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Battering in spotlight

By Rick Orlov, Staff Writer

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To Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, domestic abuse is more than just a public policy issue.

"It is something you never forget," Villaraigosa said Friday at a news conference marking the start of Domestic Abuse Awareness Month. "I'm 52 years old, and I still remember what it was like to see your mother in the corner being beaten and you standing there helpless."

As part of efforts, the mayor and other city officials said they hope to expand prevention and response initiatives in the city and hope the month draws attention to the issue.

"Seven in 10 of all the calls our police officers get involve domestic violence," Councilman Eric Garcetti said. "If we could reduce that 20 or 30 percent, it would be the equivalent of hiring a couple of thousand officers."

Garcetti said the city has been in the forefront of the issue, creating Domestic Abuse Response Teams to work with the victims of abuse, offering shelter, medical and legal attention.

The teams operate out of the West Valley and Van Nuys divisions as well as the 77th Street and Newton Divisions.

Officials said they hope to expand teams to all stations in the city.

City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo said his office also is creating a special unit to deal with the crimes and is launching an initiative to train employers to recognize the problem and provide services to workers who might be victims.

The Los Angeles Police Department said it tracks more than 50,000 domestic violence cases in the city each year and prosecutes an average of 900 cases annually.

Delgadillo said domestic violence costs the economy \$3 billion to \$5 billion each year.

"And, that is not even the real cost," Delgadillo said. "The real cost is what we see in the harm to women and their children."

As part of the program, the city honored 15 Los Angeles police officers who have distinguished themselves in responding to domestic violence calls, including: Detective Howard Choy, and Officers Kosal Bun, Robert Canizales, Andres Cardenas, Mark Cleary, Todd Doyle, Gary Ferrato, Adam Niebergall, Alejandra Sampson, Elaine Avery, Deborah Myers, Daniel O'Hanian, Lonya Britton, Paul Aeschliman and Frank Lopez.

Villaraigosa said domestic violence is an issue that he remains constantly aware of, including during a trip last week to Skid Row.

"I met this woman, who couldn't have been more than 22 or 23, with three kids," Villaraigosa said. "She said she was a victim of domestic violence and had nowhere else to go. This is something we have to deal with if we are going to protect our children."

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