



**STATE OF  
DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE**

IN DOUGLAS COUNTY,  
NEBRASKA



# STATE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN DOUGLAS COUNTY, NEBRASKA

2015 - 2017

- Introduction.....3
- Local Criminal Justice System Overview.....5
- Law Enforcement Response and Arrests.....7
- Prosecution of Offenders.....11
- Overview of Omaha-Specific Data.....15
- Victim Services.....19
  - Protection Orders in Douglas County.....19
  - Achieving Safety and Well-Being.....20
  - Safe Shelter.....23
  - Legal Representation.....24
- Conclusions.....27
- Local and National Resources.....28
- Glossary.....29
- Citations.....30

The survivors whose words appear here are adult women who survived domestic violence in Douglas County, Nebraska. Their words are presented without alteration except to ensure clarity and are reproduced here with anonymity. Photos used throughout this report are NOT photos of the survivors represented within this report. Instead, the photos used are stock images (professional, licensed photos) and are meant to represent the diversity of individuals who are experiencing domestic violence in Douglas County, Nebraska.

**CONTENT WARNING:** The subject matter covered in this research includes domestic and sexual violence. Readers should prepare themselves to engage, or if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing.



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# STATE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

IN DOUGLAS COUNTY,  
NEBRASKA

## INTRODUCTION

Physical and sexual violence manifests in many forms of abuse within our local communities. As domestic violence is significantly underreported, we cannot know the total number of victims in our community who experience such abuse. National figures estimate that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced severe physical violence, such as being hit with a fist or hard object or slammed against something, by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> By looking at what we do know from the agencies in our community who respond to these situations daily, we can begin to understand the scope of abuse locally and how to best intervene to hold offenders accountable and keep victims safe.



### HOMICIDES

Nationally, more than **55% of all female homicides** are committed by an intimate partner<sup>2</sup> and **72% of murder-suicides** involve an intimate partner.<sup>3</sup>



### GUN VIOLENCE

The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation **increases the risk of homicide by 500%**.<sup>4</sup>

While the research on the intersection of

### GANG VIOLENCE

and domestic violence is minimal, many survivors whose partners were involved with a gang, share that the violence against them was part of gang culture, forcing them to commit crimes as well as being physically abused was common-place and that safety is incredibly complex as it requires safety from the entire gang, not only their partner.

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior rather than inexplicable random incidents. While society emphasizes physical abuse, abusers also use stalking, psychological abuse and financial abuse to manipulate and control their victims. And while this report focuses on data related to domestic violence such as cases, arrests, calls and services provided, there is a need to intersect domestic violence work within all types of violence against women.

Survivors of domestic violence must be supported without judgement and provided resources to meet their needs by every agency they encounter in the systemic response to domestic violence. Just the same, offenders must be held accountable for their behavior by every agency they encounter in the system.

Approximately 30 agencies in Douglas County collaborate on a regular basis as part of a Community Response Team that reviews data, discusses critical issues, addresses the needs of the community and attempts to create solutions to meet those needs. The Women's Fund provides coordination and support for this team and its working groups through facilitation, identifying research needs, and in some cases, funding. The Women's Fund also leads efforts to collect and analyze data and implement policy changes both within institutions and on a state-wide level.

**The Douglas County Community Response Team is guided by research and national best practices as well as the voices of local domestic violence survivors.** The team has two overarching goals:

- Hold offenders accountable
- Keep victims safe

Since offenders are held accountable primarily through the criminal justice system, much of this report focuses on that system and trends over a three year period from 2015 to 2017. The data featured is specific to Douglas County, Nebraska.

Data from local agencies who provide services to victims is also featured in the report focusing on victim safety. There is crossover with multiple counties and metro areas as victims receive services based on a variety of factors including where they live or work, which program has shelter openings or other service availability. For this reason, information from programs in Sarpy and Douglas Counties in Nebraska and Pottawattamie County in Iowa has been included in this report.

As survivors' experiences are integral to understanding the successes and challenges of the system, their stories have been infused throughout this report. Their stories account for experiences over the last eight years, reminding us of growth in our systems of response since their abuse, as well as shedding light to the persisting challenges in response to survivor needs that remain.

The data in this report includes only those survivors who have interacted with the criminal justice system or reached out to victim service programs for assistance. It is unknown how many additional people experience domestic violence every day. The Community Response Team continues to improve the data collected and analyzed in order to create the best systemic response to hold offenders accountable and keep victims safe. This work will continue and grow moving forward.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STATE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN DOUGLAS COUNTY CAN BE REFERRED TO THE **WOMEN'S FUND** BY CALLING 402.827.9280 OR VIA EMAIL AT [INFO@OMAHAWOMENSFUND.ORG](mailto:INFO@OMAHAWOMENSFUND.ORG).

## HOW DOES THE DOUGLAS COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM HOLD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS ACCOUNTABLE?

National best practices support a multiagency approach to domestic violence. When victims engage with the criminal justice system and are surrounded by or 'wrapped up' by agencies and supported throughout their involvement, they identify positive experiences and a willingness to reach out again. This, in turn, often leads to a greater ability to hold offenders accountable, as victims are more likely to have a positive response with the system and be willing to participate in the process and call law enforcement in the future if needed.

The first point of systemic response to domestic violence is typically interaction with law enforcement, beginning the engagement with the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system and Nebraska laws identify domestic violence as any crime that occurs between intimate partners.<sup>5</sup> This could be a current or former spouse, people who have a child in common, or a current or former dating relationship. This definition applies to relationships between two people of any gender.

Beginning in 2016, Douglas County criminal justice agencies have reviewed and updated internal policies on domestic violence to ensure alignment with data and national research on best practices. Additionally, a Douglas County Domestic Violence Protocol was completed to create standards for how agencies work together to respond to domestic violence.

**TABLE 1**

| DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CALLS TO 911 IN DOUGLAS COUNTY     |  | 2015   | 2016   | 2017   |
|--|--|--------|--------|--------|
| 911 Domestic Violence Calls                          |  | 17,867 | 17,637 | 17,023 |
| Domestic Violence Calls, as Percent of All 911 Calls |  | 3.8%   | 3.7%   | 3.6%   |

Source: Douglas County Communications

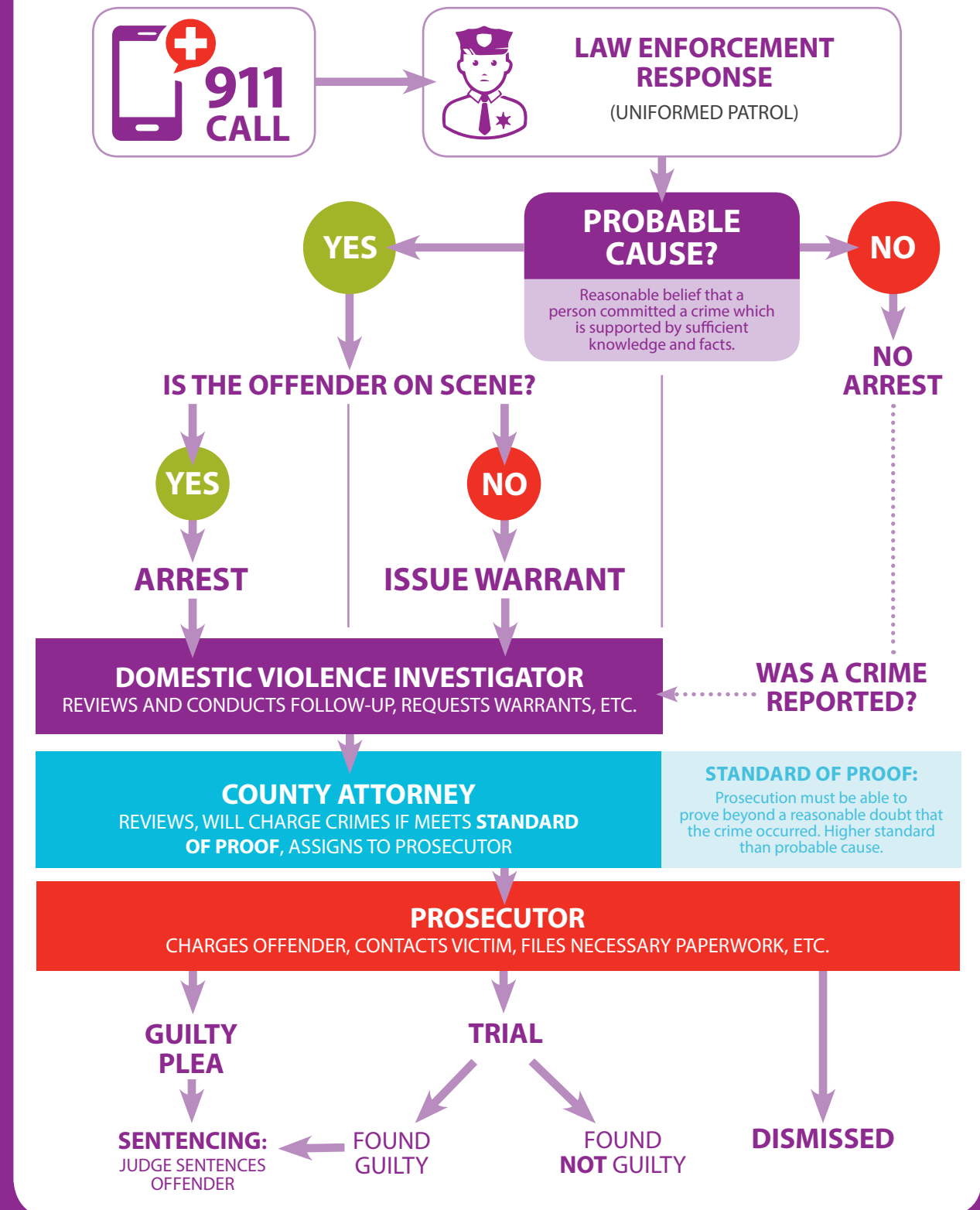
### CALLS FOR HELP (911)

Douglas County 911 provides call support to all law enforcement agencies throughout the county. The type of call is categorized by the 911 operator, based upon the available information. Once the 911 operator receives a call, they distribute the call to the appropriate law enforcement agency based upon geographic location.

The number of domestic violence-related 911 calls has decreased approximately 5% over the last three years. This is the only portion of the criminal justice system where domestic violence cases have decreased. However, the percentage of overall 911 calls that are identified as domestic violence has stayed relatively the same.

It is possible the numbers in Table 1 are an underrepresentation of the number of 911 calls that are reporting domestic violence situations. For example, law enforcement may arrive at a call that was first identified as a theft or property damage call but will find that the offender and victim are current or former intimate partners. In these situations, the calls may not always get reclassified as a domestic violence call in the 911 call operator data.

## THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN DOUGLAS COUNTY



# LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE AND ARRESTS

Of the 911 calls identified as domestic violence, only a portion of those will result in domestic violence-related arrests, which is the next step in the systemic response to domestic violence. There are several reasons for this, including:

- Law enforcement may arrive and find that the situation was not between intimate partners, and thus, does not meet the definition of domestic violence;
- The situation may be a verbal altercation, and/or no crime was reported; or,
- Law enforcement may not have enough evidence to make an arrest.

As evidenced by 911 data in Table 1, domestic violence reports to the system are not increasing; however, the law enforcement response to domestic violence is increasing. Domestic violence arrests in Douglas County have increased by 49% over the last three years (2015 to 2017) as shown in Table 2.

It is believed this increase in arrests is due to an enhanced law enforcement response resulting from a significant commitment to training. In 2016, more than 1,000 police officers county-wide were provided domestic violence training. This included the entire Omaha Police Department and Ralston Police Department, all first responding officers from Douglas County Sheriff's Office and a portion of Valley and Waterloo Police Departments.

| DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED ARRESTS IN DOUGLAS COUNTY |              |              |              |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|   | 2015         | 2016         | 2017         |
| Omaha Police Department Arrests                     | 1,747        | 2,346        | 2,617        |
| Douglas County Sheriff Arrests                      | 92           | 129          | 163          |
| Other Agency Arrests*                               | 41           | 33           | 25           |
| <b>Total Arrests</b>                                | <b>1,880</b> | <b>2,508</b> | <b>2,805</b> |

Source: Douglas County Jail Booking

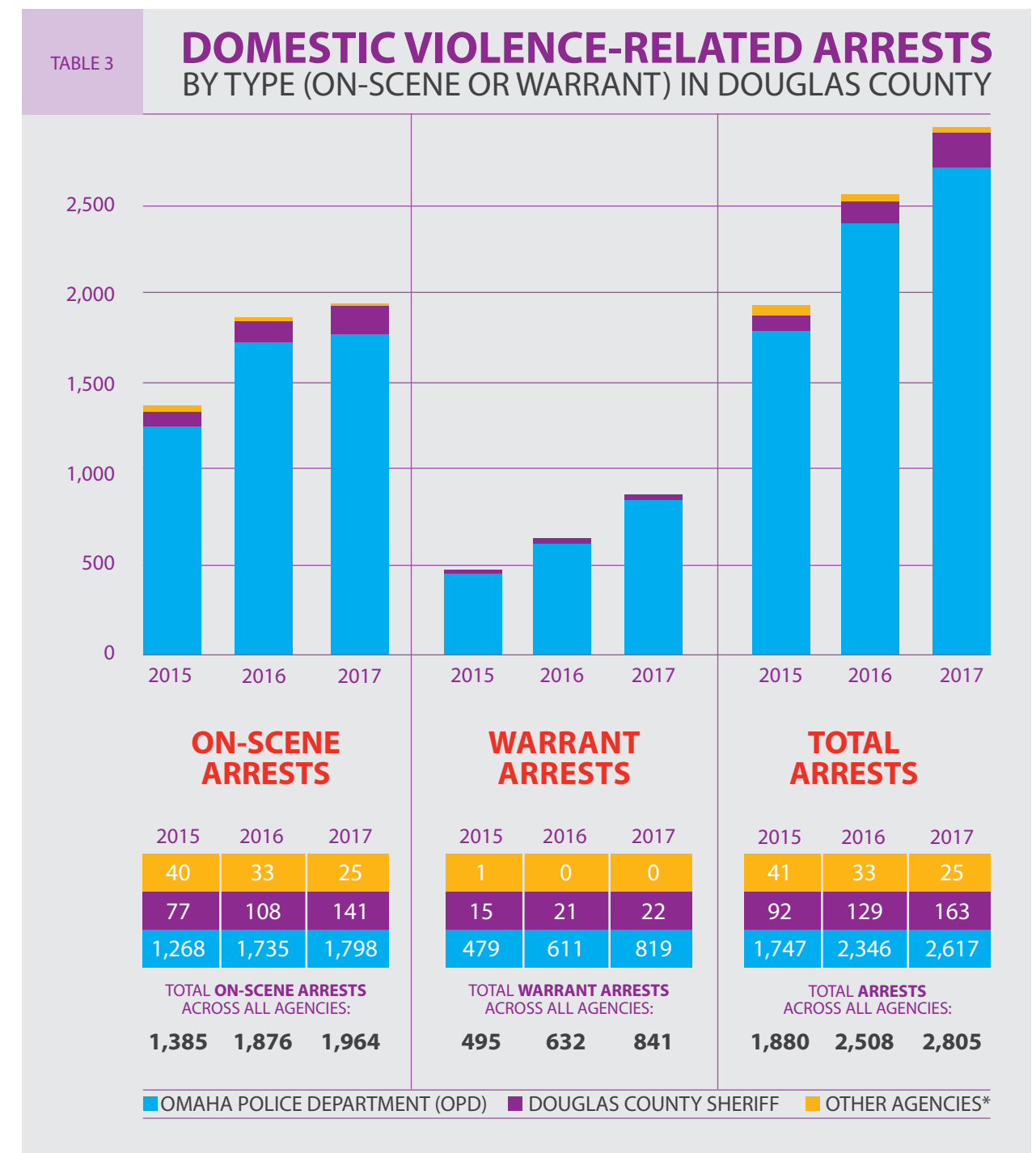
Also in 2016, the Omaha Police Department remodeled their 40-hour training for new recruits on domestic violence to be trauma-informed with a focus on the overall community response. This training provided an understanding of what trauma looks like, how to respond to the variety of ways trauma presents itself and how their role as law enforcement influences a larger community response to domestic violence. In 2017, national trainers on trauma-informed investigations and use of neuroscience to understand trauma trained 75 community members in the Omaha metro area, including approximately 35 law enforcement investigators from eight local law enforcement agencies.

\*Other Agency Arrests: This refers to arrests that did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Omaha Police Department or the Douglas County Sheriff. In these cases, the responding agencies include local police departments of Bennington, Waterloo, Boys Town, Ralston and Valley as well as University of Nebraska Omaha and Metro Community College Police Departments.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-RELATED ARRESTS IN DOUGLAS COUNTY INCREASED BY 49% OVER THE THREE-YEAR PERIOD.

Not all domestic violence arrests happen at the time of the incident. If the offender is not present when the crime is reported, or if it is determined a crime occurred but the offender has left the scene and cannot be located, a warrant may be requested. A warrant is a court order that allows an arrest to be made when the offender is located. The warrant process requires collaboration between law enforcement and prosecutors in the Douglas County Attorney's Office.

The overall increase in domestic violence arrests is evident in both arrests that occurred on-scene at the time of the incident as well as warrant arrests.



Source: Douglas County Jail Booking; Omaha Police Department; Douglas County Attorney's Office





"When the abuse became too much to bear, I called the police. He was arrested 12 times in one year. He would go to jail and I would feel safe until I came home from work and he would magically appear from under my bed or out of a closet. **I was convinced that no matter what I did, or who I called, he would never leave me.**"



# PROSECUTION OF OFFENDERS

As the next step in the system, offenders who are arrested have their cases reviewed and are potentially charged and prosecuted by the Douglas County Attorney's Office, which has a team of specialized domestic violence prosecutors. Cases are charged when it is believed that the case can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

There are several reasons for the difference in the number of arrests and those cases that are charged and prosecuted as seen in Table 4. First, the primary reason is there is a higher standard for charging a case (to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt) than what is needed to arrest (probable cause), which is why not all persons who are arrested for domestic violence can be charged and prosecuted.\*

While every arrest is reviewed and/or charged, not all arrests are reviewed or charged in the same year in which the arrest occurred. There is lag time at both ends of the year in which cases coming in and out of the County Attorney's Office do not fall into that year for data reporting purposes. Additionally, some cases are charged, but not yet entered into the appropriate data system and thus are not counted in that year. Finally, if the County Attorney's Office reviews an arrest and finds it was not actually an instance of domestic violence, it would not be counted as a domestic violence case. This is why the cases reviewed for each year is lower than the number of arrests for that year.

The majority of domestic violence cases in each year are misdemeanors. However, there was an increase in the number of cases involving felony charges in Douglas County by 3% over the three-year period. This is believed to be largely due to better investigations by law enforcement combined with the overall increase in cases. Table 6 lists the most common types of domestic violence-related charges between 2015 and 2017.

These crimes in Table 6 are the most commonly charged each year over the three-year period. Their rank from year to year varies, however, the first charge—Domestic Assault, 3rd Degree, 1st Offense—is the most frequently charged crime in each of these three years. Domestic Assault, 3rd Degree, 1st Offense accounts for more than 70% of crimes charged each year. This offense is defined in state law as intentionally and knowingly causing bodily injury, threatening with bodily injury or threatening in a menacing manner<sup>5</sup>. Table 5 refers to charges as any instance in which the defendant is formally accused of a crime. A case is relabeled from a charge to a disposed case when the case has come to a conclusion. This conclusion can include cases found guilty, cases dismissed by prosecution or cases acquitted, meaning they are found not guilty at a trial.

Guilty cases include situations where the offender was found guilty at trial or situations where the offender pled guilty. Some pleas include pleading guilty to some of the charges in exchange for others being dismissed.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROSECUTIONS IN DOUGLAS COUNTY HAVE INCREASED AS A PRIMARY RESULT OF INCREASED ARRESTS. THE NUMBER OF CASES REVIEWED IN DOUGLAS COUNTY HAS INCREASED BY 51% OVER THE THREE-YEAR TIME PERIOD. THIS LED TO MORE THAN 80% OF CASES IN 2017 HAVING AT LEAST ONE FELONY CHARGE.

In many cases, victims are unable or unwilling to participate in prosecution because of safety or other reasons. In these situations, it is not always possible for prosecutors to move forward, and the cases may be dismissed. These cases are sometimes seen later if the victim wishes to see prosecution pursued at that time. The percentage of cases that are dismissed in Douglas County has slowly declined over the three-year period.

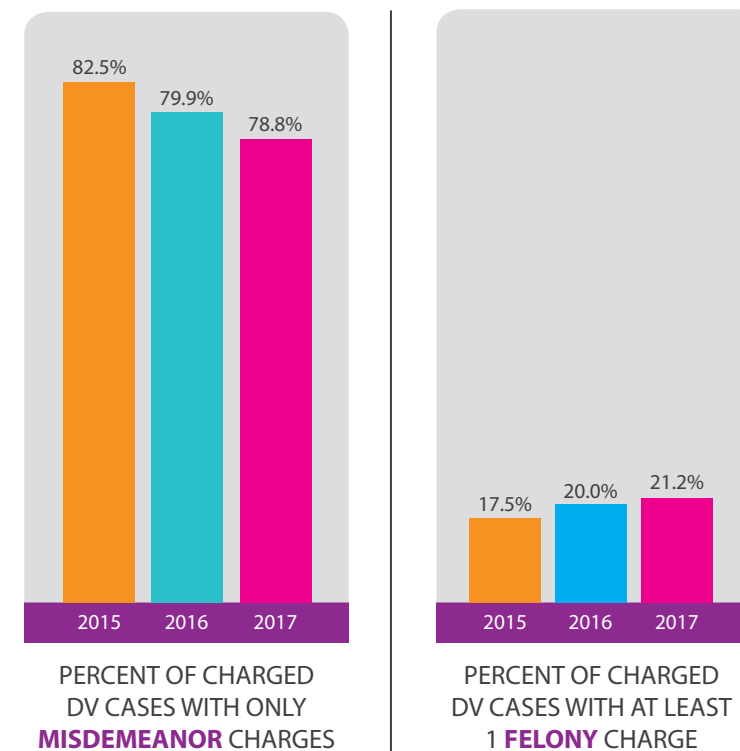
Table 7 refers to any cases that were completed in the year, regardless of when the case began. Cases take a variable amount of time to work their way through the system, sometimes more than a full year. Therefore, some of the cases disposed were charged in a previous year, and some cases charged will be disposed in a future year. This explains why the number of cases disposed each year does not match the number charged.

\* The standard for arrest by law enforcement is "probable cause" that a crime has occurred.

|   | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Domestic Violence Cases (Arrests) Reviewed**        | 1,721 | 2,334 | 2,600 |
| Domestic Violence Cases Charged***                  | 1,539 | 2,062 | 2,283 |
| Percent of Domestic Violence Cases that are Charged | 89.4% | 88.3% | 87.8% |

## TABLE 5 MISDEMEANOR AND FELONY

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (DV) CHARGES IN DOUGLAS COUNTY

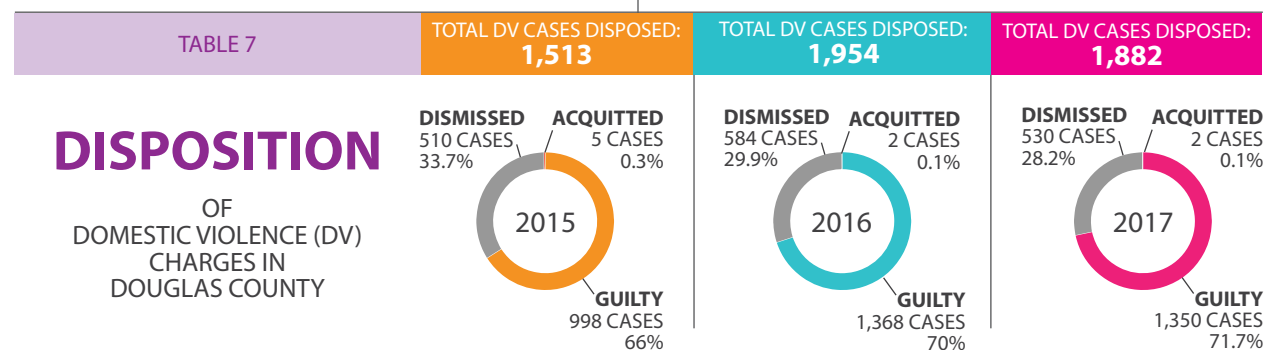


## TABLE 6 MOST COMMON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-RELATED CHARGES

- IN DOUGLAS COUNTY (2015-2017)  
*(F) indicates a felony charge  
(M) indicates a misdemeanor charge*
- Domestic Assault, 3rd Degree, 1st Offense (M)
  - Protection Order Violation, Domestic Abuse, 1st Offense (M)
  - Damage to Property (M)
  - Assault and Battery (M)
  - Domestic Assault, 3rd Degree, 2 or More Offenses (F)
  - Child Abuse by Neglect, No Serious Injury (M)
  - Assault by Strangulation (F)
  - Disturbing the Peace (M)
  - Criminal Mischief Under \$500 (M)
  - Terroristic Threat (F)

**A MISDEMEANOR** is less serious than a felony and punishable by no more than one year in jail. It may also include probation or a fine.

**A FELONY** is more serious than a misdemeanor and has harsher penalties. It is often punishable by imprisonment of over one year but may also include probation.



\*\* This refers to the review process by prosecution to determine charges.  
\*\*\* Cases charged refers to those identified by prosecutors as domestic violence and subsequently charged. See Table 5 for the most common domestic violence-related charges.

Source for Tables 4-7: Douglas County Attorney's Office

"Before I reached my teens, I was abused and exploited for several years by people around me who were supposed to be trustworthy. It came as no surprise when my girlfriend in college became controlling, abusive and isolating. When I wanted to do what she didn't want to do, she would threaten to tell people I was a lesbian. **When I didn't want to do the things she wanted to do, she would tell me that no one would love me like she did.** I knew if she shared my secret, I would lose everything, and I believed that no one could love me anyway."



**KEY TAKEAWAY:**

IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THE PERCENT OF INCIDENTS BETWEEN FORMER RELATIONSHIPS INCREASED IN OMAHA OVER THESE THREE YEARS. THIS ILLUSTRATES THAT THE VIOLENCE AGAINST VICTIMS DOES NOT END JUST BECAUSE A RELATIONSHIP ENDS.

## OVERVIEW OF OMAHA-SPECIFIC DATA

The following information is available only for incidents and arrests through the Omaha Police Department, whereas the information provided previously in this report was county-wide.

Cases reflected in Table 8 may identify more than one relationship option as chosen by law enforcement. Because law enforcement can identify more than one relationship for a single case, these numbers add up to more than 100%.

Many of the same offenders are seen in the system repeatedly—sometimes with the same victim and sometimes with a different victim as reflected in Table 9. From 2015 to 2017, the number of offenders arrested who were repeat offenders increased. This is true even though the proportion of repeat offenders decreased due to the large increase in overall cases in the system.

Table 10 shows that from 2015 to 2017, the proportion of victims (whose offenders were arrested) and who were previously victims of domestic violence decreased\* although their overall numbers increased.

The gender of victims and offenders shown in Table 11 also shifted slightly from 2015 to 2017. The majority of individuals arrested for domestic violence are male, however, the percentage of male offenders decreased slightly from 2015 to 2017 and the number of female offenders increased.

It should be noted that the gender data available only reports in the binary of male or female as determined by law enforcement. Law enforcement does not capture gender data outside of these two categories.

Table 13 shows that over the three-year period, victims who were 18- to 24-years-old made up between 19.3% and 22.1% of all victims in Omaha. This group has been growing as a percent of all victims, whereas victims ages 35 to 59 and 60+ have decreased slightly.

|                    | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Spouse             | 18.5% | 15.7% | 16.7% |
| Former Spouse      | 3.5%  | 3.4%  | 4.0%  |
| Cohabitants        | 20.8% | 16.2% | 14.9% |
| Former Cohabitants | 5.8%  | 5.7%  | 5.6%  |
| Dating             | 52.7% | 45.2% | 42.3% |
| Former Dating      | 33.0% | 34.8% | 37.8% |

Source: Omaha Police Department

\*An individual is counted as having previously been a victim if they were listed as the victim on a domestic violence case that was charged.

TABLE 9 REPEAT OFFENDERS

OFFENDERS ARRESTED IN OMAHA THAT HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY CHARGED WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

| 2015  | 2016  | 2017  |
|-------|-------|-------|
| 56.0% | 53.7% | 49.9% |
| 657   | 865   | 899   |

OFFENDERS ARRESTED IN OMAHA THAT HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY CONVICTED WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

| 2015  | 2016  | 2017  |
|-------|-------|-------|
| 45.0% | 44.4% | 38.5% |
| 528   | 715   | 693   |

TABLE 10 REPEAT VICTIMS

OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARRESTS IN OMAHA

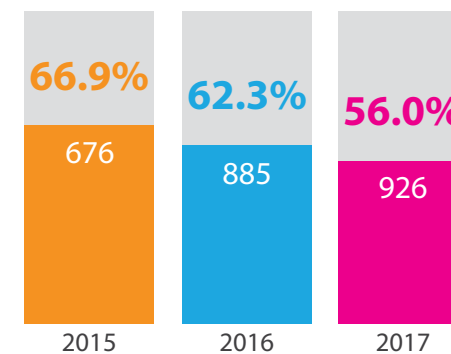


TABLE 11 GENDER

OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS IN OMAHA

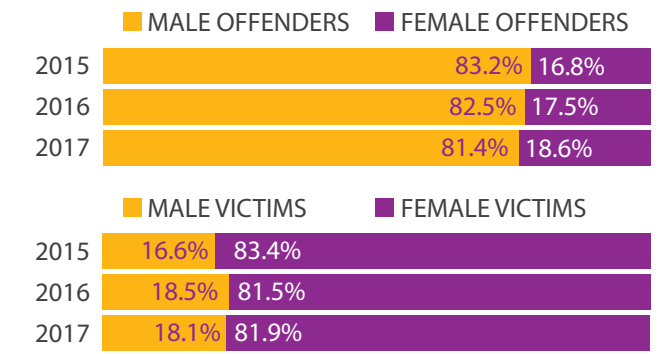


TABLE 12 OFFENDER AGE

AGES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS IN OMAHA

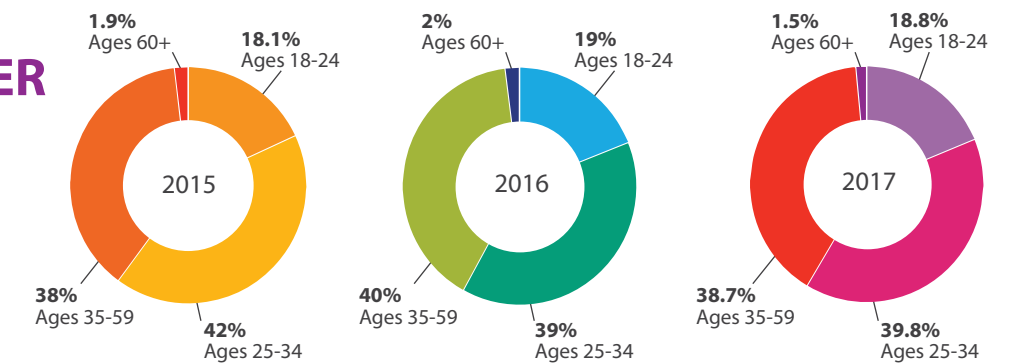
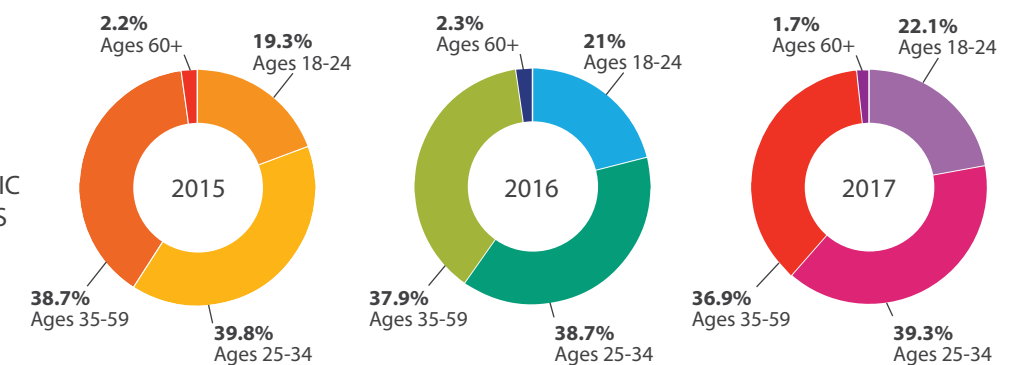


TABLE 13 VICTIM AGE

AGES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS WITH ARRESTED OFFENDERS IN OMAHA



Source for Tables 8-13: Omaha Police Department



"The worst question to ever ask someone that may be involved in a domestic violence situation is: Why won't you leave? For me, it wasn't that easy. **My abuser and I were together for seven years. Only four of those years were my choice.** We were inseparable in the beginning and he made me feel as though we were a team. The abuse wasn't something that I considered abuse in the first few years. I was young and in love so when he told me I shouldn't go to work because we needed to spend more time together, I found it flattering. When he told me to stop talking to certain people, I thought he was looking out for my best interest."



# VICTIM SERVICES

## PROTECTION ORDERS

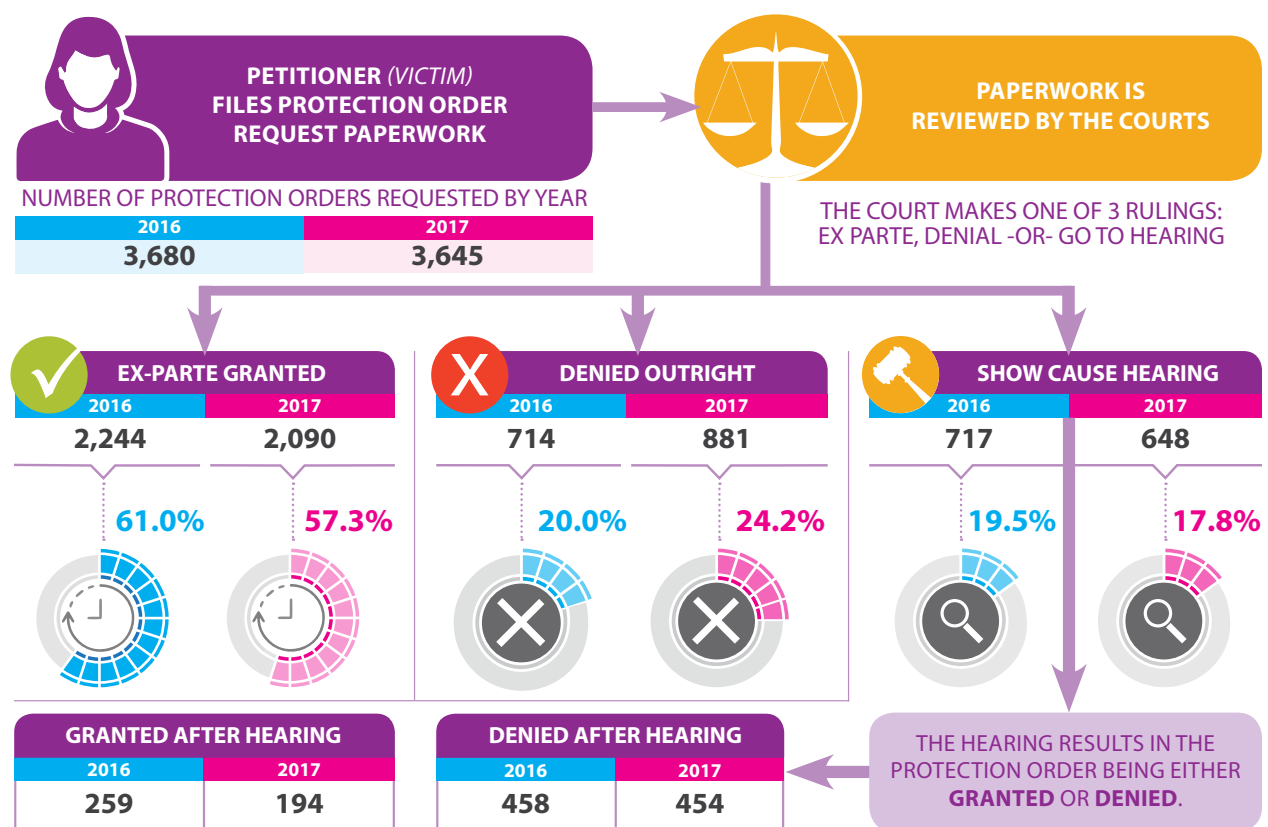
Protection orders are one way the courts can attempt to offer safety for domestic violence victims. The decision to grant a protection order is made by a judge based on paperwork filed with the court by the victim, most often without the assistance of an attorney, usually because of cost.

Protection orders typically forbid the abuser from contacting or harassing the victim. It also may order an abuser to vacate the home or provide for temporary physical and legal custody of children. In Nebraska, protection orders can be obtained for domestic abuse, harassment and sexual assault. Depending upon the specifics of their situation, some domestic violence survivors may seek harassment or sexual assault protection orders. For this reason, all three types of protection orders are included in Table 14. The number of protection orders requested in Douglas County in 2017 declined by 6% from 2016, despite the number of domestic violence arrests and prosecutions increasing.

When protection orders are requested, a judge can either grant the protection order ex parte, which means granted and in effect immediately, or order a show cause hearing where the victim presents evidence that they need the protection order. Some jurisdictions deny protection orders outright, without a hearing. However, Nebraska law for protection orders<sup>6</sup> does not explicitly provide for a process by which a protection order can be denied outright.

Overall, the utilization of protection orders has declined. The total number of protection orders requested in Douglas County has decreased, as shown in Table 14. The percent of orders granted ex parte and ordered for show cause hearing has decreased, and the number of orders denied outright has increased. Thus, fewer protection orders were granted in 2017 than in 2016.

TABLE 14 PROTECTION ORDERS IN DOUGLAS COUNTY



Source: Nebraska JUSTICE State Court Management System (DATA IS ONLY AVAILABLE FOR 2016 AND 2017)

## HOW DOES THE COMMUNITY HELP VICTIMS ACHIEVE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING?

The ability to connect with local domestic violence advocates can provide a lifeline to someone being abused.

Survivors seek services with providers based on where they live, work, attend school or where certain services are provided, among other reasons. They also seek services where shelter is available, which can be a challenge because there is not always shelter available close to where they reside. Local providers serve all victims that come to them, regardless of where the victim may live. Because of this, information was gathered from all established domestic violence programs within the Omaha metro area including:

- **Catholic Charities Omaha**—The Shelter (Douglas County)
- **Catholic Charities Iowa**—Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program (Pottawattamie County, Iowa)
- **Heartland Family Service**—Domestic/Sexual Abuse Program (Sarpy County)
- **Women's Center for Advancement (WCA)**—(Douglas County)

These four programs provide free, confidential services to victims and strive to meet victims where they are in their journey to safety. This means advocates do not try to persuade victims to make certain decisions, including leaving or staying in the relationship or calling law enforcement. Advocates work with victims experiencing a variety of different types of abuse such as physical, emotional, financial and stalking. Advocates discuss all options and then support the decisions of the victims as the person who knows best what they need.

## ADVOCACY AND RESOURCES

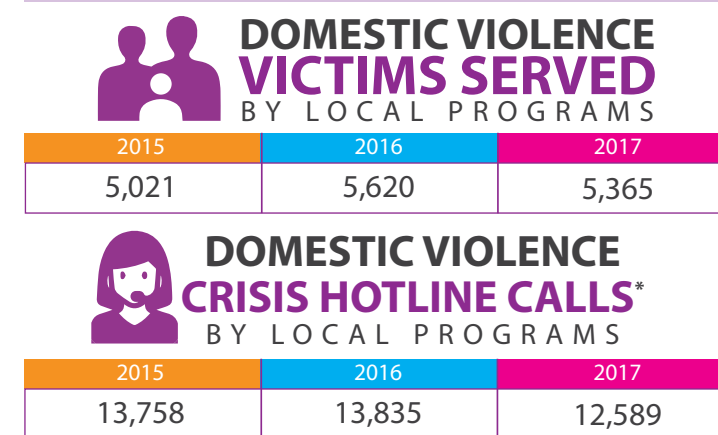
Advocates' primary services focus on safety planning with victims and providing resources based on individual needs. This process involves creating a plan for staying safe from emotional and physical abuse and stalking. Safety planning may include strategies to stay safe at work, at home, at school, or how to keep their children safe from the offender, as well. It may include planning for multiple situations and scenarios that could be dangerous for the victim and their children.

Local advocates address the range of issues that victims must negotiate including but not limited to: housing, physical and mental health needs, financial support, children's issues, etc., and the additional resources and connections needed. In order to make this possible at all times, service providers have 24/7 hotlines that provide assistance over the phone anonymously from a local advocate.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**

**MORE THAN 5,000 UNIQUE VICTIMS ARE SERVED EACH YEAR BY LOCAL VICTIM SERVICE PROGRAMS.**

TABLE 15



Source: Catholic Charities Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program, Catholic Charities Omaha, Heartland Family Service Domestic/Sexual Abuse Program, Women's Center for Advancement (WCA)

\* The crisis line is confidential, so victims may call the hotline more than once and not identify themselves. This would result in them being counted more than once.

"One night my phone was in my back pocket and I accidentally called my sister. She thought it was a distress call and rushed over. He put a gun to her head. She ran to her car and called police. They arrested him and he was sentenced to four years in prison. **That's when I got my life back.**"



## SAFE SHELTER

For many survivors of domestic violence, accessing shelter or temporary housing is necessary to obtain immediate safety. Catholic Charities Iowa (Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program), Catholic Charities Omaha (The Shelter) and Heartland Family Service have stand-alone domestic violence shelters for a total of approximately 65 domestic violence shelter beds. The Women's Center for Advancement (WCA) does not have a stand alone shelter. All four programs provide hotel/motel stays in certain situations, including when there is a high risk of lethality, shelters are full or if the offender knows the location of the shelter.

During their stay at either a shelter or hotel/motel, victims and their children are provided basic necessities such as beds, meals and laundry facilities. Advocates work with survivors to identify the family's needs, such as making arrangements with their children's school, negotiating a leave from work, finding employment or training opportunities, or obtaining health care. Shelter residents are also informed about their legal rights and are assisted in obtaining protection orders and legal assistance, if desired.

Many shelters also provide access to therapy and support groups, which they may be able to continue to access when they leave shelter. Providing temporary housing allows survivors to assess their next steps, review their safety plan and determine what resources they need in order to find more permanent housing. In other situations, survivors use their stay as a respite and then return to their previous partner and living situation.

Although the number of victims served in shelters has decreased slightly over the last three years, the number served in hotel/motel services has increased 36% as shown in Table 16. Overall, the number of victims provided housing decreased 3% over the three-year period. The closing of Catholic Charities Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program shelter in Council Bluffs for four months in 2017 led to an overall decrease in shelter services provided during that year.

| SAFE SHELTER<br>FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS IN LOCAL PROGRAMS |  | 2015       | 2016       | 2017       |
|---|--|------------|------------|------------|
| TABLE 16  | Clients/victims served in shelters                 | 398        | 373        | 372        |
|   | Client's children served in shelters               | 350        | 333        | 300        |
|   | Clients/victims provided hotel/motel shelter       | 88         | 58         | 139        |
|   | <b>Total Clients/Victims Provided Safe Shelter</b> | <b>836</b> | <b>764</b> | <b>811</b> |

Source: Catholic Charities Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program, Catholic Charities Omaha, Heartland Family Service Domestic/Sexual Abuse Program, Women's Center for Advancement (WCA)

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY LOCAL PROGRAMS, WITH AN INCREASE OF 128% OVER THE THREE-YEAR PERIOD.

THE LARGEST INCREASE WAS IN CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES,\* WHICH INCREASED 151%.

## LEGAL REPRESENTATION

In addition to assistance from the criminal justice system and service providers, domestic violence survivors also often need legal assistance to stay safe and gain independence from relationships where they are being harmed. Four local programs, listed below, provide free legal services to domestic violence victims and have contributed data to this report.

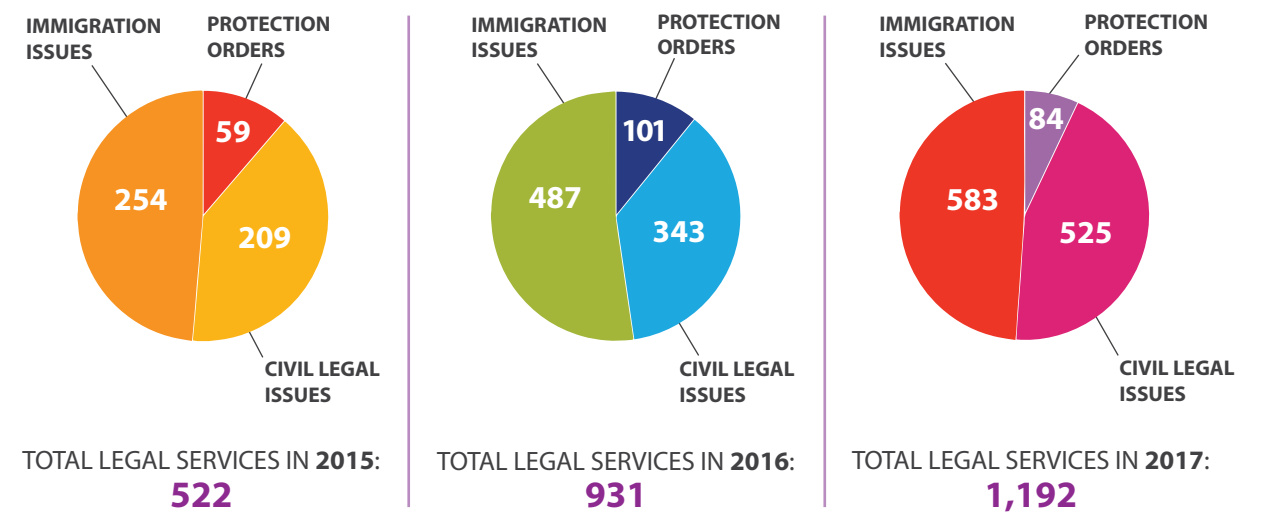
- Catholic Charities Omaha (The Shelter)
- Immigrant Legal Center
- Legal Aid of Nebraska
- Women's Center for Advancement (WCA)

These services provide critical help with legal issues that impact a victim's ability to gain independence from a relationship where they are being abused, such as child custody, immigration status, divorce/separation or housing. The specific legal services available differ with each agency.

TABLE 17

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE

TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS BY LOCAL PROGRAMS  
BY NUMBER OF VICTIMS ASSISTED BY ATTORNEY OR PARALEGAL STAFF (BY AREA OF NEED)



**IMMIGRATION ISSUES:** Includes specific types of immigration relief and visas available to victims of domestic violence or abuse.  
**PROTECTION ORDERS (POs):** Does not include PO assistance by advocates, only legal staff.  
**\*CIVIL LEGAL ISSUES:** Includes divorce, legal separation and custody cases.

Source: Catholic Charities Omaha, Immigrant Legal Center, Legal Aid of Nebraska, Women's Center for Advancement (WCA)



"I was able to gain strength from the people who offered me their friendship and support, without ever asking questions about why I was so jumpy and didn't trust anyone. I was able to learn about healthy relationships in my classes, and saw people modeling what that looked like. **I was able to experience love and acceptance as a member of the LGBTQIA community, as well as someone who carried severe trauma.** And, even though I had other abusive relationships after her, the one thing that helped me navigate through and actively leave those relationships was friends who accepted me for who I am and didn't judge me for what I was or where I had been."



# CONCLUSIONS

**IN ORDER TO CREATE A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERYONE CAN LIVE FREE FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, WE MUST WORK COLLABORATIVELY.**

The extent of domestic violence that is happening in our community is far more than we can ever know. What we do know is that there is a need to support survivors and hold offenders accountable.

The following considerations could help make an impact in our community:



### BE TRAUMA INFORMED

by training all professionals who respond to domestic violence to understand trauma.



### IDENTIFY UNIQUE SOLUTIONS

to reduce repeat offenses and better hold offenders accountable.



### ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY

of safety tools, such as protection orders, so they are accessible for victims.



### INCREASE CAPACITY

in the criminal justice system based on the increase in arrests and charges. Increase services and advocacy to ensure every victim who reaches out gets the help they need.



### ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

that holds offenders accountable and keeps victims safe.



### FUND VICTIM SERVICES

especially legal services to make these more accessible to victims.



### CREATE OPTIONS

for victims for housing and long-term sustainability.



### IMPLEMENT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

that teach youth and young adults about healthy relationships and consent.



### SET STANDARDS

for responding to domestic violence, and **HOLD EACH OTHER ACCOUNTABLE** to follow those standards.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCES

**If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence and needs assistance, there is help available. Services and resources are available throughout the community.**

## LOCAL

- **CATHOLIC CHARITIES IOWA** (*Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Program*)  
(Pottawattamie County)  
712.328.0266 | [www.CatholicCharitiesDM.org](http://www.CatholicCharitiesDM.org)
- **CATHOLIC CHARITIES OMAHA** (The Shelter)  
402.558.5700 | [www.CCOmaha.org](http://www.CCOmaha.org)
- **HEARTLAND FAMILY SERVICE** (Sarpy County)  
800.523.3666 | [www.HeartlandFamilyService.org](http://www.HeartlandFamilyService.org)
- **WOMEN'S CENTER FOR ADVANCEMENT** (Douglas County)  
402.345.7273 | [www.WCAOmaha.org](http://www.WCAOmaha.org)

If you are a survivor of domestic violence who would like to connect with other survivors or use your voice and experience to inform the system, please contact:

- **SURVIVORS RISING**  
402.999.2725 | [www.SurvivorsRising.org](http://www.SurvivorsRising.org)

To report a domestic violence crime to law enforcement, call 911. Additional resources are available at [www.DomesticViolenceOmaha.com](http://www.DomesticViolenceOmaha.com).

## STATEWIDE

Find other Nebraska domestic/violence sexual assault programs at:

- **NEBRASKA COALITION TO END SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**  
[www.NebraskaCoalition.org](http://www.NebraskaCoalition.org)

## NATIONAL

- **NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE**  
800.799.7233 | [www.TheHotline.org](http://www.TheHotline.org) (for online chat and resources)

If you are under 25, learn more about domestic/sexual violence online at:

- **LOVE IS RESPECT**  
Text LOVEIS to 22522 | [www.LovelsRespect.org](http://www.LovelsRespect.org)

# GLOSSARY

**Arrests/Cases:** In this context, arrests refer to on-scene arrests and arrests issued by warrant. The number of arrests directly equals the number of cases as each case is only counted once for this purpose, regardless of whether the case was split into multiple felony and misdemeanor charges.

**Cases Charged:** This refers to cases identified by prosecutors as domestic violence and charged.

**Case Review:** This refers to the review process by prosecution to determine charges. A case has been or is currently being reviewed when it has an open date, or the date that an arrest was reviewed or received for review in the county attorney's office.

**Charge vs. Conviction:** This refers to charges as any instance in which the defendant is formally accused of a crime. Cases convicted are those in which the defendant is found guilty.

**Convictions:** Convictions include domestic violence cases where at least one charge is convicted at trial or plead guilty, even when amended from the original charge.

**Domestic Violence Cases Disposed:** Disposed cases refers to all cases that came to a conclusion, including cases found guilty, dismissed or acquitted.

**Domestic Violence-Related 911 Calls:** These include all calls classified as domestic violence calls by 911 operators as well as those identified as domestic violence calls by law enforcement. However, note that upon responding, law enforcement may judge that contrary to an operator's coding, the call did not actually relate to domestic violence.

**Ex parte:** Judges have the option of granting a protection order immediately without a hearing, or ex parte, because they believe the victim needs immediate protection. The offender may still request a hearing in order to attempt to provide evidence as to why the order should not be placed. The ex parte order will still be in effect pending this hearing.

**Felony Domestic Violence Charge:** In the state of Nebraska, domestic violence misdemeanor charges include crimes with penalties over one year in jail and \$1,000 fines. The penalties vary depending on the crime. Some domestic violence cases are enhanceable to felonies. This means that the first time a person is convicted of a misdemeanor, such as Violation of Protection Order or Domestic Violence Assault 3rd Degree, it is a misdemeanor. However, additional new cases for the same crime will be charged as felonies.

**Legal Services:** Refers to those both free and domestic violence-related provided by Nebraska Legal Aid, Immigrant Legal Center, Women's Center for Advancement (WCA) and Catholic Charities Omaha.

**Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Charge:** In Nebraska, domestic violence misdemeanor charges are charges that have a maximum penalty of no more than one year in jail or \$1,000 fine. Some misdemeanor charges have lower maximum penalties.

**Other Agency Arrests:** This refers to arrests that did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Omaha Police Department or the Douglas County Sheriff. In these cases, the responding agencies include local police departments of Bennington, Waterloo, Boys Town, Ralston and Valley as well as University of Nebraska Omaha and Metro Community College Police Departments.

**Probable Cause:** Reasonable belief that a person committed a crime which is supported by sufficient knowledge and facts. Law enforcement must meet this standard in order to make an arrest.

**Repeat Victim:** An individual is counted as having previously been a victim if they were listed as a victim on a domestic violence case that was charged.

**Standard of Proof:** Prosecution must be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the crime occurred in order to move forward with a case. This is a higher standard than the law enforcement probable cause standard required for arrest.

**Trauma Informed:** Refers to interactions with victims that understand and recognize the impact of trauma, including brain processes and behaviors that may be a result of the trauma, and respond in a way that supports victims and promotes safety.

**Warrant Arrests:** These are arrests that did not occur when the incident happened, typically because the offender isn't there when law enforcement arrives. A warrant was requested and when the offender is found, or has law enforcement contact for another reason, such as a traffic violation, then they will be arrested for the domestic violence crime. These arrests can happen days, weeks or months later or, in rare cases, years.

# CITATIONS

- <sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2012 <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/index.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control, Homicides for Adult Women – and the Role of Intimate Partner Violence, 2017 [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6628a1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6628a1\\_w](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6628a1.htm?s_cid=mm6628a1_w).
- <sup>3</sup> Violence Policy Center. (2012). American roulette: Murder-suicide in the United States. Retrieved from [www.vpc.org/studies/amroul2012.pdf](http://www.vpc.org/studies/amroul2012.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J. et al. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from multisite case control study. *American journal of public health*, 93(7), 1089-1097.
- <sup>5</sup> Nebraska Revised Statutes § 28-323.
- <sup>6</sup> See Nebraska Revised Statutes § 28-311.09 for harassment orders, § 28-311.11 for sexual assault protection orders, and § 42-925 for domestic abuse protection orders.

*Criminal Justice data represented in this report was provided by the Omaha Police Department, Douglas County Sheriff's Office, Douglas County Jail Booking System and Douglas County Attorney's Office Case Management System as provided by DOTCOMM, the City/County data management agency, in addition to Douglas County 911 Communications.*

*Protection Order data was provided by Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts JUSTICE Case Management System.*

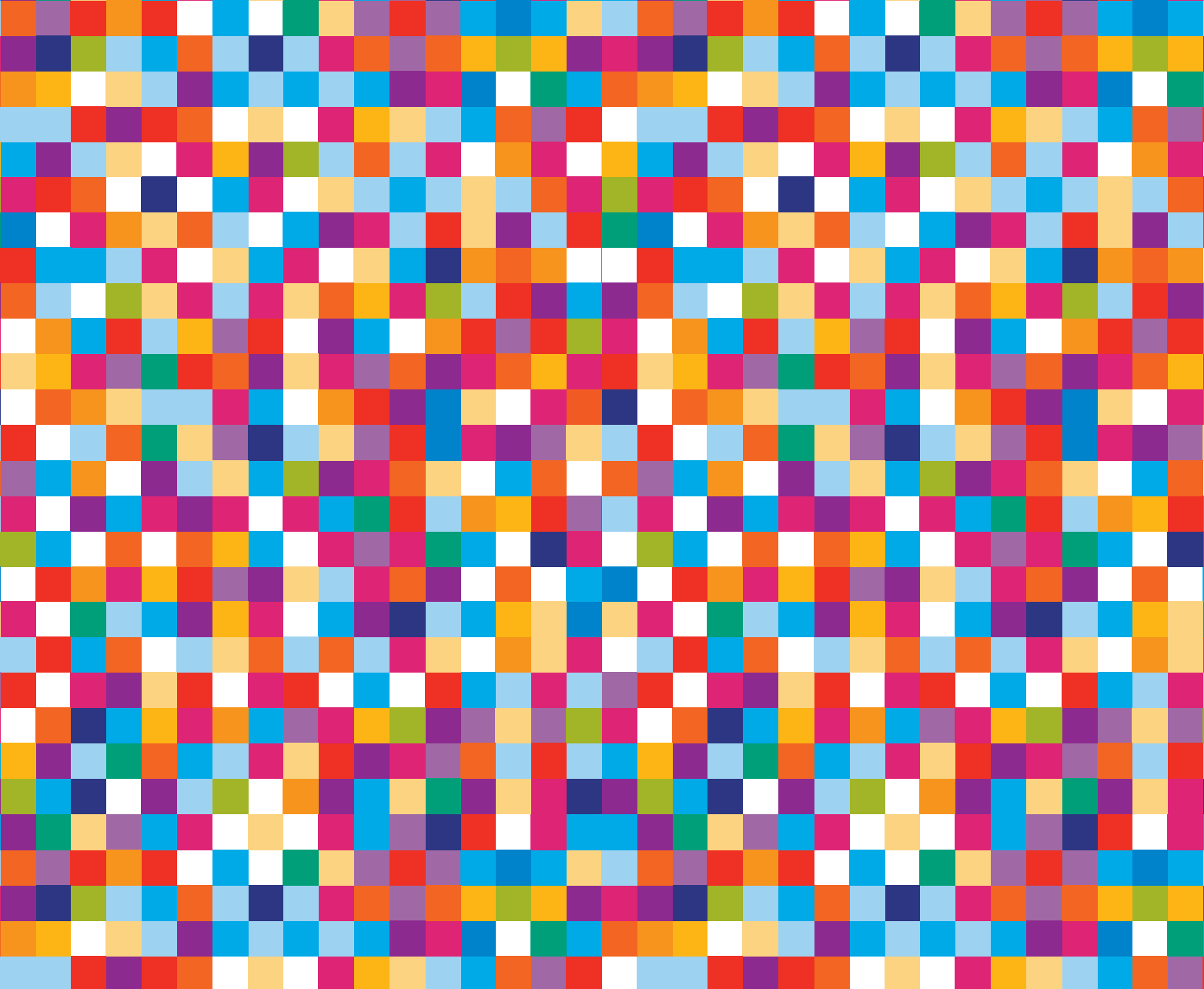
*Victims and legal services data was provided individually by each victim and legal service program identified in the report: Catholic Charities Omaha The Shelter, Catholic Charities Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program, Heartland Family Service, Immigrant Legal Center, Legal Aid of Nebraska and the Women's Center for Advancement (WCA).*

*Other significant contributions to this report were provided by HTI Labs, who conducted analysis for all criminal justice and protection order data contained in this report and Michelle Patterson, who compiled victim service data and supporting language.*

## HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT:

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