

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STRATEGIC PLAN

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PUBLIC SAFETY
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**SHELBY COUNTY COORDINATED
COMMUNITY RESPONSE**



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SHELBY COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

A Coordinated Community Response (CCR) is an approach that brings different agencies and organizations together to combat the domestic violence crisis, including law enforcement, prosecutors, victim advocacy groups, healthcare providers, and community-based non-profit service organizations to reduce gaps in victim support (Allen, 2005; Shorey et al., 2014). This allows victims to be connected to multiple services through a more centralized system, as opposed to going to each one on their own.

In Shelby County, the University of Memphis Public Safety Institute (PSI) currently serves as the convener of the Coordinated Community Response. With this, the PSI facilitates collaboration among agencies, supports ongoing communication, and helps with the development and implementation of strategies that are meant to improve the response to domestic violence. Additionally, PSI organizes meetings and help guide discussion to improve the community's response to domestic violence. As part of its responsibilities, it has been charged by the TN Office of Criminal Justice Programs to oversee development of a strategic plan to address domestic violence needs.

Problem Statement

Domestic violence continues to be a major public safety and community issue in Memphis and Shelby County. According to data from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) (2026), the City of Memphis reported 3,103 domestic violence offenses during the first three months of 2026, and Shelby County reported 3,542 offenses during the same period. Although rates have decreased compared to earlier years, the number of cases remains high and continues to place high pressure on the criminal justice system, victim services agencies, and other community organizations/agencies.

Similarly, data shows that firearms are consistently playing a crucial role in domestic violence incidents in Memphis. January-March of this year had 205 reported domestic violence aggravated assaults involving a gun. According to Memphis Police Department, this accounts for 51.5% of reported domestic violence aggravated assaults during that period (Memphis Police Department, 2026). The same stands for other years - 54.8% in 2025 and 50.8% in 2023 and 2024 (Memphis Police Department, 2026). This is especially concerning because there is a strong connection between firearms and intimate partner homicide.

Data from courts continue to highlight the ongoing challenges that are connected with domestic violence cases in Shelby County. During the months of January-March of this year, there were 1,538 intimate partner domestic violence cases referred through General Sessions Domestic Violence Court (Shelby County District Attorney's Office, 2026). Of those, 676 involved defendants with a prior domestic violence arrest but no conviction, and only 21

involved defendants with a prior domestic violence arrest with a conviction (Shelby County District Attorney's Office, 2026). The trend remains the same throughout previous years, where the number of prior arrests with no conviction is much higher than the number of prior arrests with convictions. Data also show that many cases do not result in convictions and are instead dismissed, therefore creating concerns of repeat offending, victim safety, and accountability.

Lastly, data from the Domestic Violence Criminal Court reflect the same trend with indicted cases. During the first three months of 2026, there were 251 total intimate partner domestic violence cases indicted, with 32 of those defendants having a prior domestic violence indictment with no conviction, and 10 individuals having both a prior domestic violence indictment and conviction (Shelby County District Attorney's Office, 2026). This shows that there is a major concern regarding repeat domestic violence involvement. Because of this, there is a strong need for better coordination across agencies, improved victim services, and strategies that target high-risk and repeat domestic violence cases in Shelby County.

The following strategies have been identified through CCR discussion to strengthen coordination, improve victim safety, and address gaps in the community's response to domestic violence. This strategic plan builds on a prior domestic violence strategic plan in Shelby County. Many of the agencies and organizations that are currently participating in the CCR were also involved in earlier versions of the task force. Though some priorities have remained consistent over time, current discussions are focusing on identifying ongoing system gaps, improving coordination between agencies, and addressing any challenges that impact victims and service providers.

Law enforcement, the courts, prosecutors, advocacy organizations, healthcare providers, and community service agencies play a vital role in responding to domestic violence cases. When these organizations/agencies work together, victims are more likely to receive consistent support and timely access to any resources they may need.

During CCR discussions, members stated the importance of creating clear accountability mechanisms for agencies that participate in the coordinated response. Developing a process to ensure accountability as a priority can help strengthen collaboration by setting clear expectations for how lead agencies and their partners assume responsibilities for implementation of specific strategies and work together and respond to challenges that will pop up during implementation. Research that has examined CCRs have indicated that effective collaboration requires accountability among the agencies. When law enforcement, advocacy leaders, prosecutors, and other service providers work together under clear procedures, communication tends to improve and agencies can coordinate services for victims better (Shorey et al., 2014). Studies examining domestic violence coordinated community responses have also relied heavily on the importance of accountability (Sullivan, 2018). This helps to provide a consistent way for agencies to address the challenges that will arise during collaboration.

Working with lead implementing agencies and their partners, the CCR will establish key metrics for each strategy as a way of both measuring progress and addressing roadblocks. Having the space to have a transparent process for addressing concerns can reinforce trust among organizations and help ensure that the CCR continues to focus on having effective and victim-centered service delivery and offender accountability.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES AND JUSTIFICATIONS

Strategy 1: Streamline the process to distribute the Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) to entities centered around bail and other court decisions through the implementation of an electronic LAP. LEAD: YWCA

Accurate and consistent identification of high-risk domestic violence cases is essential to improving victim safety and informing court decision-making. The Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) is designed to identify victims at high risk of serious injury and homicide and connect them to advocacy services at the earliest point of contact. However, its effectiveness depends on consistent use, standardized implementation, and reliable information sharing across agencies.

During CCR discussions, members emphasized the need to ensure that all law enforcement entities in Shelby County, including the Memphis, Bartlett, Germantown, Collierville, and Millington Police Departments, and the Shelby County Sheriff's Office, are using the correct and most current version of the LAP. An incorrect form had previously been circulated, creating inconsistencies in documentation; however, that has since been corrected.

Members also discussed the importance of:

- Ensuring that different levels within the court system have access to the LAP form and
- Response systems being reliable, including ensuring that the LAP hotline is consistently answered and coordinated with advocacy partners.

The proposed shift toward an electronic LAP system (LAP 2.0) reflects a need for standardization, improved access, and stronger coordination across agencies.

Empirical Justification

Risk screening conducted at the time of a law enforcement response improves identification of victims at a higher risk of serious injury or homicide (Messing et al., 2015). In jurisdictions where the LAP has been implemented consistently, victims identified as high risk were more likely to engage with advocacy services and participate in safety planning. Having this type of early intervention is vital, because the time frame that immediately follows police response is often one of the most dangerous times for victims.

Evaluations conducted by the National Institute of Justice further indicates that LAP implementation strengthens coordination between law enforcement and advocacy organizations

(Messing et al., 2014). A risk identification process reduces variation in how officers respond to domestic violence incidents and increases consistency in referrals. When lethality screening becomes a routine in the response, it reduces the likelihood of officer discretion and improves the likelihood that high-risk victims are flagged appropriately. This is important in jurisdictions with multiple law enforcement agencies operating within the same county, because inconsistent screening across agencies can question reliability and reduce its credibility in court settings (Campbell et al., 2009). Electronic tools can improve documentation accuracy, reduce form errors, and enhance information sharing between agencies.

Research on structured risk tools, including a danger assessment, show that these approaches improve the ability to identify cases at risk for severe or fatal outcomes compared to relying on professional judgment alone (Campbell et al., 2009). These tools identify specific indicators that are associated with intimate partner homicide, such as escalating violence, access to firearms, threats to kill, and prior strangulation (Campbell et al., 2009; Spencer & Stith, 2020). A meta-analysis of intimate partner homicide cases found that access to a firearm and a history of strangulation were among the strongest predictors of lethal outcomes (Spencer Stith, 2020). When these risk indicators are documented consistently, they can help to determine charging decisions, bail, protective order proceedings, and sentencing decisions. Without documentation, critical risk factors may not be communicated effectively across agencies and the courts.

Transitioning to an electronic LAP can further strengthen reliability and coordination. Electronic systems reduce documentation errors, eliminate outdated forms, and allow for more information being shared between law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, and advocacy partners. Digitizing also allows for improved data tracking, which can support policy evaluation and transparency. In counties with multiple jurisdictions, electronic tools reduce confusion about form versions and ensure that all entities are operating from the same framework when identifying high-risk cases.

Shelby County Context

Many law enforcement agencies currently use the Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) to help identify high-risk domestic violence cases. The assessment is used by officers during domestic violence incidents to identify victims who may be at an increased risk of serious injury or homicide.

CCR discussions have focused on making sure that all agencies are using the correct and most updated version of the assessment. Implementing an electronic copy of the LAP and improving access to the form across agencies and the courts may help increase consistency in how risk is identified.

Strategy 2: Establish and maintain a reinvigorated Domestic Violence Rapid Response Team. LEAD: U.S. ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

High-risk domestic violence cases require consistent coordination across agencies. When law enforcement, prosecutors, advocates, and service providers are not aligned, information that is crucial to help the victim can be overlooked. In cases involving escalating violence, gaps in communication can increase the risk of serious injury or even homicide.

During CCR discussions, members agreed that the Domestic Violence Rapid Response Team (DVRRT) should be restructured to ensure better coordination and consistency. Concerns were raised that not all relevant agencies were included, the team had been Memphis-centered as opposed to including all of Shelby County, and members weren’t sure how cases were being selected. There was also discussion about the lack of reported outcomes and limited transparency regarding the team’s impact.

CCR members discussed shifting the DVRRT toward a more structured high-risk case review model. Proposed revisions included:

- Involving more agencies across Shelby County,
- Improving the use of Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) forms in selecting cases,
- Ensuring consistent participation from law enforcement and the DA’s Office, and
- Strengthening coordination and follow-through.

Empirical Justification

Research shows that coordinated, multidisciplinary responses improve identification of high-risk victims and strengthen intervention efforts (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005). When agencies operate in isolation, warning signs may be missed due to the necessary tools not being connected across systems.

Studies examining the LAP show that structured lethality screening can improve identification of high-risk victims and strengthen connections to advocacy and safety planning. In a quasi-experimental evaluation of LAP implementation, Messing and his coauthors found that the LAP was associated with improved safety-related outcomes and increased help-seeking among victims (Messing et al., 2015). A National Institute of Justice evaluation similarly highlights how law enforcement use of the LAP can strengthen coordinated responses by creating a standardized process for identifying high-risk cases and connecting victims to services in real time (Messing et al., 2014).

Research also indicates that structured and consistent justice-system intervention approaches can improve accountability and response effectiveness (Feder and Wilson, 2005). For DVRRT particularly, clear case selection processes, consistent participation, and regular communication across agencies are necessary to ensure high-risk cases receive attention and follow-through. Multidisciplinary case review approaches are widely used in domestic violence

coordinated community responses to improve information sharing, identify gaps within the system, and better the responses to high-risk cases (Clark et al., 1996; Shorey et al., 2014; Storer et al., 2013).

Shelby County Context

In Shelby County, agencies have previously worked together through the DVRRT to review high-risk cases and coordinate responses among partner organizations. These meetings brought together representatives from law enforcement, prosecution, and advocacy organizations to discuss cases and identify ways to strengthen victim safety. However, CCR discussions noted that the previous DVRRT model faced challenges related to coordination, participation from agencies across the county, and consistency in case selection.

An example of an agency that has not been involved previously—and possibly never asked—in the U.S. Attorney’s Office. Yet, that office is uniquely positioned to handle cases involving repeat offenders who possessed a firearm and/or ammunition when charged. (Data shows that over 50 percent of reported domestic violence aggravated assaults involve firearms.) Revising the model and shifting toward a structured high-risk case review may help strengthen communication and collaboration with the agencies’ way to responding to domestic violence incidents.

Strategy 3: Obtain funding for shelter and housing repairs, including funding for construction of additional emergency housing. LEAD: TO BE DETERMINED

Access to safe and stable housing is one of the most urgent needs for victims of domestic violence. When survivors leave abusive situations, they often face immediate housing instability. Without short-term and long-term housing options, victims may feel forced to return to unsafe environments due to financial pressure, lack of shelter space, or limited support systems.

During CCR discussions, members emphasized the need to identify flexible funding streams that could support a broader range of housing needs.

CCR members identified several priorities within this strategy, including:

- Funding to house victims in hotels or alternative locations for up to 10 days, beyond the space that is available at the Y
- Increasing awareness of the Safe at Home program
- Creating more longer-term housing solutions such as transitional housing
- Addressing housing needs for non-citizens and immigrant victims
- Developing a group proposal to city or county leadership for housing dollars

Empirical Justification

Housing instability does not only impact physical safety, it also impacts mental health. Survivors of domestic violence already experience elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to the general population (Lagdon et al., 2014). When survivors face housing uncertainty after leaving abuse, symptoms often worsen due to stress, financial insecurity, and fear of continued victimization. Financial instability can almost limit a survivor's ability to secure independent housing, therefore increasing the likelihood of returning to unsafe environments.

Research shows that stable housing is strongly linked to improved mental health outcomes for survivors (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). When survivors have access to safe, consistent housing, they have less trauma symptoms, increased feelings of control, and improved emotional stability (Goodman & Smyth, 2011). In contrast, unstable housing increases psychological distress and may contribute to survivors returning to abusive partners as a coping or survival mechanism (Baker et al., 2010).

Because of this, many domestic violence service organizations have adopted housing-first, survivor-centered approaches that prioritize immediate safety and flexible housing support as a foundation for recovery (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). Flexible funding models, including hotel placement, rental assistance, relocation funds, and repair assistance, allow service providers to respond to individual safety and mental health needs rather than applying restrictive eligibility rules. When DV victims are safely housed, they are better able to engage in counseling, employment, court process, and long-term recovery.

Shelby County Context

In Shelby County, limited shelter capacity, high poverty rates, and additional barriers for immigrant communities increase the urgency of this issue. Without expanded housing resources, survivors face an increased risk of re-victimization and ongoing trauma. While the Shelby County District Attorney's Office recently received grant funding to assist with housing repairs, those funds are limited to individuals involved in the criminal justice system. As a result, victims without current court involvement may be unable to access critical housing repair assistance, despite facing ongoing safety risks.

Additionally, local efforts are looking to expand shelter capacity for domestic violence victims and their families. Current funding initiatives are trying to renovate and expand the upper area of the YWCA shelter facility to better accommodate larger families. The proposed project, which is estimated to cost approximately \$750,000 and includes the installation of a freight elevator, would add six to eight additional rooms and increase the shelter capacity by up to 24 beds. Though this project is not intended to provide transitional housing, it reflects the ongoing efforts within Shelby County to address immediate shelter needs and improve access to safe housing for victims of domestic violence.

Strategy 4: Change state law to allow judicial discretion on a case by case basis to impose a reasonable wait period before a dismissed domestic violence case is expunged, possibly up to one year. LEAD: MEMPHIS SHELBY CRIME COMMISSION

Expungement laws allow certain criminal charges to be removed from an individual's record after a case is resolved. While these laws can support rehabilitation and future opportunities, the timing of expungement can affect how information is used within the criminal justice system. In domestic violence cases, access to prior incident information can help courts, law enforcement, and service providers better assess potential risk.

During CCR discussions, members suggested looking into whether a reasonable waiting period should be in place before dismissed domestic violence cases become eligible for expungement. Domestic violence cases that are dismissed are not subject to expungement. Due to fear or intimidation, a large percentage of domestic violence cases are dismissed because victims either recant or fail to show when their testimony is critical. Having a waiting period could give the justice system additional time to identify patterns of repeat behavior and ensure that relevant case information remains available when making decisions related to victim safety and court proceedings.

Empirical Justification

Research on intimate partner violence shows that abusive behavior often happens repeatedly over time as opposed to a single incident. Studies that examined the patterns of domestic violence have found that prior incidents are often linked to future abuse, making past case information an important factor when assess risk (Campbell, 2017). When courts and law enforcement agencies have access to information about earlier incidents, they can better recognize patterns of escalation and respond in a timely manner.

Research on risk factors associated with severe domestic violence and intimate partner homicide also highlights the importance of documenting previous incidents and threats. Factors such as prior police involvement and repeated threats may indicate increased danger for victims (Spencer & Stith, 2018). Having that open access to records for a certain time can help the justice system consider these factors when making decisions related to bail and protective orders.

Many jurisdictions consider waiting periods before certain records become eligible for expungement. These waiting periods allow courts and other criminal justice system partners time to observe an individual's behavior and ensure that important case information remains available for a period before records are cleared (Kurlychek et al., 2006; National Reentry Resource Center, 2022).

Shelby County Context

In Tennessee, dismissed domestic violence cases can typically be expunged almost immediately (Tennessee Bureau of Investigation [TBI], n.d.). This immediate expungement may

limit the amount of time that prior case information remains accessible to courts, law enforcement, and service providers. As a result, identifying repeat behavior can become more challenging in the time shortly after a case is resolved.

Keeping access to this information for a specific period could support more informed decision-making related to risk assessment, bail considerations, and protective orders. A structured waiting period before expungement may also provide an opportunity to observe whether additional incidents happen, allowing the criminal justice system to respond more effectively and prioritize victim safety.

Strategy 5: Address the imbalance in the level of representation for offenders and victims in order of protection hearings. LEAD: TO BE DETERMINED

Orders of Protection (OPs) are an important legal tool used to help protect victims of domestic violence from further harm and they can restrict contact between the offender and the victim. However, victims seeking protection through the courts may face challenges navigating the legal process, especially when they do not have access to legal representation or advocacy support.

During CCR discussions, members communicated that there is an imbalance that can occur in OP hearings when offenders appear with legal representation while victims often appear without support. This imbalance may create additional stress for victims and make it harder for them to effectively present their experiences or even understand court procedures. Members noted that there is an importance in strengthening support services for victims who seek protective orders.

A few ideas that were communicated were:

- Increasing the number of victim advocates available at protective order court hearings
- Possibly creating virtual options for court appearances

Expanding advocacy support could help victims better understand the court process and access resources, while virtual options may reduce barriers such as transportation, work conflicts, or safety concerns when appearing in court.

Empirical Justification

Research on domestic violence court procedures indicate that victims often face barriers when navigating the legal system without support. Studies have shown that legal advocates can help victims better understand court procedures and increase their confidence when participating in hearings (Sullivan & Olsen, 2016). Advocates can also assist victims with safety planning and connecting them to additional services.

Research also emphasizes that court-based advocacy programs can improve victims' experiences within the system and increase access to protective orders. When advocates are

present in court, they can help victims prepare documentation, understand legal terminology, and communicate more effectively during hearings (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015). Having help with these services can reduce some of the stress and confusion victims experience when navigating legal processes alone.

Additionally, allowing virtual options for court appearances has been identified to reduce barriers for victims seeking legal protection. Remote appearances could make it easier for victims to attend hearings while addressing concerns related to safety, childcare, work, or transportation (Logan et al., 2006). Expanding virtual options for court appearances helps to reduce these barriers and allows victims to access legal protections more easily. Research examined the use of virtual hearings during COVID-19 and suggested that remote appearances can improve access to the court system for some survivors by allowing them to be attend hearings without the challenges that are associated with attending court in person (Johnson, 2022).

Shelby County Context

In Shelby County, victims seeking OPs must navigate the court process, which may involve filing petitions, attending hearings, and presenting information to the court. Some victims receive assistance from advocacy organizations, but the level of support available can vary depending on staffing and available resources. Increasing the number of advocates available in protective order courts and exploring virtual options for court appearances may help reduce barriers for victims and improve access to legal protections.

Strategy 6: Increase transparency in the dissemination of domestic violence caseload data. LEAD: DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

Access to accurate and timely data is a core component to understanding how domestic violence cases move through the criminal justice system. Data related to domestic violence caseloads can help agencies identify trends, monitor case outcomes, and better understand how the system is responding to victims and offenders. When this information is shared within organizations, it can help inform decision-making and improve policy and practice.

During CCR discussions, members stated the importance of improving transparency in how domestic violence caseload data are shared across agencies. Without consistent access to this information, it may be difficult for organizations to fully understand the scope of domestic violence cases within the community or identify potential gaps in service delivery.

Improving transparency in the dissemination of domestic violence case data may help strengthen collaboration within agencies, support more informed decision making, and allow partners to evaluate how the criminal justice system is responding to domestic violence cases over time. Regular data sharing can also support ongoing evaluation of system performance and help agencies assess whether current strategies are achieving the intended outcomes.

Empirical Justification

Research examining coordinated community responses highlights the importance of data sharing and information transparency within agencies participating. Access to reliable data allows organizations to better understand patterns of violence, identify service gaps, and evaluate whether interventions are effectively addressing the needs of victims (Shorey et al., 2014).

Data transparency also helps to strengthen accountability within CCRs. When agencies regularly review and share information about case outcomes, arrest patterns, and prosecution decisions, they can better identify areas where CCRs need improvement. This type of data-informed approach allows agencies to adjust policies and practices that may improve victim safety.

Shelby County Context

In Shelby County, several agencies collect data related to DV cases, including law enforcement agencies, judges, and the DA's office. The current available data include reported domestic violence offenses, the number of individuals charged, the number of those charged with prior arrests, and the number of those charged with prior convictions. Still not available are (1) a breakdown of reasons for dismissals and (2) sentencing lengths and conditions for those who either plead guilty or are found guilty.

CCR discussions have highlighted the importance of improving transparency in how this information is shared within organizations. Increasing access to domestic violence caseload data may help agencies better understand trends within the county and support more informed decision-making when developing strategies to address domestic violence.

Strategy 7: Increase coordination, collaboration, and timely responses to victims through the creation of a new Family Justice Center. LEAD: TO BE DETERMINED/ DISCUSSIONS UNDERWAY

Responding to domestic violence often requires victims to interact with multiple individuals and agencies, such as law enforcement, courts, advocacy organizations, healthcare providers, and social service agencies. When these services operate separately, victims may be required to travel to multiple locations, repeat their experiences numerous times, and navigate complex processes to receive assistance. These barriers can discourage victims from seeking help or continuing the process of obtaining protection and support.

During CCR discussions, members expressed support for establishing a new Family Justice Center that would bring key service providers together in a coordinated setting and be able to respond promptly when necessary to the needs of victims. Members discussed that centralized service models can simplify access to assistance and improve coordination among agencies responding to domestic violence. There was also discussion about the importance of learning from the challenges associated with the previous Family Safety Center and ensuring that

any future model includes sustainable funding and strong collaboration across participating organizations.

A centralized center with 24/7 response ability that brings together law enforcement, prosecutors, advocates, and service providers has the potential to reduce fragmentation in the response system and make it easier for victims to access multiple services in a single location.

Domestic violence incidents occur at all hours, often outside standard business operations. Victims frequently seek assistance during evenings, overnight hours, weekends, or holidays, times when access to services may be limited. The period immediately following a violent incident is frequently one of the most dangerous points for a victim. Delays in response can increase the risk of continued violence, escalation, or victim withdrawal from seeking assistance.

A fully coordinated 24/7 response model as part of a new Family Justice Center would ensure that victims identified as high-risk, specifically through LAP screening, are able to connect with a trained advocate immediately, regardless of when the incident takes place.

Empirical Justification

Research indicates that centralized service locations can improve accessibility and coordination for victims seeking assistance (Shorey et al., 2014). Family Justice Centers were developed to address the challenges victims face when navigating multiple agencies. By bringing together law enforcement, advocacy organizations, legal services, and social service providers, these centers allow victims to receive several types of assistance in one location as opposed to going to different locations on their own.

Studies examining coordinated responses have found that collaboration between agencies can improve victim engagement and strengthen communication among professionals responding to cases (Shorey et al., 2014). When professionals from multiple agencies work closely together, coordination tends to improve, which in turn can support more effective safety planning and service delivery.

Research consistently demonstrates also that prompt access to crisis services increases victim engagement and strengthens safety planning. Survivors are more likely to accept referrals and engage with advocacy services when support is offered at the time of crisis rather than delayed until regular business hours (Messing et al., 2015). The window immediately following law enforcement contact is a critical intervention point. Therefore, if advocacy services are not offered during that period, victims may decline follow-up contact or disengage due to fear of ongoing control from their abusive partners. Survivors of domestic violence experiencing acute trauma symptoms benefit from rapid access to emotional support, safety planning, and stabilization resources (Campbell, 2002).

Studies on coordinated community responses indicate that prompt collaboration between law enforcement and advocacy organizations improves continuity of care and reduces gaps in service delivery (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005). When crisis lines and advocacy services operate continuously, it strengthens the overall system response by making sure that referrals from law enforcement, hospitals, and courts can be acted upon without delay.

Additionally, counties with multiple jurisdictions require coordinated and after-hours response protocols to make sure there is consistency. Without an established 24/7 system, responses may vary depending on which law enforcement agency is involved or what time the incident occurs. A structured, around the clock response reduces instability and strengthens county-wide coordination.

Because of these factors, many coordinated community responses incorporate around-the-clock crisis services to make sure that victims can access support promptly following a violent incident.

Shelby County Context

In Shelby County, agencies responding to domestic violence already collaborate through the CCR, which brings together law enforcement, courts, advocacy partners, prosecutors, and service providers to discuss challenges and improve coordination. These meetings provide an opportunity for partner organizations to share information and identify ways to strengthen services for victims.

While this collaboration has improved communication across agencies, victims still need to navigate multiple organizations located throughout the community when seeking assistance. Establishing a new Family Justice Center with 24/7 response abilities would provide an opportunity to strengthen coordination among agencies responding to domestic violence and improve access to services for victims across Memphis and surrounding municipalities. A centralized location could help streamline referrals, improve communication among participating organizations, and reduce the burden placed on victims navigating multiple service systems.

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) plans to begin operating the Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) line on a 24/7 basis, and the Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center (CVRCC) currently maintains a 24/7 rape crisis line. While these developments represent significant progress, the broader discussion is centered on ensuring domestic violence victims across Shelby County have consistent access to crisis response and advocacy services during any time of day.

Strategy 8: Target at-risk populations with domestic violence awareness education. LEAD: MEMPHIS AREA WOMEN'S COUNCIL

Reducing domestic violence requires more than responding after the abuse has already happened and done damage. While coordinated system responses are crucial, long-term change

is heavily dependent on prevention efforts that start early and continue over time. Feelings about relationships, communication, and acceptable behavior begin forming during childhood and adolescence. Lacking the knowledge and education during these stages increases the chances of unhealthy norms becoming normalized and carried into adulthood.

During CCR discussions, members agreed that prevention strategies should remain a core component of the strategic plan. Members emphasized the importance of:

- Strengthening youth-focused programming that recognizes Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month,
- Developing a prevention framework that begins prior to high school,
- Creating a K-12 approach that teaches them about domestic violence, advocacy, boundaries, consent, and healthy relationships,
- Incorporating family engagement,
- Expanding digital and visual outreach, and
- Including more education that reflects the cultural diversity of Shelby County.

Empirical Justification

Comprehensive prevention efforts are commonly included as part of broader domestic violence response strategies, particularly when they focus on early intervention and skill building across multiple settings. Research consistently shows that adolescents who experience dating violence have an increased chance for experiencing or perpetrating intimate partner violence later in life (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013). This connection highlights the importance of intervening before unhealthy patterns become instilled. Prevention programs introduced in middle school or earlier tend to be more effective because beliefs about relationships and gender roles are still developing.

School-based programs that teach communication skills, boundary setting, consent, and bystander prevention have been shown to reduce attitudes that support violence and improve peer accountability (DeGue et al., 2014). Programs that occur over multiple sessions and are reinforced across grade levels demonstrate a stronger, more sustained outcome than a single event.

Promoting healthy relationship skills, engaging families and caregivers, and shifting community-level norms are key components of comprehensive violence prevention strategies (Niolon et al., 2017). Prevention initiatives that involve parents or caregivers along with youth education efforts strengthen skill reinforcement, therefore having consistent messaging across all environments. Similarly, prevention efforts that address community norms and beliefs about relationships can help reduce the acceptance of violence and support long-term behavioral change.

Additionally, media platforms play a central role in shaping adolescent understanding of relationships. Prevention strategies that incorporate digital content and peer-driven messaging has demonstrated an increased reach and relevance among younger people (DeGue et al., 2014). Because technology plays such a heavy role in modern relationships, including cyber dating abuse, prevention efforts should account for not only in-person but also online behaviors.

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