

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - INTRODUCTION & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURTS**

*Professor: Wesley Jennings, Ph.D.*

This presentation focuses on domestic violence courts. So what are domestic violence courts? Domestic violence courts are specialized court that tells society that the criminal justice system recognizes the distinct nature of domestic violence and the need for special attention to this specific crime. There are more than 300 domestic violence courts nationwide that have special processing mechanisms for handling domestic violence cases.

To some extent, there is variation in what these specialized processes are and what they seek to achieve. Most courts, however, do share two common goals. These two goals include improving offender accountability and enhancing victim services. There are specific characteristics of domestic violence courts. The first of these types of characteristics is specialized intake units that orient victims to the court procedures, provide more extensive legal assistance to victims, and refer them to community based assistance programs.

Specialized units can facilitate the coordination of case management by linking the present case to any related case currently pending. Secondly, they have the dedication of one or more calendars for domestic violence matters including ex parte protection order petitions, hearings on final protection orders, and proceedings in criminal cases. Third, the designation of specialized judges or teams to hear the domestic violence cases exclusively or as part of their primary assignment.

These characteristics allow judges to monitor the behavior of abusers and their compliance with court orders. Four-- the integration of various issues related to domestic violence occurring in a victim's environment, such as the establishment and enforcement of child support orders. The fifth characteristics of domestic violence court involves the issue of judicial monitoring. Judicial monitoring is the cornerstone of many domestic violence courts, and it is crucial in order to ensure offender accountability.

Judicial monitoring involves regular compliance reviews of court mandated sanctions. Judicial monitoring also ensures that repeated violations and offenses will not be tolerated. So does the type of post-dispositional monitoring really matter? Overall, studies are mixed concerning the impact of post-disposition judicial monitoring. Well, this probably should not be surprising since the quality of judicial monitoring also varies across judges.

One such example was a quasi-experiment involving the Bronx domestic violence court. This study found judicial monitoring did not reduce offender recidivism. However, another study in the San Diego domestic violence court attributed judicial monitoring to a decrease in re-arrests from 21% to 14% over the course of one year. Similarly, other studies suggest that longer periods of court control are associated with reduced re-abuse.

In addition, studies have also found out that probation supervision increases batterer program completion. Similarly, in a multi-year study in Massachusetts, the study results indicated that they

found batterer program completion rates to be 62% for those supervised, compared to only 30% for cases that were unsupervised. Overall, given the vast variation in court context, no specific model of post-dispositional monitoring has emerged as being significantly better than any other type.