

NYC Domestic Violence Task Force

2017 goals and
recommendations

Reframing New York City's Approach to Domestic Violence

Since 1990, rates of violent crime in New York City have decreased by more than 75%¹—a dramatic decline that has made New York City one of the safest big cities nationwide² But, over the past ten years, complaints of felony and misdemeanor domestic violence offenses have increased and now represent a growing percentage of crime citywide.³

In 2007, 4.8% of all major crimes⁴ in the City were related to domestic violence⁵ (broadly defined to include offenses involving members of the same family or household as well as those related to intimate partners). By 2016, that percentage had reached 11.6%⁶. Domestic violence now accounts for one in every five homicides—and two in every five reported assaults—citywide.

This is a troubling trend. Even more troubling is the larger universe of domestic abuse that goes unreported every year. A leading national study found that 5.4% of individuals in the United States over the age of 18 are victims of rape, physical assault or stalking by an intimate partner annually. If this rate holds true here in New York City, then nearly 352,000⁷ New Yorkers are victimized by an intimate partner every year, substantially more than the number of intimate partner violence complaints made to police.⁸

What this tells us is that domestic violence is an insidious problem that often hides behind other problems. It is a problem that has far-reaching impact on our families, our communities and our City: nearly 25% of New York City shelter admissions are due to domestic violence;⁹ 20-40% of chronically violent adolescents have been exposed to extreme parental conflict at home¹⁰; and women who experience physical violence from an intimate partner report an average of 7.2 days of lost work-related productivity a year.¹¹

The persistence of domestic violence even as the City has become safer overall led Mayor Bill de Blasio in November 2016 to create the NYC Domestic Violence Task Force. Co-chaired by First Lady Chirlane McCray and Police Commissioner James O'Neill, and operating with guidance from the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, the Task Force was charged with reenvisioning how New York City responds to domestic violence. The Mayor praised it as "unique in its focus on bringing law enforcement and social services together to look with fresh eyes at how we can both hold abusers accountable and ensure that we are providing smart and effective pathways to safety for survivors."¹²

The Task Force members included experts and leaders from a broad spectrum of City agencies and community-based organizations, professionals who assist victims and work with offenders, leaders in law enforcement and the criminal justice system, senior representatives from key City agencies, and individuals who have survived domestic violence. The Task Force members' collective knowledge is critical to understanding domestic violence here in New York City—both the nature of the problem and the strengths and weaknesses of our current responses—and to identifying critical service needs and areas for improvement.

Reframing New York City's Approach to Domestic Violence

Based on their expertise, Task Force members joined one of four working groups charged with identifying effective strategies to advance the following goals: prevent violence and abusive behavior before it happens; increase early reporting and engagement by survivors; enhance the response of the criminal justice system; and create strategies for long-term violence reduction and innovative practices to hold offenders accountable.

Staff from the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, with assistance from the City University of New York Institute for State and Local Governance, gathered a wealth of current information, including statistics on domestic violence complaints to police and criminal case outcomes, data on shelter and social service involvement of victims and abusers, and research on promising models for combating domestic violence that are in use either in New York City or elsewhere in the country. As part of the knowledge gathering process, the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence also surveyed 26 city agencies and 84 community-based organizations about their domestic violence-related practices and services.

Task Force members worked intensely over the course of six weeks in early 2017 to identify existing domestic violence programs and interventions that are working well, those that need attention and promising practices that could be implemented or expanded. As their work progressed, the Task Force members held supplemental meetings to further explore how domestic violence cases are handled in the family and criminal court systems and to discuss ways to facilitate data collection and reporting between agencies. Meetings with elected officials were held to inform them of the Task Force's progress and to solicit their feedback and ideas.

The result is a set of recommendations for targeted investments to create durable and effective solutions to domestic violence citywide. Collectively, these recommended investments offer fresh, comprehensive strategies for:

- 1. Expanding child and youth prevention and intervention;**
- 2. Enhancing criminal justice system responses;**
- 3. Strengthening New York City communities; and**
- 4. Improving citywide coordination to maximize resources.**

Recommendations

AREA 1:

Expanding child and youth prevention and intervention

Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to become involved in an abusive relationship in their teens or as an adult.¹³ Teenagers who experience dating violence are more likely to have lower grades and to experience poor mental health, including persistent sadness, self-harming and attempts at suicide.^{14,15} Also, there is a strong intersection between domestic violence and child welfare—child welfare investigations frequently involve domestic violence.

The following recommendations aim to intervene at the earliest possible opportunity to combat intergenerational cycles of domestic violence and exposure to violence, including by preventing relationship abuse among youth across New York City and by identifying—and intervening—in situations where children are at a high risk of domestic abuse.

Expand Child Trauma Response Teams

The Child Trauma Response Team program provides a coordinated, immediate, trauma-focused response to children and their family members who are exposed to domestic violence. This innovative program, which brings together police, prosecutors and community-based organizations, will expand to additional high-need precincts across New York City and implement an ongoing evaluation.

Increase resources for Administration of Children’s Services investigations

The Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) uses investigative consultants to support prevention program service planning and ensure the safety of children, particularly those who are not yet school-aged. By expanding the use of investigative consultants to prevention cases, ACS will aim to more thoroughly investigate, identify and address domestic violence.

Enhance domestic violence screening and training policies and practices at the Administration for Children’s Services

OCDV will work with the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) to strengthen procedures to identify domestic violence in the course of a family’s interactions with ACS. The agencies will work in tandem to develop enhanced domestic violence training and identify clearer pathways to link victims to services at community-based organizations and Family Justice Centers.

Enhance the in-school Respect for All Program to address dating violence

The Department of Education (DOE) will partner with OCDV to incorporate dating violence and intimate partner violence content into the training required for all Respect for All (RFA) liaisons. The RFA liaisons are the DOE staff responsible for responding to incidents of bullying and harassment against students, including dating violence. In addition, DOE will require all current RFA liaisons to complete a comprehensive dating violence and intimate partner violence training provided by OCDV, and update relevant RFA promotional material.

Recommendations

AREA 1:

Expanding child and youth prevention and intervention

Incorporate domestic violence and teen dating violence into the Department of Education’s comprehensive health education curriculum

DOE will partner with the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence to incorporate healthy relationship and dating violence content into the DOE’s Comprehensive Health Education guidelines, training and resources.

Expand youth prevention education in Department of Youth and Community Development programming

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) will enhance its partnership with domestic violence service organizations and OCDV to provide additional healthy relationships workshops at programs (e.g., Beacons and Cornerstones) in high-need communities, and identify peer leaders and reach a broader population, including LGBTQ youth, who are at increased risk of victimization.

AREA 2:

Enhancing criminal justice responses

Approximately three-quarters of domestic violence homicide victims did not have any contact with law enforcement related to domestic violence preceding the homicide, though there were likely abusive incidents prior to the homicide.¹⁶ For those victims who do report abuse, the criminal justice system can seem complicated and overwhelming. The recommendations below aim to address this problem by making the criminal justice system less daunting and more accessible for victims.

The recommendations also seek to reduce recidivism and improve citywide conviction rates for domestic violence offenders—which are lower in domestic violence felony and misdemeanor cases¹⁷ than in non-domestic violence cases—by enhancing evidence collection and increasing offender accountability.

Expand the Early Victim Engagement (EVE) Program

Expand an existing successful victim engagement program that provides critical information to victims at the time of an offender’s arraignment enhancing safety, access to resources and prosecutions.

Enhance evidence collection tools for criminal investigations and prosecutions

Enhance criminal investigations with state-of-the-art technology, particularly related to stalking and strangulation cases, and increase training efforts on evidence collection for domestic violence cases to improve prosecutions.

Create domestic violence programming at the Department of Probation

The Department of Probation (DOP) will create specialized domestic violence programming and supervision practices to provide safe and viable alternatives to incarceration that enhance offender accountability through heightened monitoring and rigorous release conditions and that incorporate connections to victims to link them to appropriate services.

Recommendations

AREA 2:

Enhancing criminal justice responses

Expand and enhance forensic nurse examination programs

The City will expand forensic nurse examiner programs in two high-need New York City Health + Hospitals (H+H) facilities to develop a curriculum for domestic violence forensic examinations, provide trauma-informed care for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, collect forensic evidence to aid prosecution of offenders, and offer connection to additional victim services.

Implement tailored domestic violence risk assessment tools in the civil and criminal justice systems

Evidence-based risk and safety assessment tools have proved to be an important asset for law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, victim service providers, and other professionals in identifying appropriate interventions and services for both victims and offenders. At present, few organizations and agencies in New York City use formal risk assessment tools for domestic violence. For those that do, there is little consistency in risk identification methods and little coordination when cases are identified as high risk. New York City will provide training and technical assistance to identify and implement appropriate risk and safety assessment tools for various key points in the criminal and civil justice systems.

Establish a District Attorney Workgroup to develop best practices in domestic violence prosecution

Prosecution strategies and conviction rates vary among boroughs. A District Attorney Workgroup will develop best practices and innovative approaches for domestic violence criminal investigations and prosecutions, and engage in ongoing communication to ensure consistency across District Attorney's offices and continued improvement in strategies and approaches.

Revised Domestic Incident Report protocols

Routinely recording a victim's email address and mobile phone number on Domestic Incident Reports (DIRs), a form that is completed by the police every time they respond to a domestic violence call, would facilitate better follow-up with victims by law enforcement, prosecutors, and social service organizations.

Expand Coordinated Approach to Preventing Stalking (CAPS) program

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) and OCDV will collaborate with District Attorney's offices to expand a successful homicide prevention initiative to increase the identification and reporting of intimate partner stalking cases, enhance stalking arrests and prosecutions, and link victims to critical services.

Recommendations

AREA 3:

Strengthening New York City communities

Reporting or even discussing domestic violence can be a daunting prospect for many victims and their families, though it may be critical for victim safety. Data reveal that the majority of domestic violence homicide victims never had any contact with the police related to domestic violence^{18,19}. Because domestic violence often escalates over time, there were likely abusive incidents prior to the homicide. These missed opportunities for support and intervention highlight the need for expanding community resources and alternative interventions for both victims and offenders

Many of the recommendations that follow are designed to increase education and capacity for community service providers so that they can more effectively engage victims—many of whom will not have contact with police—and successfully connect them with needed services. A number of recommendations are intended to better reach marginalized communities—including immigrants, communities of color, older individuals, people with disabilities and LGBTQ persons—and address their specific needs by offering new, culturally-relevant service and intervention models. The recommendations in this area also seek, where feasible, not only to serve victims directly, but also to educate others who are in a position to assist victims and intervene as early as possible.

Expand access to services at New York City Family Justice Centers

OCDV will introduce evening hours one day per week at the three NYC Family Justice Centers (FJCs) with the highest client flow to accommodate victims who work or are otherwise unable to visit the FJC during the day. In addition, to meet the high demand for children’s counseling, the FJCs in Brooklyn and the Bronx will each be staffed with one additional Spanish-speaking children’s counselor.

Create trauma-informed and culturally-specific offender-based programming

The Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice will require that abusive partner intervention programs funded by City contracts employ evidence-based and trauma-informed treatment modalities, including culturally specific services, and looks to expand services to include access on Staten Island. New programming will be informed by the NYC Interagency Workgroup on abusive partner interventions.

Enhance legal services for immigrant domestic violence victims

The City will expand domestic violence-specific immigration legal services in targeted communities with large, underserved immigrant populations and high levels of domestic violence. The focus will be on providing holistic legal assistance that meets victims’ linguistic and cultural needs.

Continue to provide housing legal assistance at the New York City Family Justice Centers

Maintain access at the five Family Justice Centers (FJCs) to legal service providers who can assist victims and their families in maintaining their current housing, preventing eviction and homelessness and addressing financial issues related to housing.

Recommendations

AREA 3:

Strengthening New York City communities

Explore legislative and procedural mechanisms to provide additional housing protections for domestic violence victims

New York City will explore legislative and procedural mechanisms to provide additional housing protections for domestic violence victims.

Pass Paid Safe Leave legislation

New York City should pass new legislation that was introduced by Mayor de Blasio and Councilmember Julissa Ferreras-Copeland in the City Council in 2016 that will allow employees currently covered under the Earned Sick Time Law to use allowable paid sick leave hours for safety reasons directly related to incidents of domestic violence, sexual assault and/or stalking.

Expand Department for the Aging’s PROTECT program

The New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA) and the Weill Cornell Medical Center have partnered to develop PROTECT, an evidence-based program that provides combined social work and mental health intervention to elder abuse victims. The City will expand PROTECT by offering the program to clients of DFTA’s existing borough-based elder abuse programs. PROTECT will be offered in English and Spanish.

Create neighborhood-based roundtables and forums

Family Justice Centers (FJCs) will convene community members and stakeholders in forums and discussions to ensure ongoing dialogue in communities across New York City, especially those with the highest incidence of domestic violence. By engaging communities, we are able to create additional touchpoints and pathways in communities for obtaining resources, training, services, and information.

FDNY will work with OCDV to enhance engagement with domestic violence victims.

Firefighters, paramedics and EMTs are often the first point of service contact for victims, and it is critical that they have the skills and education necessary to appropriately respond.

AREA 4:

Improving citwide coordination to maximize results

City agencies representing law enforcement, public safety, housing, health, education, child welfare, and social services all contribute to the City’s unified goal of reducing domestic violence and the associated collateral consequences. However, not all agencies focus on or measure domestic violence in the same way. Our best measure of domestic violence prevalence in New York City relies on law enforcement data. But, since domestic violence is often unreported to the police, actual prevalence is unknown. The following recommendations will ensure that the City works more effectively to serve victims through increased coordination and data-driven responses. respond to ongoing violence and prevent future abuse.

AREA 4:

Improving citwide coordination to maximize results

Establish an ongoing Domestic Violence Task Force

To ensure the expansion and implementation of citywide domestic violence initiatives, the City will establish an ongoing interdisciplinary Domestic Violence Task Force comprised of government agencies, community-based organizations, victim advocates and survivors.

Develop a data-driven approach to domestic violence

New York City maintains numerous data sources across criminal justice, social services, and healthcare agencies that each contribute to the City's collective understanding of domestic violence. However, at present, these data sources are not analyzed in concert or linked, which limits the City's ability to grasp the full scope of the problem and develop strategic solutions. A new project to link or comprehensively analyze data sources will address this gap by helping the City to identify "pathways" that victims and perpetrators follow through the system. This information will be used to design and implement interventions at key points to better respond to ongoing violence and prevent future abuse.

Standardize domestic violence measurement and reporting across City agencies

Coordinate and assist criminal justice, health, and social service agencies in reviewing and modifying their domestic violence recording metrics to facilitate interagency measurement and reporting, including ensuring clarity and consistency in the use of definitions regarding domestic and intimate partner violence.

Integrate domestic violence training and policies into ongoing ThriveNYC initiatives

Victims of intimate partner violence have significantly higher rates of adverse mental health outcomes. OCDV will partner with ThriveNYC—a comprehensive mental health plan for the City—to discuss integrating domestic violence trainings policies into ThriveNYC initiatives, where appropriate.

Conclusion

These recommendations are the next step in a larger, ongoing effort to make New York City safer for all New Yorkers. Domestic violence is a complex and menacing problem, but one that we can, and will, reduce. We look forward to working together on implementing these critical recommendations.

Endnotes

1. New York City Police Department, Crime Data Warehouse.
2. Friedman, M., Grawert, A., & Cullen, J. (2016). *Crime in 2016: A preliminary analysis*. New York, NY: Brennan Center for Justice, New York University School of Law.
3. New York Police Department, OMAP. (2017). Unpublished data.
4. Major crimes are defined as murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, larceny and grand larceny automobile.
5. In the State of New York, the term, “domestic violence” is broadly defined to include offenses committed by and against members of the same family or household and persons who are or have been in an intimate relationship. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a subset of domestic violence that refers to abusive relationships involving victims and offenders who are married, formerly married, have a child in common, or are involved in an intimate relationship. Although many people think of domestic violence mainly as intimate partner violence, domestic violence actually is a broader category of offenses (and, for example, includes violence against siblings and parents). However, because resources and knowledge in the domestic violence field are primarily oriented toward intimate partner violence, the Task Force focused most of its efforts on identifying needs and approaches to address IPV.
6. New York Police Department, CompStat Year End Reports, 2007-2016.
7. This figure is based on the 12 month Prevalence of Rape, Physical Violence, and/or Stalking Victimization by an Intimate Partner – U.S. Women, NISVS 2010, (https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf), which is 5.9% of women 18 years and older, and the 2010 U.S. Census population of women 18 years or older in New York City, which is 3,426,274, resulting in an estimated total of 202,150. The correlating figure is 5% of men 18 years and older, and the 2010 U.S. Census population of men 18 years or older in New York City, which is 2,980,748, resulting in an estimated total of 149,037. With a total of approximately 351,187 male and female victims over the age of 18, and the 2010 U.S. Census population total of 6,407,022 men and women in New York City, approximately 5.4% of New York men and women were victims of intimate partner violence. Neither the NISVS nor the U.S. Census include data for those who identify other than male or female.
8. According to the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence 2016 Fact Sheet, the New York Police Department recorded 91,617 reports of intimate partner related domestic incidents in 2016. Even assuming that these represent unique incidents of victimization—although it is likely that multiple reports are made to the same address or concerning the same individuals—that means that approximately 25% of intimate partner violence cases result in a police report and response.
9. <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/2014dhs.pdf>

Endnotes

10. James, M., 'Domestic Violence as a Form of Child Abuse: Identification and Prevention', *Issues in Child Abuse Prevention*, 1994.
11. Arias I, Corso P. 2005. Average Cost Per Person Victimized by an Intimate Partner of the Opposite Gender: A Comparison of Men and Women. *Violence and Victims*, 20(4):379-91.
12. Office of the Mayor of the City of New York, Press Office. (2016). Mayor de Blasio launches Domestic Violence Task Force to hold abusers accountable and provide pathways to safety for survivors. [Press release]. Retrieved from: <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/896-16/mayor-de-blasio-launches-domestic-violence-task-force-hold-abusers-accountable-provide>.
13. Holt, S., Buckley, H., & Whelan, S. (2008). The impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: A review of the literature. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32(8), 797-810.
14. Exner-Cortens, D., Eckenrode, J., & Rothman, E. (2008). Longitudinal associations between teen dating violence victimization and adverse health outcomes. *Pediatrics*, 131(1), 71-78.
15. Cutter-Wilson, E., & Richmond, T. (2011). Understanding teen dating violence: Practical screening and intervention strategies for pediatric and adolescent healthcare providers. *Current Opinions in Pediatrics*, 23(4), 379-383.
16. New York City Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence. (2015). *New York City Domestic Fatality Review Committee: 2015 annual report*. New York, NY: Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence.
17. New York State Unified Court System. *Criminal court misdemeanor domestic violence—timing and conviction: Disposed 2016*. Unpublished data.
18. Since 2005, 73% of domestic violence homicide victims had no prior contact with the New York City Police Department.
19. New York City Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence. (2015). *New York City Domestic Fatality Review Committee: 2015 annual report*. New York, NY: Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence.