State Court Processing of Domestic Violence Cases

Erica L. Smith
Bureau of Justice Statistics

Report examines whether domestic violence cases are treated less seriously than other violent crime cases

1) Tracked domestic and non-domestic violence cases in court records from initial case filing to final court disposition
2) Compared DV and non-DV sexual assault and DV and non-DV aggravated assault on 11 measures of prosecution, conviction, and sentencing outcomes
Where differences were found, they were in the direction of DV cases being treated more seriously than non-DV

1. Prosecution rate
2. Overall conviction rate
3. Felony conviction rate
4. Violent felony conviction rate
5. Felony sexual/aggravated assault conviction rate
6. Misdemeanor conviction rate
7. Violent misdemeanor conviction rate
8. Misdemeanor sexual/aggravated assault conviction rate
9. Prison incarceration rate
10. Jail incarceration rate
11. Average incarceration sentence length

In nearly 70% of the 2,629 felonies tracked, the most serious charge was either sexual assault or aggravated assault

264 sexual assault cases
- 90 domestic
- 174 non-domestic

1,538 aggravated assault cases
- 520 domestic
- 1,018 non-domestic
Prosecution rate was not lower in felony DV cases

Sexual assault:
- Domestic (89%) more likely to be prosecuted than non-domestic (73%)

Aggravated assault:
- Domestic (66%) as likely to be prosecuted as non-domestic (67%)

Three-fourths of DV cases were not prosecuted due to lack of victim cooperation.

DV and non-DV sexual assault defendants differed on 2 of the 7 CONVICTION rates

1. Overall conviction rate: *DV higher than non-DV*
2. Felony conviction rate: *no difference*
3. Violent felony conviction rate: *no difference*
4. Felony sexual assault conviction rate: *DV higher than non-DV*
5. Misdemeanor conviction rate: *no difference*
6. Violent misdemeanor conviction rate: *no difference*
7. Misdemeanor sexual assault conviction rate: *no difference*
DV and non-DV aggravated assault defendants differed on 4 of the 7 CONVICTION rates

1. Overall conviction rate: **DV higher than non-DV**
2. Felony conviction rate: **no difference**
3. Violent felony conviction rate: **DV higher than non-DV**
4. Felony aggravated assault conviction rate: **DV higher than non-DV**
5. Misdemeanor conviction rate: **DV higher than non-DV**
6. Violent misdemeanor conviction rate: **no difference**
7. Misdemeanor aggravated assault conviction rate: **no difference**

Incarceration rates were not lower in felony DV cases

Sexual assault:
- Prison incarceration rate: no difference between convicted DV and non-DV defendants
- Jail incarceration rate: no difference

Aggravated assault:
- Prison incarceration rate: no difference
- Jail incarceration rate: no difference
Incarceration sentence lengths were not shorter in felony DV cases

Sexual assault:
- Convicted felony DV defendants sentenced to incarceration received a LONGER sentence than those sentenced for felony non-DV: 6 years versus 3 ¼ years
- About 15% of DV sexual assault defendants had a sentence of more than 10 years, while none of the non-DV sexual assault defendants had a sentence that long

Aggravated assault:
- No difference in incarceration sentence length between DV and non-DV

Other interesting facts:

DV aggravated assault defendants were:
1. more likely to have an active CJ status at time of arrest (26% compared to 18% of non-DV);
2. less likely to be granted pretrial release (54% compared to 62% of non-DV).

Of those granted pretrial release, courts were more likely to issue a protection order against DV aggravated assault defendants (47% compared to 4% of non-DV)

Protection orders were included in the sentences of more DV aggravated assault defendants (41% compared to 12% of non-DV)
For additional information, please feel free to contact me:

Erica Smith
Statistician
Bureau of Justice Statistics

Erica.L.Smith@usdoj.gov
202-616-3491