

1999 - 2000 Ventura County Grand Jury Report

An Overview of Domestic Violence in Ventura County

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The 1999-2000 Ventura County Grand Jury became aware that Ventura County was initiating changes in the court system including a new specialty court to deal with domestic violence. This prompted a review of the statistics that reflect trends in domestic violence in the County and those changes in the courts that will impact offenders and victims.

Background

In February 2000, Ventura County Superior Court initiated a Domestic Violence Court. The function of this special court is to follow offenders convicted of domestic violence crimes, either felony or misdemeanor. These offenders are often placed on probation and mandated by the court to complete 52 sessions in a domestic violence counseling program with a 58-week time frame.

The goal of the new court is to enforce compliance. Thirty days after sentencing, the offender is required to return to court for a review of performance. This timely review allows the judge to ascertain if the defendant has signed up for the required counseling sessions and is cooperating with the Probation Department.

In 90 days, the offender reappears in Domestic Violence Court to further assess compliance. At this time, the Probation Department has prepared a compliance report, has made a victim contact at the home, and has informed the victim what resources are available within the county.

The offender is also remanded to the Domestic Violence Court in a timely manner if he/she is in violation of probation. No more than six absences are excused during the required 52 counseling sessions. Additional absences are a violation and the offender must come before the court. At this point, the court has detailed information as to the circumstances that caused the absences and the probation officer is present to review past history of compliance.

Most excuses given for missing counseling sessions are of a financial nature. The cost is \$25 per counseling session, but there is a sliding

scale and the cost is based on “ability to pay.” Therefore, this excuse is seldom accepted. There are, however, those unusual cases where work requires the offender to be unavailable at regular times. These are the rare cases when the system attempts to find a reasonable accommodation.

Methodology

The Grand Jury requested and received five years of domestic violence statistics from the Ventura County Sheriff for Camarillo, East County, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai, Thousand Oaks, and West County, and from the Police Departments of Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Simi Valley, Santa Paula, and Ventura. (See Figure 1)

Statistics were requested from the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office for the same time period. (See Figure 2)

The panel requested and received an overview of the new Domestic Violence Court from Judge Charles Campbell, Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of the County of Ventura, and current Presiding Judge of the new Domestic Violence Court.

Findings

The Grand Jury has determined these statements, which at times appear to be contradictory, to be true:

- F-1 Statistics from the police agencies indicate a substantial drop in domestic violence crime in Ventura County. The criteria used to report domestic violence crimes in the State of California changed in 1996 and this accounts for the substantial increase in cases reported during the 1996-1997 period. (See Figure 1)
- F-2 Statistics from the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office show a corresponding drop in cases of domestic violence. (See Figure 2)
- F-3 The Ventura County Superior Court System indicates that the inventory of current cases has not decreased.
- F-4 According to Judge Campbell, the new Domestic Violence Court has early indications that compliance has increased.
- F-5 There is hope that the county may find a way to subsidize counseling for victims of domestic violence at some point in time.

	7/1/94-6/30/95	7/1/95-6/30/96	7/1/96-6/30/97	7/1/97-6/30/98	7/1/98-6/30/99	7/1/99-
City of Oxnard	1790	1197	4164	4832	3205	902
City of Port Hueneme	NA	NA	161	NA	166	NA
City of Simi Valley	667	701	602	578	399	NA
City of Santa Paula	81	180	139	138	97	32
City of Ventura	NA	349	1289	1462	1117	NA
Ventura County Sheriff						NA
Camarillo	474	426	344	351	352	NA
East County Unincorporated	106	83	109	99	117	NA
Fillmore	167	188	177	167	125	NA
Moorpark	126	116	116	129	119	NA
Ojai	114	113	108	96	73	NA
Thousand Oaks	446	520	549	578	568	NA
West County Unincorporated	668	621	606	633	513	NA
Total # Crimes Reported	4689	4494	8364	9054	6851	
% Change in Crimes Reported		DOWN 4%	*UP 86%	UP 8%	DOWN 24%	
* Method of reporting changed which accounts for dramatic increase 96-97						
Data as of 9/30/99						

Figure 1 . Ventura County Total Calls - Domestic Violence

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Number	3040	2751	3326	3010	2449

Figure 2. Domestic Violence cases submitted to the Ventura County District Attorney's Office

Conclusion

- C-1 The new Domestic Violence Court provides an innovative structure that will allow Ventura County to improve compliance in mandated counseling for domestic violence offenders in Ventura County.
- C-2 The Domestic Violence Court has the ability to address non-compliance in a timely manner that will better protect victims of domestic violence in this county.
- C-3 The goal to find a way to provide counseling, at no cost, to the victims of domestic violence crime is appropriate.

Recommendation

The Grand Jury supports and encourages the Domestic Violence Court in their search for ways to fund counseling for victims of domestic violence crime in Ventura County.

Responses

None required.