

23. Domestic Violence with Children Present

What It Is

Domestic violence is defined as intimate partner violence occurring inside or outside the home, which includes violence between spouses, individuals in dating relationships, and former partners or spouses. Shown below are the number of domestic violence calls for law enforcement assistance, and the number of those calls where children were present in the home.

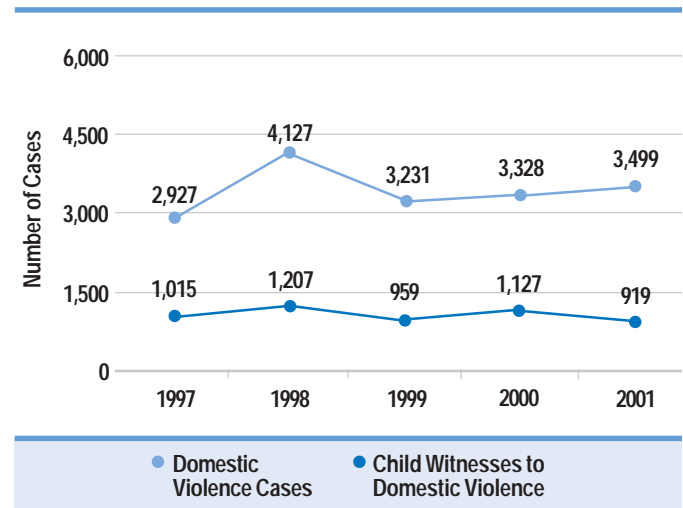
Why It Is Important

As with child abuse and neglect, domestic violence occurs in all socioeconomic groups, and cuts across lines of ethnicity, culture and education. Risk factors include parental substance abuse, social isolation, and the perpetrator or victim's history of experiencing domestic violence as a child. Domestic violence rarely occurs as an isolated event, but instead involves a recurrent pattern of power and control, which often increases in severity over time. In households with domestic violence where children are present, children are almost always witnesses to family domestic violence at some point. Child witnesses may exhibit a wide range of problems, including low self-esteem, aggression, depression, anxiety, learning difficulties, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Children who witness family violence are also more likely to be involved in violent relationships as teens and adults, or have trouble forming intimate relationships.

How We Are Doing

Between 1997 and 2001, there were 17,112 domestic violence related reports entered into the Sheriff's Domestic Violence Tracking System. This figure represents approximately two-thirds of all domestic violence related calls for assistance in the county. In 2001, children were present in 919 or 26% of these incidents, down from 1,015 incidents or 35% in 1997. This is most likely an undercount of the number of children who were exposed to domestic violence, because other children who are often living in the home are not always present during a specific incident.

Figure 23.1 — Total Number of Contra Costa County Domestic Violence Related Incidents and Incidents Where Children Were Present at the Time



Source: County of Contra Costa, Office of the Sheriff, Contra Costa County Domestic Violence Tracking System, 2003.

Note: This data is obtained via Contra Costa Domestic Violence Tracking System which has the participation of all Contra Costa County law enforcement agencies via the Police Chiefs Association.