

How IMPROVING  
TO EMPLOYMENT  
PREVENTS +  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
• SEXUAL ASSAULT



# Prevalence and Impacts of Workplace Violence in City and County Governments

This factsheet explores how domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH) impacts public sector workplaces and employees in city and county governments.

## Why DVSASSH is a Workplace Issue in Local Government

In recent years, workplace safety concerns in local government have intensified, in fact a National League of Cities survey found that, **81% of local public officials reported experiencing harassment, threats, or violence**, and **87% observed an increase in attacks on public officials** during their time in office.<sup>1</sup>

In local government settings—where employees are highly visible, community-facing, and often work within the same communities they live in—harm that originates in personal or community relationships can more easily carry into the workplace. In fact, according to the Impact Project, **local officials are more likely than federal officials to face threats from individuals they know**, including colleagues, constituents, and people within their personal or community circles.<sup>2</sup> This proximity between personal and professional life can heighten vulnerability to DVSASSH-related workplace safety risks.

**81%** of local public officials reported experiencing harassment, threats, or violence

Historical workplace violence data further underscores the risks present in government settings. According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics report on workplace violence against government employees, **government workers accounted for 1 in 5 workplace homicide victims**, despite representing a relatively small share of the overall U.S. workforce.<sup>3</sup>

Government employees also experience **nonfatal workplace violence at more than three times the rate of private-sector employees**, highlighting a consistently elevated risk of harm in public sector roles.<sup>4</sup> These risks are particularly concentrated in local government settings. Between 2002 and 2011, approximately **96% of workplace violence against government employees occurred in state, county, and local government roles**, which together account for about 81% of public sector employment.<sup>5</sup>



**Women make up 60% of state and local government employees, and workers of color are also more represented in local government** than in many private-sector industries.<sup>6</sup> This is significant because, per U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) data, women file the majority of workplace sexual harassment and harassment charges, and a substantial share of charges related to both sex and race discrimination involve Black/African American and Hispanic workers.<sup>7</sup> Together, these patterns indicate that women and workers of color may be disproportionately affected by workplace harassment in local government workplaces.

Nearly 39% of state and local public-sector workers are union members, compared with only 7% in the private sector.<sup>8</sup> This high level of unionization reflects a workforce with established structures for collective representation that can support workplace safety efforts, including policies and training. However, prevention and training remain limited. The Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005 Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention found that **only 32% of local government workplaces offered workplace violence training**—far below state governments (58%) and slightly above private industry (20%) — just 4% of all workplaces trained staff on domestic violence and its workplace impact.<sup>9</sup>



### How DVSASSH Can Show Up in Public Sector Workplaces

Employees in city and county governments work in unique environments that shape both their exposure to and experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH). Many roles within the public sector are highly visible and require regular interaction with residents, constituents, or community partners. These positions often take place in **fixed, publicly accessible worksites** such as government offices, service centers, or field locations, where employee schedules, directories, and locations are readily available. While these features are essential to public service, they can also make employees more accessible to harm doers.

Harm doers outside of the workplace can exploit **publicly available information**, including employee directories, schedules, or office locations, to harass or stalk employees during work hours. This behavior can include repeated phone calls, emails, messages, or in-person visits, which disrupt employee focus, create safety risks, and interfere with job responsibilities. Harm doers may also attempt to **approach employees** at community events, public hearings, or other offsite engagements where employees interact with the public, further increasing their risk of exposure to harassment or intimidation.

## How DVSASSH Can Show Up in Public Sector Workplaces

### Impacts on Employees

DVSASSH can affect both employees and the overall functioning of city and county government workplaces. Employees may experience disruptions to attendance, concentration, and job performance as they navigate ongoing violence or harassment.<sup>10</sup>

Safety concerns—whether from repeated contact by an abusive partner or intrusions at the workplace—can put both the individual and coworkers at risk. Survivors may face economic instability from lost wages, reduced hours, or job loss, and some may leave employment to maintain safety. Mental health impacts, including stress, anxiety, and trauma-related responses, can also impact how employees engage with their work and colleagues.

Additionally, **public sector structures—such as organizational hierarchies and elected leadership—shape workplace culture, reporting procedures, and power dynamics.**<sup>11</sup> Elected officials, who are accountable to constituents and political priorities, also shape workplace conditions through their visibility and influence over organizational culture, resource allocation, and how seriously workplace concerns are taken and addressed.

Together these dynamics can influence how complaints are received and addressed, make it difficult for employees to report abuse, and exacerbate their feelings of vulnerability or isolation. Workplace DVSASSH that goes unaddressed can undermine employee well-being and create a workplace environment where individuals may fear retaliation or lack access to adequate support.

## How DVSASSH Can Show Up in Public Sector Workplaces

### Impacts on the Public Sector

These individual impacts can lead to increased absenteeism, turnover, and vacancies, placing strain on workforce capacity and institutional knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Safety concerns affect staff, leadership, and the public, while heightened stress and fear can impact employee morale and psychological safety. Compounded with existing workforce shortages and retention challenges, DVSASSH can significantly disrupt local government operations and the delivery of public services.

### How Public Sector Workplaces Can Prevent and Respond to DVSASSH

Since local government policies are shaped through a combination of multiple systems, including agency leadership, human resources, union agreements, and oversight from elected officials, effective prevention and response strategies must be embedded within these existing structures to ensure they are consistent, enforceable, and sustainable across departments.

A strong starting point is understanding where and how risk shows up in daily work. Local government department leadership can complete a [risk assessment](#) of both the physical workspace and any virtual work-related platforms to identify areas of vulnerability to harm from bad actors. Department leadership can also conduct [workplace environment surveys](#) with their staff to be made aware of safety concerns and opportunities to improve security measures and procedures.



Local government department leaders and human resources teams can also revise and [update workplace policies](#) to explicitly include domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. City and County committees and task forces also play an important role in reviewing safety concerns, elevating staff feedback, and helping shape consistent policies across departments. At the local level, these committees are typically established through formal policy decisions, collective bargaining agreements, or administrative directives, and may include members who are selected or elected to represent employees alongside management representatives.

Local government employees who may be navigating these forms of harm, whether from colleagues or individuals outside the agency, should have clear access to resources, workplace supports, and accommodations. These may include paid leave, flexible or modified work arrangements, and changes to workplace contact information to enhance safety. Departments can also coordinate with local victim service organizations, mental health providers, and culturally responsive services to ensure appropriate support and referrals. In addition, staff should be made aware of relevant [state employment rights](#) available to survivors, so they can better understand and navigate their options within workplace and legal systems.

Additionally, local government agencies can integrate training on DVSASSH into required staff development across departments. This training should be relevant, consistently updated, and accessible; preferably offered by experts from local or national [sexual and domestic violence service organizations](#). Providing such training demonstrates that addressing DVSASSH is a priority for the workplace and signals to harm doers that violence in the workplace will not be tolerated.



When staff can understand the root causes of [violence and abuse](#), impacts of [trauma](#), and appropriate intervention strategies, they are better equipped to recognize concerns and take informed action. Engaging staff in safety planning and policy implementation further supports consistency across departments and helps create safer environments for city and county employees and the communities they serve.

**SCAN THIS  
QR CODE TO  
ACCESS THE  
RESOURCE CENTER.**



Workplaces Respond provides technical assistance to workplace stakeholders seeking to better prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment impacting the workplace.

This project is supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-23-GK-05464-MUMU awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed herein or in any materials herein, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

© 2024 Futures Without Violence. All rights reserved. This product provides only general information; it does not constitute or supplant legal advice or consist of the practice of law and should not be used or relied upon as such. Legal advice is dependent upon the specific circumstances of each situation and upon the law in specific jurisdictions. Do not rely on legal information without consulting an attorney licensed to practice law in your jurisdiction.

## Sources

1. <https://www.nlc.org/post/2021/11/10/new-report-harassment-threats-and-violence-directed-at-local-elected-officials-rising-at-an-alarming-rate/>
2. <https://theimpactproject.org/dashboards/threats-to-public-servants-dashboard/>
3. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/press-release/workplace-violence-against-government-employees-1994-2011>
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*
6. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/investments-in-the-state-and-local-government-workforce-will-deliver-crucial-services-and-create-economic-security/>
7. <https://www.eeoc.gov/data/sexual-harassment-our-nations-workplaces>
8. <https://www.epi.org/publication/union-membership-data/>
9. <https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/osnr0026.pdf>
10. <https://icma.org/blog-posts/bullying-and-harassment-local-government-workers-community-problem>
11. [https://workplacesrespond.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FORMATTED-Culture-Change-Best-Practices\\_3.26.25-3.pdf](https://workplacesrespond.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FORMATTED-Culture-Change-Best-Practices_3.26.25-3.pdf)
12. <https://icma.org/blog-posts/bullying-and-harassment-local-government-workers-community-problem>