary, broad based organization which reviews information from law enforcement, public health, social services, coroner, child welfare, public and private medical organizations and domestic violence advocacy organizations. The current participating organizations are:

- Sacramento County District Attorney's Office
- Sacramento County Coroner's Office
- Sacramento County Sheriff's Department
- Sacramento City Police Department
- Sacramento County Probation Department
- Elk Grove Police Department
- Citrus Heights Police Department
- Law Enforcement Chaplaincy- Sacramento
- California Attorney General's Office
- Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services
- Sacramento County Counsel
- Kaiser Permanente
- University of California, Davis Medical Center

- Sacramento County Child Protection Services
- Sutter Health
- Sutter Medical Center
- Dignity Health
- WEAVE, Inc. (Women Escaping a Violent Environment)
- My Sister's House
- A Community For Peace
- Child Abuse Prevention Council

IMPLEMENTATION

To fulfill its mission, the DVDRT:

- Reviews domestic violence homicides in the county to determine if any systemic improvements should be made;
- Develops and recommends strategies to reduce and prevent domestic violence related homicides and homicide-suicides;
- Develops and recommends strategies to deal with the aftermath of domestic violence and domestic violence deaths;
- Acts as a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team with regular meetings;
- Operates with the confidentiality principles outlined in Penal Code Section 11163.3 (requiring a signed statement of confidentiality for all team participants).
- Maintains a database of all records reviewed;
- Interacts with agencies and community based organizations to help achieve its goals, using the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council as a point of contact and interaction.

SELECTION AND REVIEW OF CASES

The process by which the DVDRT selects cases for review has evolved over time. Currently, any member who has knowledge of a domestic violence related death in Sacramento County (that is not currently being prosecuted by the District Attorney) may ask for the case to be reviewed. Most cases are referred by either law enforcement or the District Attorney. The DVDRT chair selects which of the referred cases will be reviewed. If a case is being prosecuted by the District Attorney's Office, the team waits until the case is sentenced and the prosecution is completed.

Once a case is selected, the District Attorney's Office provides identifying information to the other members of the team regarding the victim, the perpetrator, and any biological or custodial children that either party had prior to the homicide. Each committee member is responsible for reviewing the records of their agency to identify relevant information regarding the case and/or parties involved. At the time of review, the District Attorney or law enforcement agency describes details of the homicide and each member agency provides any additional information they may have about the case.

In some cases, the DVDRT may extend an invitation to the prosecutor, law enforcement detective or victim advocate assigned to the case. When necessary, a member of the group may be assigned to contact members of the victim's or perpetrator's family to develop a better understanding of the underlying relationship. In some instances, family members and witnesses have been asked to attend DVDRT meetings to give direct input to the team.

With the limitations of the selection process, the time constraint placed on the team to ascertain records and the inability of the DVDRT to gather information from every possible source, the database of cases reviewed cannot be considered exhaustive or statistically representative. Nonetheless, the data collected can reveal significant concerns or insufficiencies which are evaluated by various experts, representatives from local agencies and members of the team, who then make recommendations.

CASES REVIEWED

In 2014-2015, the team reviewed seven distinctly different homicides involving 10 homicide-suicide victims. Each case required complex scrutiny by the team to evaluate all of the issues. The murder-suicide cases, where no criminal prosecution was possible, required even more effort to gather essential family history information since police agencies are generally not inclined to conduct an investigation into the background factors of a case when prosecution is not possible.

CASE SUMMARIES

The review of our seven cases this year reaffirms our conclusions from years past. Domestic violence cuts across all age ranges, races, religions and economic levels of our society. The main truism that can be gleaned from these cases is that a domestic violence homicide victim or perpetrator can be either male or female, and abusers come from all walks of life.

Age Ranges:

The victims ranged in age from a 32 to 63 years old. The perpetrators ranged in age from 40 to 74.

Education Levels:

Education levels of both victims and perpetrators ranged from high school dropout to college graduate.

Employment:

In the cases reviewed this year, employment for victim's ranged from unemployed to a cultural military trainer for the U.S. Army and an operations manager for a construction company. Employment for perpetrators ranged from unemployed to a retired supervising state worker to a nightclub promoter. The incomes of the victims and perpetrators ranged from middle income to low income.

Murder-Suicides and Murders Witnessed by Family:

Three of the seven cases were murder-suicides. In one other case, an additional victim was targeted by the perpetrator but was able to avoid being assaulted and ultimately contacted law enforcement.

Premeditation and Deliberation:

In five of the seven homicides, there was evidence of calculated pre-planning by the perpetrator.

Prior Domestic Abuse:

There was evidence of prior abuse, both physical and verbal; in four of the murders where we were able to get detailed histories of their relationships. However, the evidence did not show a progression of escalating violence preceding the murders.

Alcohol/Drugs or Prescription Medications:

Alcohol and/or illegal drug use was a contributing factor in five of the cases.

Prior Awareness of Abuse by Others:

In four of the cases, the victim had either told someone about prior abuse or family members knew about prior abuse and/or fear of future abuse. In some of the cases, the victim thought they could control the situation. This incorrect judgment on the part of the victim (i.e. the victim of abuse believing he/she would have time to make a determination about the danger, and take appropriate steps before the violence turned lethal), turned out to be a deadly error.

In most of the cases reviewed, the friends or family members who knew or were concerned for the victim's situation failed to realize there was a possibility the violence could end in murder. Repeatedly, friends or family talked about signs of abuse they had witnessed, and in the next breath, expressed shock about the homicide. This insight into the potential lethality of domestic violence was also lacking in many of the victims, who were certain they could control their environment and escape serious injury, as they had in the past.

The following chart is a breakdown of some of the key factors seen repeatedly in domestic violence homicides:

V = Victim
P = Perpetrator
D = Defendant
BF = Boyfriend
GF = Girlfriend
Unk - Unknown

Case **# 1** **#2** **#3** **#4** **#5** **#6** **#7**

Age of Victim	54	63	47	60	35	56	32
Age of Perp	52	74	51	65	50	72	40
Kids Together?	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Children – V	3	2	2	3	3	1	1
Children – P	4	3	3	3	1	1	0
Kids Witness Violence?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unk	No
Relationship Status	Husband & Wife	Estranged Husband & Wife & new BF	BF-GF	Husband & Wife	Estranged Husband & Wife	Husband & Wife	BF-GF
Weapon Used	Gun	Gun	Fists	Knife	Gun	Gun	Knife
Facts	Wife (P) hired man to shoot husband (V) in the head	Murder-Suicide: P shot new BF (V) in chest and head, then P shot himself in chest	P beat V and broke her back. V became paralyzed and later died from injuries	P stabbed V during argument	Murder-Suicide: V shot in head, P shot self in head	Murder-Suicide: V shot in head, P shot self in chest	GF (P) stabbed BF (V) during argument

Prior DV History	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Unk	Yes
Prior Suicidal Ideation	Unk	No	No	No	Unk	P: Yes	No
Education – V	College Graduate	Some High School	High School Grad	Unk	High School Grad	Unk	High School Grad
Education – P	Attending College	High School Grad	High School Grad	No Formal Education	High School Grad	Unk	High School Grad
Mental Health Diagnosis	P: Personality Disorder; PTSD	None	None	P: Major Depression w/ Psychosis	None	Unk	P: Depression
Employed? V	Military Trainer	Operations Manager	Un-employed	Un-employed	Un-employed	Un-employed	Un-employed
Employed? P	Un-employed	Retired Supervising State Worker	Un-employed	Un-employed	Club Promoter	Un-employed	Bartender
Drugs/ Alcohol	P: None V: Alcohol	P: Alcohol V: Alcohol	P: Alcohol	P: Alcohol & Opium	P: Alcohol Prescription Meds V: Prescription Meds	None	P: Alcohol V: Alcohol
Race	Both Afghani	Both White	Both White	Both Mien	Both African American	Both White	Both White

FINDINGS

Mental health continues to play a significant role in domestic violence murders.

In six of the seven cases reviewed this year, perpetrators had been recently diagnosed with a serious mental health disorder (two cases included evidence of psychotic thinking) or there was substantial evidence existed that they were suffering from mental health issues in the weeks leading up to the homicide. In all of these cases, family members and friends described seeing signs of suicidality and other concerning behavior but time and time again downplayed the significance of what they observed.

Cultural differences can isolate victims of domestic violence.

Two of the cases involved victims and perpetrators who were first-generation Americans born in other countries. In both prior countries, domestic violence was a “taboo” subject matter and domestic violence as a crime is not fully accepted. Sacramento County continues to be one of the most diverse counties in California. Our committee strongly believes that educational outreach to underrepresented communities must remain a county priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The DVDRT recommends that the Board approve the following implementation plan:

Public awareness of the relationship between mental health and domestic violence lethality must increase.

Clearly, people need more education in the subject matter of mental health deterioration and that intervention steps can benefit both patient and family.

Mental Health Awareness Week occurs annually in May. This is an opportunity for the county to use their communication power to help promote awareness of this vital health issue. The DVPC and DVDRT would be willing to work with the County Mental Health Department to come up with campaign ideas and present them to the county Communication & Media Officer (CMO). The CMO can then review, edit and disperse the information as they deem appropriate. Using the County Media Office, District Attorney’s Office, Family Justice Center and community partner websites and social media networks, we can work together to raise awareness and educate the public on mental health services and the importance of early intervention.

The DVDRT believes we, as a county, must see the connection between mental instability and family violence as an opportunity for the domestic violence community to collaborate with partners in the mental health arena to educate the public on identifying domestic violence lethality factors and on the subject matter of reporting and seeking outside assistance immediately when there is a suspicion of declining mental health functioning in people that are loved ones, family, or neighbors.

Sacramento County can continue to break down cultural barriers to better serve domestic violence victims.

Sacramento County is one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the country. While this diversity can be a great strength, it can also pose challenges in outreach and education on available services. By combining community outreach to include family services and mental health program availability we can give potential victims, family and friends real options for prevention that can save lives.

A goal of the future Family Justice Center is to collaboratively reach out to underrepresented communities and supplement the work currently being done by community organizations.

CONCLUSION

The DVCC is continuing to actively work with a broad spectrum of domestic violence partners including law enforcement, community organizations, businesses, educators, faith based organizations and local governments in trying to better address the issue of domestic violence in Sacramento County. The Family Justice Center will provide a unique opportunity to further advance the successful collaborative efforts we have developed to deal with issues surrounding domestic violence in our community. We look forward to your continued support during the next year as we explore this exciting opportunity.