

**Study recommends major investment in DV infrastructure
as IPV homicides double in 3 years**

This report shares the results of UH-IRWGS's study of regional Domestic Violence [DV] Service Providers, based on interviews and group discussions with leaders of 12 local DV shelters and nonresidential agencies. It recommends significant community investment in expanded DV infrastructure coordination and staffing, to move from the current model of limited response to overwhelming demand to a model that allows the community to not only address DV cases more effectively but to analyze and address causes as well.

In addition, the report contains an initial aggregation of regional DV data – including data from some shelters, law enforcement, and nonresidential service providers (see Supplement). Future reports will provide more detail and include data from more sources.

Executive Summary

- Houston has a major problem with Domestic Violence assaults and homicides: Calls for Shelter and Calls for Service from the police are high, and IPV homicides doubled between 2019 and 2022, rising from 32 to 64 across the two largest police departments in Harris County (HPD and HCSO).
- Violence is rampant in this region, across ranks. As was indicated by the [recent IPV assault by the \(now former\) UT basketball coach](#) and January DV cases involving a [house set fire with family members within](#) and the [decapitation of a young immigrant bride](#).
- We need a stronger DV infrastructure to turn the tide.
- Based on qualitative interviews and group discussions with local DV service providers as well as local data analysis, this report recommends a significant strategic investment in strengthening the currently under-resourced DV service-provider collaborative. **A centralized coordination infrastructure, with administrative staff based both centrally and within individual agencies,** would enable DV providers across the region (shelters and nonresidential providers in collaboration with law enforcement, courts, and other social services agencies encountering DV) to operate and strategize collaboratively, improve and expand services, and address causes.
- While funds for direct services are essential, expanded **investment in DV infrastructure would be a game changer.**

- Currently, each provider operates on its own, creating inefficiencies at all levels: operational redundancies, inconsistent standards, a lack of unified voice on DV, and, because each is overtaxed with providing service to those at their door, an inability to see much beyond the immediate need.
- The collaborative needs a core administrative team, including **an Operations Manager, a Communications Coordinator, a Researcher/Evaluator and a Grant Writer**, based in the Harris County DV Coordinating Council. In addition, **expanded staffing** is needed within provider organizations to carry out collaborative initiatives. **An investment** for this purpose **of \$1,000,000 / year** for five years from local funders would be transformative.
- A smaller initial infrastructure investment would get change under way, but working by half measures as has long been the case in this region will not enable the real change needed. Over time, grant funding will increase, to cover costs.
- This **significant strategic investment** will allow providers to
 - **analyze and reframe their services & policies**
 - **deliver services more effectively**
 - **work with agencies** across the community to **address the causes of violence** in our region
 - **raise more funds** and **expand services**
 - **advocate for regional policy change** around the issues that give rise to DV

Newly Aggregated DV Data

- You can't fix a problem, if you don't know what it is. Due to costs and complexity, the limited DV data collected to date has not previously been combined to provide a full regional picture. **This groundbreaking report begins to aggregate local DV data.** Future reports will provide more detail and include data from more shelters, agencies & regional police departments, with a goal to inform response.
- The Covid emergency raised the level of domestic violence in the Houston area. And per HPD and HCSO data, identified Intimate Partner Violence **[IPV] homicides continued to rise after the lockdown ended—doubling** in their combined jurisdictions **between 2019 and 2022, rising from 32/year to 64/year** over that period. That's a 73% rise in HPD – and 160% in HCSO (a combined 100% rise). [See Figure S-3.]
- The rise **overlaps with the move to permit-less carry** which went into effect in Texas in September 2021. Between 2020 and 2022 **the number of HPD IPV homicides committed with a gun increased by 61%**, while the overall number of IPV homicides increased by 52%. While other factors may play in, the easy availability of guns puts

many women at risk for homicide, as well as for terroristic threats of homicide within IPV situations.

- While overall homicides and non-IPV FV homicides fell in 2022 in HPD data, **IPV homicides continued to rise.**
- **Calls for shelter** have also risen steadily since the lockdown, to rates above what they were prior to March 2020, and callers are regularly turned away for lack of space.
- Overall DV calls for service have fallen since 2020 in both HPD and HCSO, but numbers remain high: HPD received between **25,000 to 27,000 calls for service** around DV for 2019-2021. This data is not sortable by IPV, so we don't know if there is an effect similar to that in the homicide data differentiating IPV and non-IPV outcomes. We have not received complete 2022 data, but it looks on track to roughly 24,000 in 2022.
- Many thousands more suffer without reaching out, not believing things would improve if they did or not knowing that help is available.
- Harris County has **330 shelter beds**, while **New York City**, with twice the population, has more than ten times as many shelter beds, at **3500**.
- Though affordable housing is the best solution for many, it is not widely available; shelters, nonresidential providers and mobile advocates provide alternatives for those in immediate need.
- A targeted investment in DV administrative infrastructure can **turn the tide on DV assaults and homicides.**
- **Improved victim service delivery** along with a **community violence prevention focus** will benefit all Houstonians.
- Though this change will require significant start-up costs, the infrastructure thus created will increase ability to bring in more federal and other external funds down the line.

Additional Findings

- The high volume of people experiencing IPV in this region links directly to the state's low level of family support infrastructure, the lack of affordable housing and the low wages earned by Texas women.
- People dependent on others, especially those with children they don't want to unhouse, become more vulnerable to violence at the hands of those they depend upon.

- This is true at any income level but is particularly true for those at low incomes. Since higher-income women may be able to leave when things get grim and still keep their children and themselves housed, they are less likely to utilize shelters than low-income women. Higher-income women more often employ the safety planning resources providers offer.
- Though Houston's DV service providers were already strapped before the pandemic, since its onset and in the face of multiplying demand, DV shelters and other providers have stepped up services, helped by Covid Emergency federal funds. Before these funds are gone, the community needs to reorganize its response to DV for the long haul.
- While DV providers have offered survivors a range of services for some time, the pandemic spurred innovations that have improved service delivery overall: including Bed Availability App, DV High Risk Teams / DART, Mobile Advocacy, Flexible Funding, Text Hotlines, Hotel Stays, Longer Stays, etc.
- Many in need do not know of, or feel distrustful of, DV service providers, so clearer communications and continued trust building are needed.
- Transportation is a major issue for those seeking shelter across Harris County.
- The HCDVCC coordinated housing queue is a great improvement on the past, but it met less than one third of eligible demand in 2022.
- Staff burnout has been a huge issue for shelters during Covid.
- Black women in economic precarity are overrepresented in shelter in Harris County.
- Undocumented Hispanic women suffering DV seem underrepresented in shelters, likely due to threats of deportation from their abusers or lack of information on their rights.
- Asian and Muslim women generally reach out to culturally specific DV agencies, when they reach out.
- The leadership of DV agencies is now more inclusive of women of color than it has been historically, enabling wider range of insight and overcoming of survivors' distrust.
- All DV leaders need sustained support and engagement from the community as they struggle to address the ongoing DV crisis here.