

**Maricopa Association of Government
Domestic Violence Protocol Evaluation Project
Victim Focus Groups Summary**

Victims' experiences with law enforcement and the courts provide important insights to consider when assessing domestic violence protocols. Between April and July 2012, seven focus groups were held with 63 victims of domestic violence. Each group answered questions about their experiences with law enforcement, victim advocates and the courts. Victims' thoughts, feelings, and experiences were recorded. This summary is offered to relay the perceptions of victims related to their personal experiences with law enforcement and the courts.

Successes

Law Enforcement:

- Showing Compassion
 - Working with a detective who understood domestic violence.
 - Detective was helpful and continues to help victim navigate the system.
 - Arresting officer testified before the Grand Jury and gave victim his cell phone number.
 - 911 dispatcher was nice and helpful.
 - Sitting with victim and really listening.
 - Receiving empathy and understanding.
 - Took the situation seriously.
 - Police were good to the victim.
 - Officer stayed with victim in the Emergency Room.
 - Police offered to check stalking victim's home when she returned.
- Collecting Evidence
 - Separating victim and abuser on-scene.
 - Took pictures and collected evidence.
- Giving Resources
 - Giving victim resources.
 - Information about resources given to victim by police who served the Order of Protection.
 - Detective called victim the day after the incident and gave her resources.

Victim Advocates:

- Felt lucky in making connections with the Family Advocacy Center.
- Court advocates try to hold it all together. They have a hard job!
- Had absolutely great advocate!
- Advocate helped victim prepare to represent herself in court.
- Receiving counseling through the Family Advocacy Center.
- Awareness of groups of people who would understand and believe me.

Courts:

- Justice was served when the court dismissed everything against the victim.
- Easy to complete form for Order of Protection.
- Getting a judge that understands domestic violence.

Insights

For Law Enforcement:

- Evidence Collection
 - On-scene response should interview the victim and abuser separately.
 - Inadequate collection of evidence (evidence is not collected and left in the house).
 - Pictures of injuries are not being taken consistently.
 - Emails and texts are refused as evidence.
 - Officers are refusing to provide translators.
 - All witnesses, including children, are not being interviewed.
 - Weapons are left in the home.
 - Misinformation about the court process is prevalent.
- Demeanor of Law Enforcement
 - Not listening.
 - Not compassionate.
 - Ignoring.
 - Blaming.
 - Rushed.
 - Not taking situation seriously.
 - Not remaining neutral.
 - Assuming legal status.
 - Judgmental.
- Unfair Advantage for Abusers
 - Officers tend to side with abuser.
 - Officers only believe the abuser.
 - Believing the abuser because he is calmer.
 - Punishing the victim for defending herself.
 - Abuser allowed to remain in the home.
- Dependents (children/pets)
 - Victims feel threatened by police when told children will be placed with CPS.
 - Not stepping in when the abuser takes the children.
- Training Needs
 - Use open-ended questions.
 - Look for abuse without physical signs.
 - Recognize self-defense injuries.

- Orders of Protection
 - Improve the process to serve an Order of Protection.
 - Some victims were told to serve it themselves.
 - Others could not get assistance to serve it.
 - Improve the process to enforce an Order of Protection.
 - Do not require victims to have a copy.
 - Do not downplay the importance.
- Others
 - Often times, the victim is told to leave the home.
 - Police not following through.
 - Victim is not allowed to get dressed.
 - Report not written/filed.
 - Getting the run around.
 - Not counting priors convictions of the abuser.
 - Not getting both sides of the story.
 - Inconsistent and inaccurate guiding information.
 - Takes too long to get search warrant.
 - Not looking at history of violence.
 - Would like the option to speak with a female officer.
 - Fears regarding law enforcement and/or authority

For Victim Advocates:

- Need more information about available resources.
 - Counseling.
 - Safety planning.
 - Housing.
 - Transportation.
 - Financial assistance for medications.
 - Landlord/Tenant Act.
- Others
 - Need an advocate.
 - Need help to navigate the system.
 - Need to work more closely with faith communities.

For Courts:

- Victim Notification
 - Lack of notification when abuser is released.
 - Lack of information and coordination with probation system.
- Unfair Advantage for Abusers
 - No accountability for abuser.
 - Victim is forced to testify in front of abuser in court.

- Abusers' rights upheld at expense of victim.
- Dependents (children/pets)
 - Children taken away from mother because she is staying in shelter.
 - Giving custody to abuser.
 - Not enforcing child endangerment when pregnant women are abused.
 - Ordering visitation with the abuser.
- Orders of Protection
 - Improve process to obtain an Order of Protection.
 - Need more space on forms.
 - Don't position computer so victim's back is to the door.
- Others
 - Penalties are too light.
 - Lack of evidence to proceed with prosecution of the case.
 - Lack of legal representation makes the process daunting to the victim.
 - The court process is long.
 - Lack of court staffing. Vacant positions are being left unfilled.
 - No empathy from judges.
 - Support and resources are minimal.
 - Gap between criminal court and family court is too wide.
 - Negative experience with mediation.

For All

- Awareness of Personal Impact of Domestic Violence
 - Isolation.
 - Limited support system.
- Training Needs
 - Need for sensitivity training.
 - Need for more awareness.
 - Be consistent with application of protocols.
 - Need training on unique aspects of assisting older adult victims (likely to cover for other family members, think of family before self, spiritual shame).
- Orders of Protection
 - Misinformation about what is needed to get an Order of Protection, what it covers, and how it works.
- Overall Process
 - Takes too long.
 - Repetitive.
 - Abusive.
 - Too complicated.

- Lack of coordination among municipalities, such as files and information not being shared.

- Quotes from Victims
 - “(Domestic violence) changed my life forever. It is a fabric of me but not who I am.”
 - “Why does it have to get to the point one of us has to die?”
 - “There were times I would beg him to kill me and end it...just end it...”
 - “What is it going to take to change the system? In Denver, it took the death of a victim on the court steps. Is that what it is going to take here?”
 - “We don’t have to fight for our lives by ourselves.”
 - “Police cannot do their job and be an advocate. They need the help of advocates. They are just there to make it stop.”
 - “If police are afraid going into domestic violence situations, what about our safety? They have guns and protective gear...we have nothing.”
 - “I’m doing everything I’m supposed to be doing. I get nothing and he gets away with it.”