

Las Vegas' Domestic Violence Problem May Be Rising Again

Synopsis: Until 2014, Nevada had the dubious honour of being the #1 state in the nation when it came to [domestic violence](#). Law enforcement training, recruiting volunteer advocates and boosting financial support to shelters and programs all helped drive down the domestic violence rate. The numbers may be reversing now.

In 1993, [The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#) defined domestic violence as:

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

Las Vegas finds itself with a domestic violence problem. Some in the city are looking for help.

Covering the annual ceremony to remember victims of domestic violence, Bizuayehu Tesfaye shared his thoughts in a Las Vegas Review op-ed.

"Domestic violence is a crucial concern in our community," Tesfaye writes. "Sound the alarm and scream from the rooftops. We need to do something."

As a journalist, she covers the justice system in Clarke County, Nevada, home to Las Vegas. Within the space of 14-days, two homicide cases — domestic death cases — were heard in the courtroom.

David Dinunzio

Dinunzio, 36 killed his 60-year-old mother in their apartment on August 13, 2017. The woman's body showed she had been strangled. By the time cops arrived, Dinunzio was gone. Later found and arrested, Dinunzio was charged with open murder and robbery.

Lisa Hollopeter

Hollopeter was sentenced to ten years behind bars, but will eligible for parole in twenty-four months. Hollopeter claims she shot her 40-year-old boyfriend as she was afraid for her life. Her defence attorney told the court Hollopeter had endured an abusive relationship for ten years before she shot her boyfriend in the back.

Those are the homicides. The television screens showing courtroom dockets inside the Regional Justice Center indicate that at least once daily a case involving some domestic violence charges appears. Many days, there are several.

Often the murder-suicides which rock the headlines never make it to the tote boards. The victims and their killers both end up dead, apparently erased from the communal memory.

Just Listening

[Liz Ortenburger, CEO of Safe Nest](#), the state's biggest charity devoted to domestic violence, said: "As a community, we need to invest research dollars to find out why it's so bad here. Until then we are wondering what we can do."

"From a community perspective, the first question often asked is 'why doesn't the victim leave,' said Ortenburger. "What we see each time is a state where a batterer uses power and control to get what they want. A murder occurs when the sufferer is trying to leave."

Ortenburger directs interested persons to call the domestic violence hotline, 702-646-4981, to report anything they see or hear regarding a domestic violence situation.

For its part, Metro PD has launched a pilot program, "Project 417." The program, named for the dispatch code for domestic violence, sends volunteers to each domestic violence call, 24/7.

"When the scene is safe, our advocates have access to whoever made the call," says Ortenburger. "Often our advocacy work is just listening."