

Local Initiative Looks to Stem Violence

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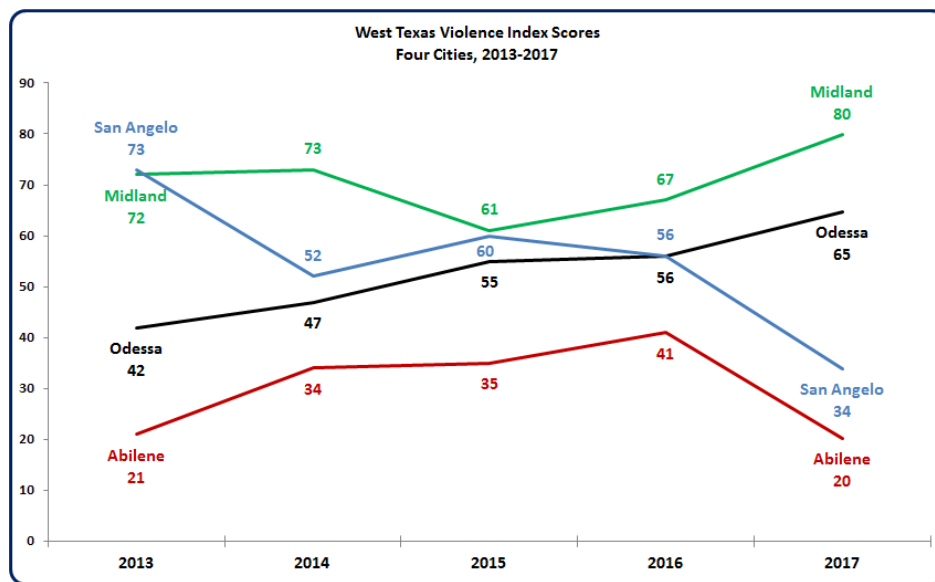
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San Angelo has become a more violent city in recent years. The most recent update of the West Texas Violence Index (WTVI) confirms a trend led by increases in domestic violence.

We based the WTVI on six statistical indicators of violent events and trauma. It includes incidence of violent crime, family violence, sexual assault, and child abuse, as well as suicide and accidental death rates.

We have measured and tracked these factors in the four West Texas cities of Abilene, Midland, Odessa, and San Angelo since 2013. The most recent annual update incorporates data for 2017.

The WTVI scoring system annually rates each of the four West Texas cities based on the six indicators of violent and traumatic events in each community. The ratings to date have assigned each city a score ranging from zero to 100 for each year between 2013 and 2017. The highest ratings go to cities with fewer violent and traumatic events.



Data for 2013 identifies San Angelo and Midland as the least violent of the four West Texas cities with ratings of 73 and 72 respectively. Odessa lagged with a score of 42 for 2013, while Abilene's rating of 21 indicated the highest levels of violence among the four cities.

Moving forward, San Angelo's WTVI rating trended downward to intersect with Odessa in 2016. Its continued fall to 34 points, ranking San Angelo as the second most violent city of the four regional urban centers in 2017.

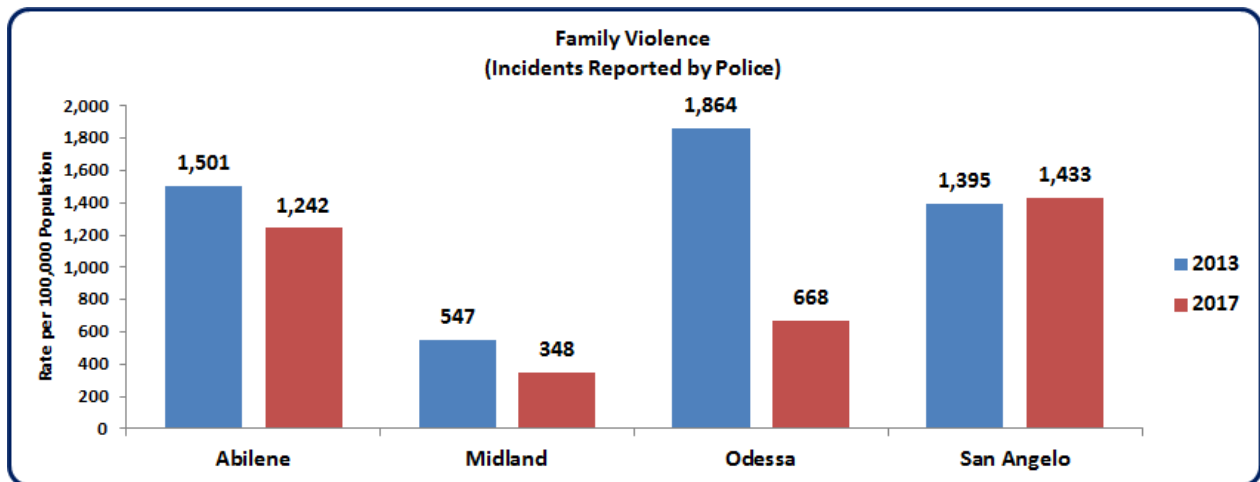
Meantime, Midland maintained a position as the safest of the four cities by increasing its WTVI rating to 80 in 2017. Odessa lifted to the second safest city, boosting its score from 42 in 2013 to 65 for 2017. Abilene remained at the bottom of the ratings with the highest levels of violent and traumatic incidents.

Although San Angelo's rate of violent crimes (including murder, rape, robbery, and assault)

increased by 31% from 277.3 to 364.2 incidents per 100,000 population between 2013 and 2016, it dropped precipitously to 276.7 per 100,000 in 2017.

Since the swift decline realigned the local rate with its 2013 level, the five-year trend in violent crime played only a minimal role in driving the city's WTVI rating down to the score of 34 for 2017.

Instead, the driving factors making San Angelo a more violent community than its peers in Midland and Odessa are key indicators of domestic violence.



Indeed, the most frequently occurring group of crimes reported by local police are family violence events. These include assaults, homicides, kidnappings, robberies, and sex offenses taking place between related individuals.

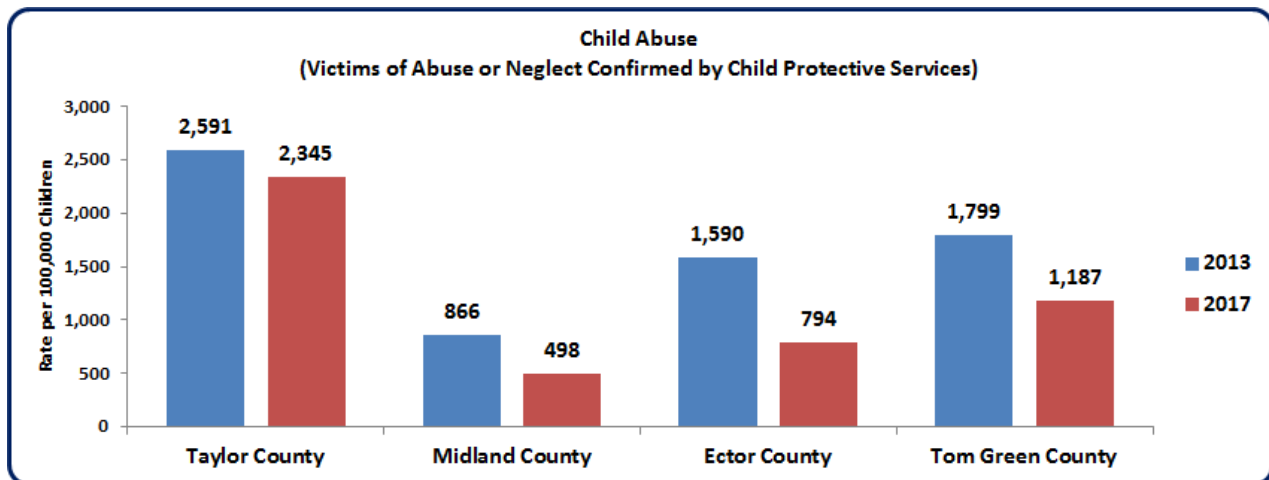
The group also includes incidents between foster children and parents, roommates or members of the same household, and dating violence.

San Angelo Police reported 1,461 family violence events in 2017. This translates to a rate of 1,433 incidents per 100,000 residents.

Although San Angelo's rate increased only slightly by 3% between 2013 and 2017, its important impact on the community's WTVI score stems from the fact that it was the only one of the four regional cities that experienced an increase during the five years.

Both Abilene and Odessa had higher family violence levels in 2013, but each of those cities managed declines to rates lower than San Angelo by 2017. Midland, with the lowest rates of the four cities, also managed to alleviate the problem in a downward direction between 2013 and 2017.

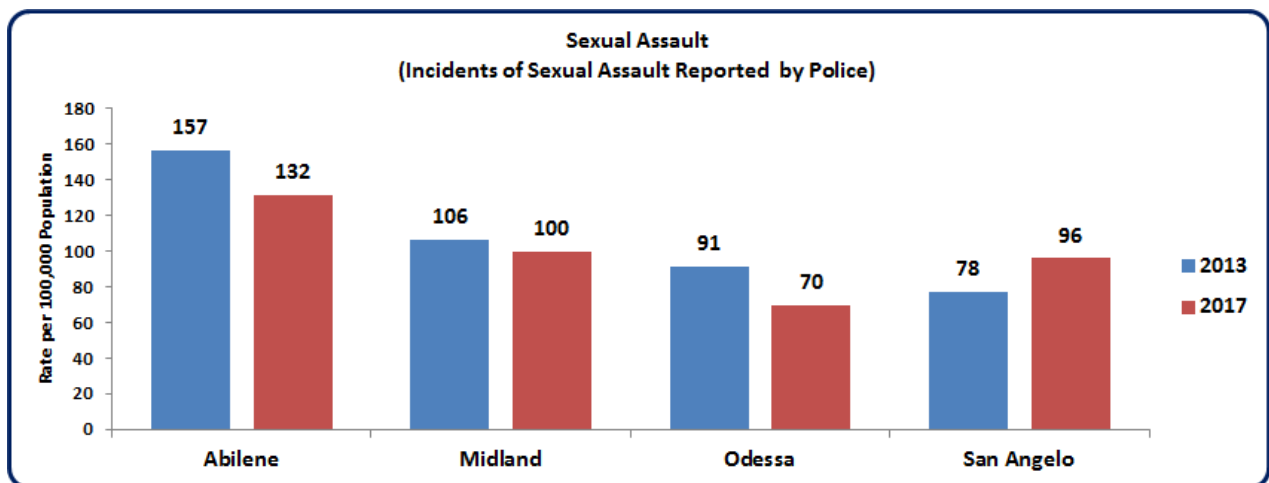
Child Protective Services (CPS) confirmed 328 victims of child abuse and neglect in Tom Green County and San Angelo in 2017. The local rate of 1,187 victims per 100,000 children was the second highest of the four regional urban centers.



Partly due to changes in CPS procedures for assessing cases, each of the four West Texas urban areas experienced reduced rates of child abuse between 2013 and 2017. However, Midland (Midland County) and Odessa (Ector County) were able to achieve deeper reductions compared to San Angelo (Tom Green County).

Specifically, Odessa trimmed its child abuse rate by 50% while San Angelo curbed the problem by only 34%. This fact is among the reasons why the WTVI points to Odessa becoming a less violent city compared to San Angelo between 2013 and 2017.

Sexual assault is another group of crime incidents contributing to San Angelo's trend toward increased domestic violence. In addition to sexual assaults victimizing men and women of all ages, this group also highlights a range of sexual crimes directed toward children.



Police in San Angelo reported 98 incidents of sexual assault in 2017. This computes to a rate of 96.1 alleged events per 100,000 population. Although Abilene and Midland had higher rates of sexual assault in 2017, San Angelo was the only regional city with a five-year increase to its rate. San Angelo had a 23% increase in the rate of sexual assault between 2013 and 2017. Lead by Odessa's 23% decline, rates fell in each of the other three cities over this time period.

Kambri Crews is someone whose lived experience tells why it is so easy for people to ignore domestic violence. Born in 1971, Crews's 2012 book, *Burn Down the Ground*, memorializes

growing up with deaf parents and living in a tin shack near the tiny east Texas town of Montgomery.

Reflecting on the writing, Crews recalled, “I was constantly reminded to not to air our family's dirty laundry. Part of why domestic violence is allowed to continue is because there is often an unwritten rule in many families of abuse: Don't ask. Don't tell.”

Without witness, domestic violence is invisible. Yet, as Crews further recounts, “I found that sharing my story liberated me from my past. There is power in storytelling and, in that, healing. Owning my truth also empowered me. I will no longer be manipulated or controlled by guilt or shame.”

Behind the veil, domestic violence steals the liberty of victims. So we celebrate strong people like Kambri Crews who reclaim it by speaking out. Shining the light on domestic violence not only empowers victims to reach beyond unfounded shame and guilt as Crews teaches us. It also empowers communities to challenge attitudes and show the inhumanity of domestic violence.

Given its alarming trends, San Angelo is fortunate to have a responsive police force and key crisis intervention services like the New Bridge Family Shelter. These are exemplary local organizations with strong leadership and dedicated staff who go beyond the call of duty to protect victims and offer opportunities for recovery.

To address the blitz of domestic violence, however, communities must develop better means to look upstream, before tragedy hits, and to help families and households cope with forces leading up to violent incidents and crisis.

Child health and development factors, family stability and adequate income support, obstacles to children's educational achievement and success, mental health and spiritual well-being are all involved. Resilient communities work together in addressing these forces to achieve domestic violence prevention.

This is why San Angelo is being called to embrace the new Child and Family Well-being Initiative based at Tom Green County Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). This innovative approach is not just another “new program” controlled and operated by CAC as an independent agency.

Instead, the role of CAC is to work as lead agent to bring the community's health, mental health, educational, spiritual, and other key resources together to address the upstream forces for prevention of domestic abuse.

Work together for a more resilient community to prevent domestic violence. Get onboard San Angelo!