

# AN OVERVIEW OF THE STATE OF Domestic Violence in Douglas County

The first *State of Domestic Violence in Douglas County* was published in 2019 and covered criminal legal system data from 2015 through 2017. **This project expands on the initial report by including what victims can expect when they enter the criminal legal system and more recent data through 2022.** By publishing this report in a new online and interactive format, we hope to make it more accessible and allow everyone to learn about the criminal legal system, domestic violence and how to better support victims.

**This work will continue and grow going forward.**

**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 domestic violence and the criminal legal system, there is a need to intersect domestic violence with gender-based violence.

**Victims of domestic violence must be supported without judgment and provided resources to meet their needs by every agency they encounter in the systemic response to domestic violence.** This includes law enforcement officers responding to a 911 call, judges conducting a hearing on a protection order or an advocate providing confidential crisis counseling. Just the same, offenders must be held accountable for their behavior by every agency they encounter in the system.

**National evidence-based practices support a multi-agency approach to domestic violence.** When victims engage with the criminal legal system and are surrounded by or 'wrapped up' by agencies and supported throughout their involvement, they identify positive experiences and a willingness to participate in the criminal legal process. In turn, there is a greater ability to hold offenders accountable and create communities that are safe from gender-based violence.

While the data in this report focuses primarily on the criminal legal system, we know it provides a limited view of the complexity of domestic violence in our community. We have heard from many survivors who experienced further harm while navigating the criminal legal system. We also know that many survivors, particularly those with marginalized identities, are often failed by our current systems. We continue to examine how we as an organization can continue to adapt our approach in response to this feedback and research.

**As victims' experiences are integral to understanding the successes and challenges of the system, we must continue to consult with them on how to better support people experiencing domestic violence and make substantial changes.** Their stories educate us on the growth in our systems of response, as well as shed light on the persisting challenges in the system response to the needs of victims.

Approximately 25 agencies in Douglas County collaborate on a regular basis as part of a Domestic Violence Community Response Team (CRT) 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 local and statewide level.

The Women's Fund made the choice to not include racial/ethnic demographic data within this report. Due to a wide variety of systemic issues, racial dynamics evidenced in criminal legal system data are not a reliable proxy for understanding which demographic group tends to have experiences with domestic violence. As a starting point to understand more about racial dynamics and domestic violence, please see: Ragavan, M. I., Thomas, K. A., Fulambarker, A., Zaricor, J., Goodman, L. A., & Bair-Merritt, M. H. (2020). Exploring the Needs and Lived Experiences of Racial and Ethnic Minority Domestic Violence Survivors Through Community-Based Participatory Research: A Systematic Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(5), 946–963. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018813204>