

D V R T

Domestic Violence Resource Team



October 2006

**A Report by the
Los Angeles City Commission on the Status of Women**

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report states domestic violence is the primary cause of injury to women in the United States.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, domestic violence is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. Over 4,000 victims of domestic violence are killed each year. The vast majority, of which, are women.

Domestic violence accounts for 27% of all incidents of violence in the workplace according to the U.S. Department of Labor. As well as a recent United States Department of Justice report estimates that 13,000 acts of violence against women are committed each year in the workplace by perpetrators.

Domestic violence does not stay home when victims and abusers go to work.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

With nearly 1/3 of American women reporting physical abuse by an intimate partner at some point in their lives, it is certain that domestic violence affects employees. It can result in the loss of productivity, increased absenteeism, raise the risk of violence in the workplace and cost hundreds of millions of dollars in increased health care costs. Domestic violence can manifest itself in various forms but its goal is always the same—to subjugate and control victims through fear, physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Often, an abuser will stalk or attack the victim at work leading to safety and security issues.

Over 94% of corporate security directors consistently rank domestic violence as a high security problem. More than 175,000 workdays per year are lost due to the effects of domestic violence in the work place. Blue Shield of California, the third largest health care company in the state, conducted a study on the effects of domestic violence in the workplace which revealed that domestic violence results in high absenteeism, low productivity rates, depression, stress in the workplace, quick turnovers in job placement, and millions of dollars in health care costs paid for by the employer. Victims of domestic violence often do not perform up to employer standards and suffer from chronic low morale, resulting in poor quality work product and customer service.

When domestic violence comes to work, there is a real physical danger to everyone. Not only are the women, victimized by domestic violence at risk, but so are their co-workers.

THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Los Angeles City Commission on the Status of Women held numerous public hearings on domestic violence. Testimony from victims revealed that not only was the violence impacting them at home but at the workplace as well. Victims also testified about the critical lack of City resources for women and their families.

As a result of these public hearings and the death of Nicole Brown-Simpson, the City established the Domestic Violence Task Force in 1994. The Task Force was charged with heightening the awareness of and sensitivity to the problem of domestic violence. In 1995, the City established a Domestic Violence Trust Fund. The fund provides for the furtherance of the collection, exchange and dissemination of information, prevention and prosecutions and other related purposes relative to domestic violence. As a clear expression of the City's commitment to combat this growing problem, the City Council approved bumper stickers on City vehicles with the slogan: *"There's no excuse for Domestic Violence"*. To meet the needs of victims and the Los Angeles Police Department at a domestic violence scene, Domestic Abuse Response Teams (DART) were established. The purpose of DART provides victims with access to shelters, food banks, hospitals and other critical services.

POLICY IN SUPPORT OF EMPLOYEE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The City of Los Angeles has long recognized the need to promote a work environment that is supportive of victims of domestic violence and particularly sensitive to the effects of domestic abuse. The City not only endeavors to offer assistance and a supportive environment to citizens victimized by domestic violence but also its employees experiencing domestic violence or abuse. In keeping with this objective, the City has instituted a comprehensive policy to deal with the issues of domestic violence and abuse and its consequent effects on City employees and the work environment.

With the adoption of the Policy in Support of Employee Victims of Domestic Violence in 1998, the City Council brought the full resources of the City to bear in support of those employees victimized by domestic violence and sought to protect the workplace from the perpetrator. The policy is designed to offer assistance and a supportive environment to City employees facing the very real effects of domestic violence. The policy imposes an affirmative duty on City managers and supervisors to treat domestic violence cases seriously, investigate and assess the potential for violence, and take action accordingly. The policy objective is to empower victims with referrals to appropriate community resources, provide a sensitive and supportive work environment, and mitigate discipline when work performance is adversely affected by incidents of domestic violence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE TEAM (DVRT)

Nationally, many cities have domestic violence workplace policies. However, The City of Los Angeles is the only city to have a Domestic Violence Resource Team (DVRT) to proactively deal with the very real effects of domestic violence in the workplace. The Los Angeles City Commission on the Status of Women chairs the Domestic Violence Resource Team.

The Domestic Violence Resource Team assists with the implementation of the City policy and protocols in addition to providing departments and employees with advice and referrals. The DVRT may recommend alternatives to disciplinary actions as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis.

In the event of an impasse, DVRT will mediate between the employee and the department, often recommending alternatives to discipline including, but not limited to, holding the discipline in abeyance, providing the employee with work assignments to lessen the affects of the domestic violence, and periodic review of the employee-victim's work performance and improvement.

Process

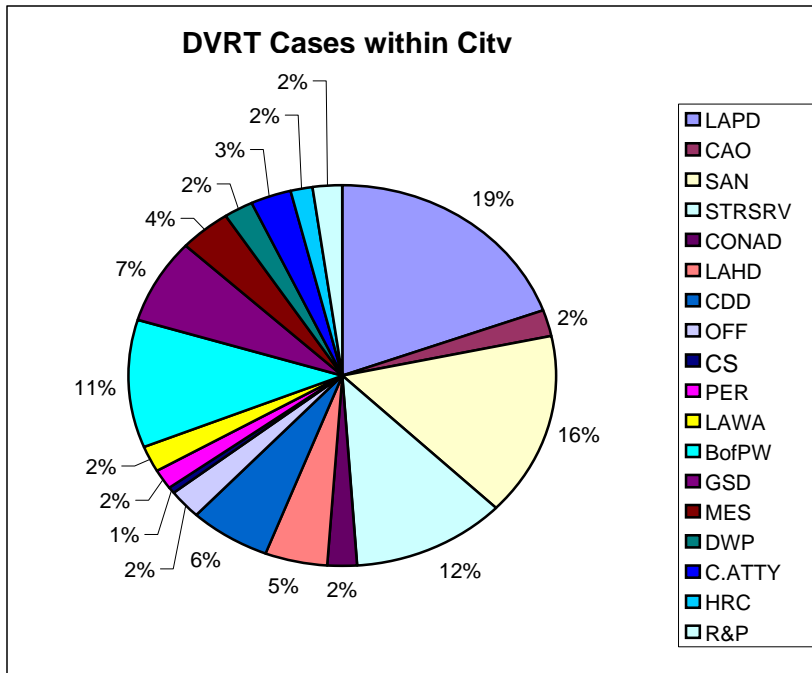
- When a supervisor becomes aware that an employee is in an abusive relationship and subjected to harassment, threats, or violence by the perpetrator, the supervisor will offer the employee information on the DVRT and other available resources for assistance such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), battered women's shelters, legal assistance agencies and/or the employee's union.
- When warranted, the supervisor will review the facts of the situation.
- If appropriate the supervisor, in consultation with the City Attorney's office, can request a restraining order against the individual if it would improve the safety of the workplace.

Typically, the DVRT consists of a member from the Commission on the Status of Women, City Attorney's Office, Los Angeles Police Department, the Personnel Department, a mental health professional from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and/or a representative from the employee's collective bargaining unit. Once the DVRT is convened and reviews the evidence the employee presents, the DVRT makes a recommendation to the employee that will hopefully assist the employee in resolving the work-related issue and gaining control over their personal life. Typical recommendations could be:

- The employee is referred to counseling and other DV services.
- The employee seeks out and maintains mental health therapy.
- The employee enters into a contract with their department to improve performance in any area that is found lacking.
- The employee remains in contact with the Commission regarding their mental health status.

Findings

Since the establishment of DVRT, the Commission has worked with more than 100 City employees (99-female City employees and 1-male City employee).



- City Departments that have received DVRT assistance:**
- Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD)*
 - City Administrative Officer (CAO)*
 - Bureau of Sanitation (Public Works)*
 - Bureau of Street Maintenance (Public Works)*
 - Contract Compliance (Public Works)*
 - Los Angeles Housing Department (LAHD)*
 - Community Development Department (CDD)*
 - Office of Finance (OFF) Personnel*
 - Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA)*
 - Board of Public Works General Services Department (GSD)*
 - Management Employee Services (Public Works)*
 - Department of Water and Power (DWP)*
 - City Attorney*
 - Human Relations Commission*
 - Recreation & Parks*

Domestic violence protocols were approved by the City Council in 2001 to assist both supervisors and employees with domestic violence and implementation of the City's policy. The protocols provide uniform steps of action and alternatives to discipline for all departments throughout the City to maintain the greatest opportunity for safe working conditions and to provide a supportive work environment for the employee-victim. It is the intention of the Domestic Violence Resource Team to determine if a nexus exists between the domestic violence or abuse and the cause for proposed discipline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To continue to ensure success of the City's Policy in Support of Employee Victims of Domestic Violence and the Domestic Violence Response Team, the following is recommended:

1. Funding for training City employees in domestic violence and the Domestic Violence Resource Team
2. Require that all City departments are trained on the implementation of the Policy in Support of Employee Victims of Domestic Violence
3. Ensure that Departments fully cooperate with the Domestic Violence Resource Team

4. Require that the Commission on the Status of Women report to the Mayor and City Council on an annual basis regarding the implementation of the City's Policy in Support of Employee Victims of Domestic Violence and the status of the Domestic Violence Resource Team

C I T Y O F L O S A N G E L E S
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE TEAM (DVRT)

The Domestic Violence Resource Team (DVRT) is chaired by the Commission on the Status of Women and consists of representatives from the City Attorney's Office, Personnel Department, Employee Assistance Program, employee unions and others as necessary.

OBJECTIVES OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE TEAM:

1. Provide information and referrals for assistance as appropriate to victims of domestic violence, and fax filing for domestic violence restraining orders.
2. Provide Domestic Violence Workplace Policy implementation assistance for departments.
3. Provide technical assistance to supervisors and other employees.
4. Coordinate citywide activities and act as a resource for domestic violence issues.
5. Be convened at the request of an employee or a supervisor when the possibility of a nexus exists between domestic violence and poor work performance and/or disciplinary action, and will review the employee's claim by means which may include, but not be limited to, interviews, relevant documents, including court records, employee personnel files, personal interviews with the employee, co-workers, and witnesses identified by the employee.
6. Collect and maintain database of incidents.
7. Report to the Mayor and City Council on an annual basis.

Requests for assistance should be made to the
Commission on the Status of Women at (213) 978-0300.