

# The Faces of Fatality

Vol. III June 2013

Report of the  
Attorney  
General's  
Statewide  
Domestic  
Violence Fatality  
Review Team



**This report is dedicated to the 202 women, children and men who lost their lives as a result of domestic violence in Florida last year, to their loved ones, and to those who work every day to prevent these deaths.**

*"The safety of Floridians is of the utmost importance to me. I am proud to partner with the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Florida's Domestic Violence team to keep victims of domestic violence and their children safe. My office and the FCADV co-chair the Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review team, and I am pleased with the work they are doing to end domestic violence in our state."*

—Attorney General Pam Bondi

"While we cannot change the outcome for the 202 women, children and men who died by the hands of someone they once loved and trusted, by working together we can change the end result for thousands more who experience domestic violence every day in our state. In order to create a lasting change we must first understand these fatalities and find solutions that will keep domestic violence survivors and their children safe. The work the Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review team and the local county teams provide is vital to that understanding, especially as 2012 experienced a 6.1 percent increase in domestic violence murders. We are honored to partner with the Office of the Attorney General and grateful for the dedication and commitment of all the professionals that make up the statewide and local teams. Together we truly can change and save lives."

—Tiffany Carr, President/CEO  
The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The purpose of the Florida Attorney General's Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team<sup>1</sup> is to identify gaps in service delivery and potential systemic breakdowns, as well as to recommend strategies that improve and increase responses to keep victims and their children safe and hold batterers accountable, with the ultimate goal of preventing domestic violence homicides. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement reported that in 2012, 191 persons were murdered in Florida as a result of domestic violence, a 6.1 percent increase from 2011, and 11 persons died as a result of domestic violence manslaughter.<sup>2</sup>

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on an analysis of data submitted to the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV) by Florida's local fatality review teams from May 1, 2012 to April 30, 2013. During this period, local teams submitted data from 35 reviews of fatal or near-fatal domestic violence incidents in Florida that occurred between 2006 and 2012.<sup>3</sup>

In the majority of cases, decedents had lived together with the perpetrator full-time at some point (67%), and were living together at the time of the homicide (67%). Most of the perpetrators, about 66%, had a prior criminal history of some kind, and for nearly half of the perpetrators, their criminal history included some record of domestic violence (43%).

The reviews suggest that the victims in these cases had little contact with service workers and domestic violence advocates. There was known contact with the Florida Department of Children and Families in 23% of the cases, and known contact with any form of victim support services in 14% of incidents. Of the 35 cases, two decedents had known contact with a domestic violence shelter and there was record of one perpetrator having been enrolled in a Batterers' Intervention Program in the state of Florida.

The demographic and relationship dimensions from this year's reviews parallel the themes found in many domestic violence incidents. The typical perpetrator was male (86%), middle-aged, had a known history of substance abuse (60%), and had a fairly high probability of being unemployed or employed in a low-wage job. Decedents were largely female (83%), slightly younger, and were more likely to be employed than the perpetrator. More than half of the decedents had children (66%), and one-half had children with someone other than the perpetrator.

The reviews also highlight the grim and escalating nature of these horrific events. Most of the incidents occurred in a joint residence or in the home of either the decedent or perpetrator (78%). Nearly half of all incidents included child witnesses or additional victims other than the decedent (43%). More than half of the perpetrators in the reviewed incidents attempted suicide following the attack (52%). Apart from prior domestic violence and criminal activity, the reviewers also identified, in almost all incidents, a substantial number of lethality risk factors including substance abuse, weapons use, economic loss, and some form of obsessiveness, jealousy, or perceived betrayal on the part of the perpetrator.

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<sup>1</sup> Attorney General Pam Bondi has continued to provide her office's strong support of the Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, established in 2010 by then Attorney General Bill McCollum, in partnership with the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Florida Department of Children and Families Domestic Violence Program Office.

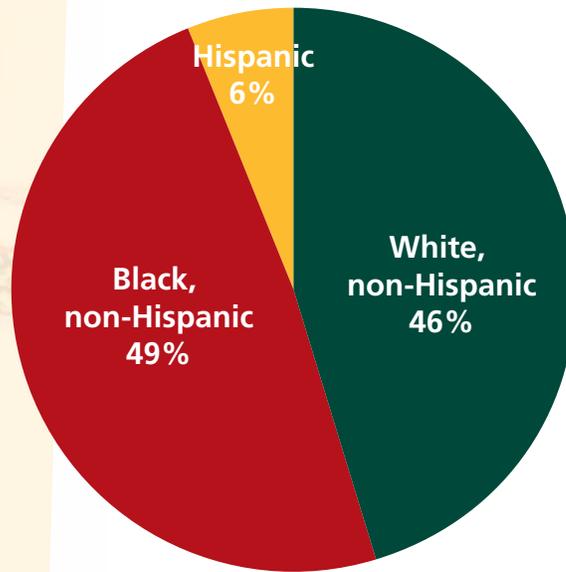
<sup>2</sup> The 2012 Uniform Crime Report is available at [www.fdle.state.fl.us](http://www.fdle.state.fl.us)

<sup>3</sup> In many cases, local teams review homicides only after the case is completely closed, thus there may be a delay of several years between the homicide and the fatality review. The data are based on the 35 reviews submitted by local fatality review teams. However, in some instances, statistics are based on different totals either due to non-applicability or missing information in reviews. We include the total number of cases used to calculate each statistic in parentheses.

**Perpetrator Characteristics**

Gender: 86% male (30 of 35), 14% female (5 of 35)

**PERPETRATOR RACE-ETHNICITY**

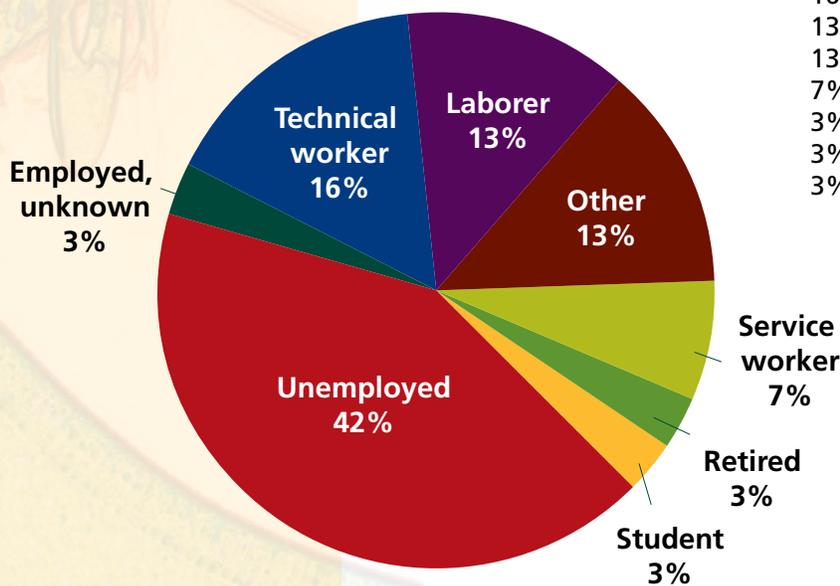


**Race/ethnicity:**

46% White, non-Hispanic (16 of 35)  
 49% Black, non-Hispanic (17 of 35)  
 6% Hispanic (2 of 35)

Average age: 39 (min: 19, max: 58)

**PERPETRATOR EMPLOYMENT STATUS**



**Employment type:**

42% unemployed (13 of 31)  
 16% technical/skilled worker (5 of 31)  
 13% laborer (4 of 31)  
 13% other (4 of 31)  
 7% service worker (2 of 31)  
 3% retired (1 of 31)  
 3% student (1 of 31)  
 3% employed, type unknown (1 of 31)

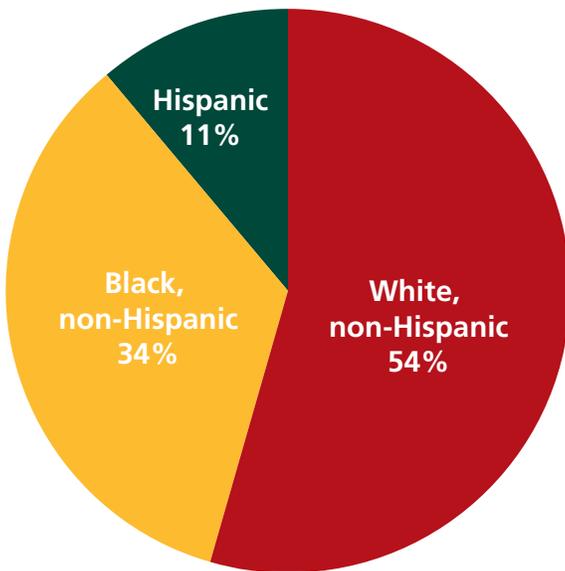
**Other known perpetrator characteristics:**

- In 60% of cases (21 of 35), reviewers found evidence of substance abuse of some kind based on various sources (e.g., Driving under the influence records, police reports, substance abuse services, and personal narratives from self, family, friends, or co-workers).
- In 23% of cases (8 of 35), reviewers found evidence of medically diagnosed mental health disorders.
- In 51% of cases (18 of 35), reviewers learned that the perpetrator was known, by family or friends, to carry or possess a weapon.
- In 23% of cases (8 of 35), reviewers found evidence of prior stalking behavior on the part of the perpetrator.

**Decedent Characteristics**

Gender: 17% male (6 of 35), 83% female (29 of 35)

**DECEDENT RACE-ETHNICITY**



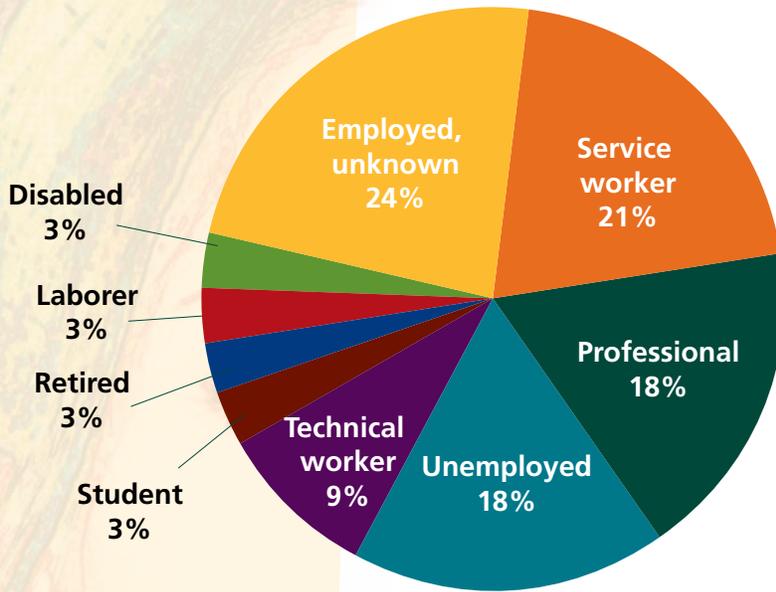
**Race/ethnicity:**

54% White, non-Hispanic (19 of 35)  
 34% Black, non-Hispanic (12 of 35)  
 11% Hispanic (4 of 35)

Average age: 38 (min: 19, max: 61)

**In this year's reviews, 54% of perpetrators had a known, non-domestic violence-related criminal history and 43% had a known criminal history of domestic violence.**

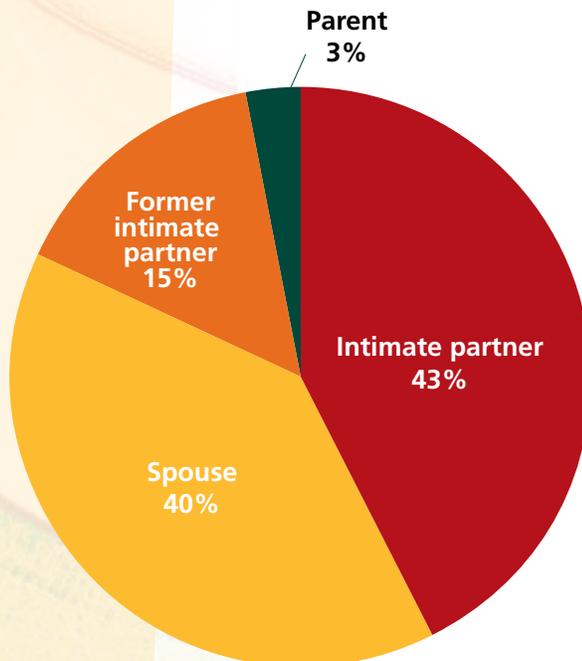
**DECEDENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS**



**Employment type:**  
 24% employed, type unknown (8 of 34)  
 21% service worker (7 of 34)  
 18% professional (6 of 34)  
 18% unemployed (6 of 34)  
 9% technical/skilled worker (3 of 34)  
 3% student (1 of 34)  
 3% retired (1 of 34)  
 3% laborer (1 of 34)  
 3% disabled (1 of 34)

**Relationship Characteristics**

**RELATIONSHIP TYPE**



**Relationship of perpetrator to decedent:**  
 43% intimate partner (15 of 35)  
 40% spouse (14 of 35)  
 15% ex-intimate partner (5 of 35)  
 3% parent (1 of 35)

Average length of relationship: 8 years

## Relationship Characteristics

### 66% of decedents (21 of 32) had children.

16%	1 child (5 of 32)
28%	2 children (9 of 32)
6%	3 children (2 of 32)
9%	4 children (3 of 32)
6%	5 children (2 of 32)

Of decedents with children, 50% (10 of 20) had children outside of their relationship with the perpetrator (i.e., the perpetrator was the natural parent of all of the decedent's children in 50% of cases reviewed where the decedent had children).

## Prior living arrangements and separation

- In 67% of cases (21 of 31), couples had previously lived together full time, and in 32% of cases (10 of 31), couples had lived together "off and on."
- In 67% of cases (20 of 30), couples were known to be living together at the time of the incident and 33% (10 of 30) were known *not* to be living together at the time of the incident.
- Reviewers found evidence of separation at the time of death (marital, separate households, or both) in 47% of cases (14 of 30).
- The average length of separation, when known, was approximately 1.00 year (min=0, just separated, max=6).

## Threats, Stalking and Harassment:

- In 9% of cases (2 of 23) there had been known allegations by the decedent of death threats made by the perpetrator towards the decedent, prior to the incident.
- In 13% of cases (3 of 23) there had been known allegations by the decedent of stalking on the part of the perpetrator.
- In 9% of cases (2 of 23) there had been known harassment of the decedent, by the perpetrator, at the decedent's workplace.



### Criminal Records

#### Perpetrator

- 54% (19 of 35) of perpetrators had a known, non-domestic violence-related criminal history.
- 43% (15 of 35) of perpetrators had a known criminal history of domestic violence.
- 66% (23 of 35) of perpetrators had a known criminal history of any kind, domestic violence-related or otherwise, based on criminal records and narrative reports.
- In 40% of cases (14 of 35), there were known prior reports to the police *by the decedent*, alleging domestic violence by the perpetrator.
- In 57% of cases (20 of 35), family members reported knowing about prior incidents or prior threats of domestic violence on the part of the perpetrator.
- In 23% of cases (8 of 35) there was a known “do not contact” order issued against the perpetrator.
- In 17% of cases (6 of 35) there was a known permanent injunction filed against the perpetrator by the decedent.
- In 14% of cases (5 of 35) there was a known permanent injunction filed against the perpetrator by someone other than the decedent.
- There were no injunction violation arrests discovered by reviewers.

#### Decedent

- 17% of decedents (6 of 35) had a known history of domestic violence, based on criminal records and narrative reports.
- In 6% of cases (2 of 35) there was a known “do not contact” order issued against the decedent.
- There were no known permanent injunctions filed against the decedent by the perpetrator.

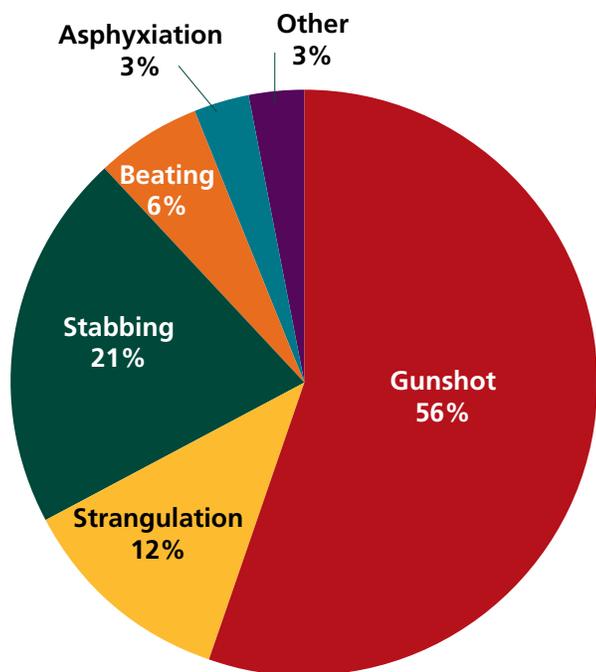
### Domestic Violence and Social Services

- In 23% of cases (8 of 35), there was known contact between DCF and the decedent or her/his family.
- In 14% of cases (5 of 35), there was known contact between the decedent and victim support services.
- In 6% of cases (2 of 35), there was known contact between the decedent and a domestic violence shelter.
- 5% of perpetrators (1 of 20) with a prior history of domestic violence were currently or had been previously enrolled in a Batterers’ Intervention Program (BIP).

### Incident Characteristics

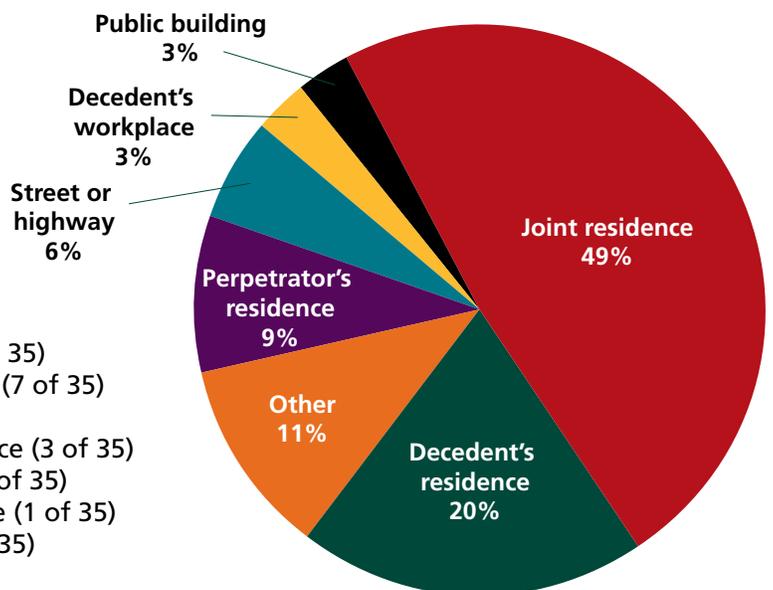
- 46% of perpetrators (16 of 35) committed suicide and an additional 6% (2 of 35) attempted but failed to commit suicide.
- There was known substance use by the perpetrator in 59% of incidents. This information is based on self-reports by the perpetrator and medical toxicology reports. The breakdown is as follows:
  - 30% alcohol (8 of 27)
  - 19% drugs and alcohol (5 of 27)
  - 11% drugs (3 of 27)
  - 41% no evidence of substance abuse (11 of 27)
- 14% of incidents (5 of 35) had a collateral victim (i.e., a victim other than the decedent; does not include perpetrator suicides).
- There were known child witnesses in 29% (10 of 35) cases.

### MANNER OF DEATH (INCLUDES ATTEMPTED)



**Manner of death (includes attempted):**  
 56% gunshot (19 of 34)  
 21% stabbing (7 of 34)  
 12% strangulation (4 of 34)  
 6% beating (2 of 34)  
 3% asphyxiation (1 of 34)  
 3% other (1 of 34)

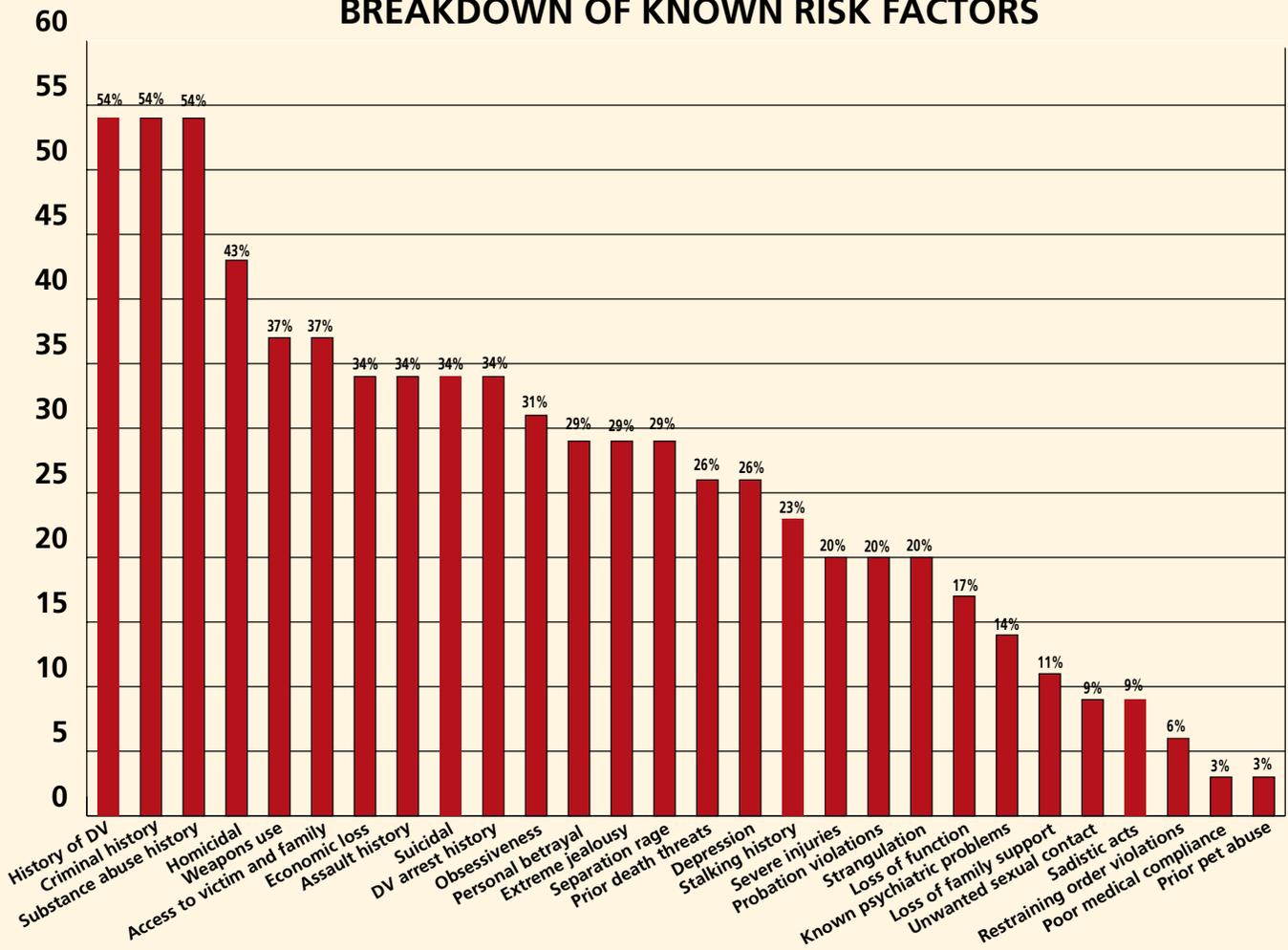
### PLACE OF INCIDENT



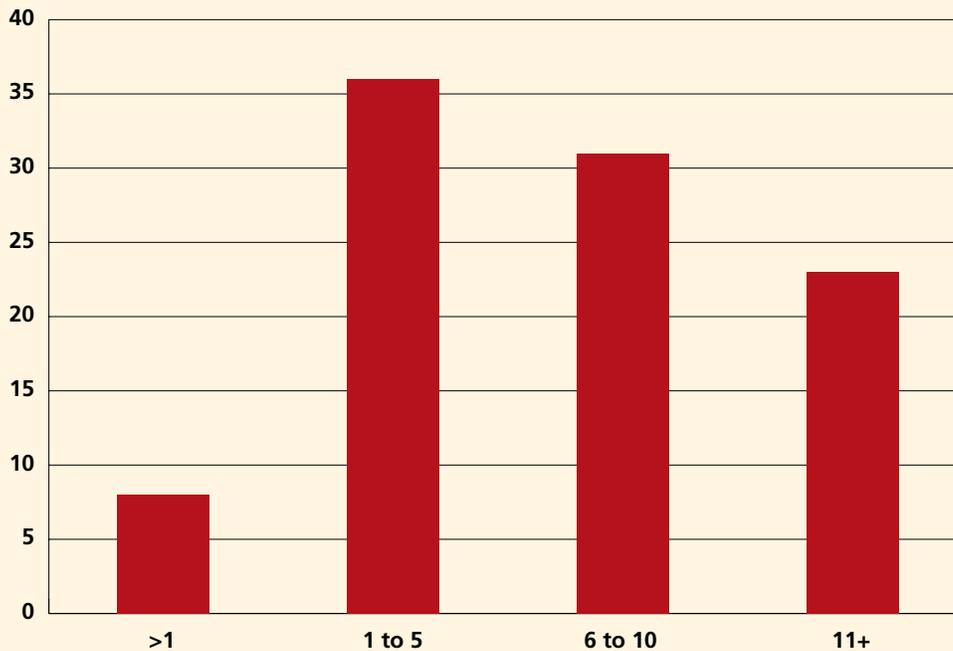
**Place of incident:**  
 49% joint residence (17 of 35)  
 20% decedent's residence (7 of 35)  
 11% other (4 of 35)  
 9% perpetrator's residence (3 of 35)  
 6% street or highway (2 of 35)  
 3% decedent's workplace (1 of 35)  
 3% public building (1 of 35)

# LETHALITY FACTORS

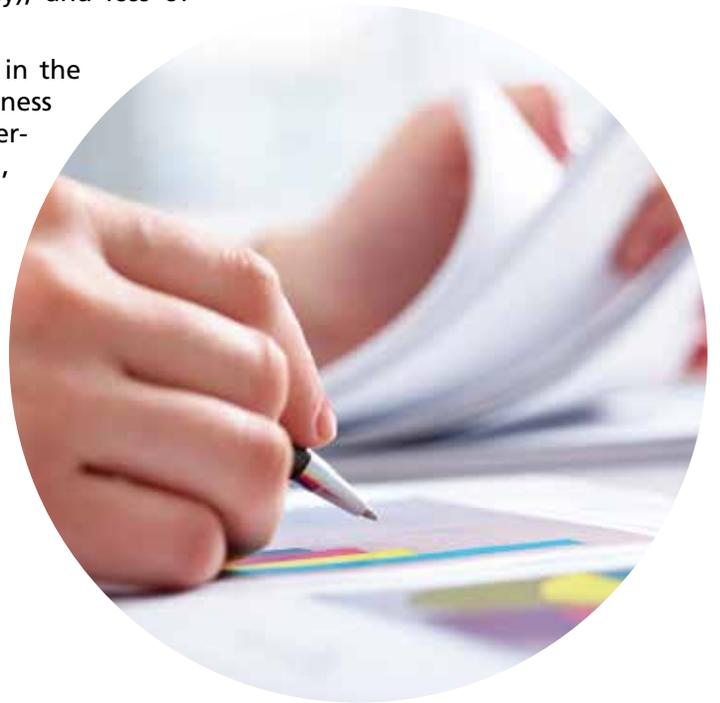
## BREAKDOWN OF KNOWN RISK FACTORS



## PERCENT OF CASES BY TOTAL KNOWN RISK FACTORS PRESENT



- The demographic profile of perpetrators and decedents are largely similar between the reviewed cases this year and those reviewed in 2012. For example, in each year, perpetrators were mostly male, and decedents were mostly female, and both were, on average, middle-aged. In addition, perpetrators from both review periods were likely to have histories of substance abuse and were more likely to be unemployed than the decedents.
- Decedents from reviewed cases in 2011 and 2012 had similarly high likelihoods to have children and identical proportions of decedents from each review period (50%) had children with someone other than the perpetrator.
- Among the 2013 incidents, reviewers identified substantially lower rates of BIP enrollment than they did in the 2012 incidents (5% versus 21%, respectively).
- Reviewers identified substantially more substance use at the time of incident in 2013 than in 2012 (59% versus 35%, respectively).
- Several risk factors were identified more frequently in the 2013 reviews than those in 2012, including economic loss (34% versus 23%, respectively), substance abuse history (54% versus 41%, respectively), and loss of function (17% versus 8%, respectively).
- Several risk factors were identified less frequently in the 2013 reviews than those in 2012, including obsessiveness (31% versus 42%, respectively), weapons use (37% versus 59%, respectively), and jealousy (29% versus 38%, respectively).



**Reviewers identified substantially more substance use  
at the time of incident in 2013 than in 2012.**

# 2013 RECOMMENDATIONS

**FCADV should continue training state and local partners on the critical need to hold domestic violence perpetrators accountable within the criminal justice system.** The local review team data showed that 43% of perpetrators had a known criminal history of domestic violence. This data suggests that prior police or other criminal justice interventions did not deter perpetrators from killing their current or former intimate partners. Both the Florida Police Chiefs and Florida Sheriffs Associations have endorsed FCADV's *Advanced Domestic Violence for Law Enforcement Training*. This training provides officers with the tools to hold batterers accountable, with specific and intensive instruction on enhanced evidence collection. In fiscal year 2012-2013, FCADV provided this training to officers from approximately 30 law enforcement agencies and at both the Sheriffs Association and Police Chiefs Association annual conferences. FCADV should also partner with state and national experts to conduct training for prosecutors on evidence-based prosecutions and the use of domestic violence experts to enhance their ability to successfully prosecute domestic violence cases.

**FCADV should identify a county in which to consider replicating the Palm Beach County Domestic Violence Information System (DVIS).** In 2012, the Statewide Team formed a committee to review innovative projects in Florida communities intended to increase batterer accountability to better protect victims and children in domestic violence cases. The committee compiled and reviewed information describing a number of such projects, with the goal of recommending a project for statewide replication. The Statewide Team identified DVIS as a project worthy of statewide replication. DVIS provides a centralized repository for information about domestic violence perpetrators and victims to increase batterer accountability and facilitate more effective interventions for victims and their children by promoting collaboration among the courts, law enforcement, child protective services, and social services providers. Proactive, coordinated responses and information sharing are critical tools in preventing incidents of domestic violence, including domestic violence homicides. One of the chief components of DVIS is the ability of the community partners to monitor offenders' progress or lack of compliance on court orders, simultaneously and in real time, to enable immediate and effective interventions to protect victims and hold batterers accountable.

**FCADV should monitor current and future outcomes from the Santa Rosa County Domestic Violence Court Program and consider seeking funding for replication.** The Statewide Team's batterer accountability committee also reviewed information about the Domestic Violence Court Program in Santa Rosa County, a "one stop shop" with the primary goal of significantly enhancing both victim safety and offender accountability. The program partners have implemented a specialized domestic violence civil injunction court, criminal prosecution court, and compliance court. These three specialized courts provide a comprehensive, integrated system of proactive response to domestic violence in the community, and send the unified message of zero tolerance for domestic violence in Santa Rosa County.

**FCADV, the Department of Children and Families, the Office of the State Courts Administrator and other stakeholders should continue to identify venues to provide training to judges, service providers and other personnel involved with drug and dependency, domestic violence and family courts on the unique correlation between substance abuse and domestic violence.** In 2013, local team reviews identified evidence of substance abuse in 59% of the cases, a dramatic increase from 35% in 2012. Stakeholders should continue to implement the Team's 2012 recommendation regarding training on risk factors for domestic violence homicide, particularly substance abuse.

**Florida's child welfare agencies should collaborate with community partners when there are surviving children.** Given that 66% of the victims had children, and there were known child witnesses to the homicides in 29% of the cases, DCF and Community Based Care (CBC) agencies should develop local agreements with law enforcement and other community stakeholders to ensure that they are notified when there is a domestic or dating violence fatality and there are surviving children. If the surviving children become dependent in the child welfare system, DCF should ensure that they are provided with appropriate services while in foster or relative care to address the trauma of losing a family member in this tragic manner. In addition, child protective investigators should be trained and required to provide appropriate service referrals for surviving children who do not enter the child welfare system but are placed with family members or other caregivers.

# STATUS OF 2012 RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>4</sup>

## Recommendations implemented:

- The 2013 Florida Legislature passed a resolution designating January 2014 as Stalking Awareness Month in Florida.
- In 2013, FCADV and the Alliance 2 End Stalking, founded by a stalking survivor, conducted a community awareness event and training for law enforcement, advocates, judges, attorneys, and others in Seminole, Orange and Osceola Counties.
- FCADV's dating violence curricula for middle and high school students include specific information related to stalking and cyber stalking.
- FCADV awarded a local grant for a collaborative stalking pilot project to Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, Inc. and the Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County. The grant provides a means for bringing community stakeholders together to increase the resources, services, and advocacy available to survivors of stalking. The collaborative partners are committed to enhancing survivor safety through cooperative efforts to develop materials, training, and capacity building in Palm Beach County.
- FCADV developed a stalking training for lawyers and advocates that includes information on Florida's new civil injunction for protection against stalking.
- FCADV developed and distributed statewide, brochures in English, Spanish and Creole, that describe the civil injunctions for protection available to survivors of domestic, dating, and sexual violence and stalking.
- The Team attended a demonstration of new civil injunction petition software that is currently used by the Clerk of the Court in Martin County, Florida to assist survivors of domestic violence in completing injunction for protection petitions.
- The Team formed a Children's Issues Subcommittee in the fall of 2012 to attend, when invited, Statewide Child Abuse Death Review Committee meetings.
- In 2013, FCADV conducted three regional trainings for program managers and supervisors from Certified Domestic Violence Centers to enhance

their individual and organizational capacity to work with survivors of stalking.

- FCADV continued conducting *Advocacy, Technology, and Safety* trainings which focus heavily on safety planning and evidence collection in cyber stalking cases. These trainings were conducted in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General.

## Recommendations on the road to implementation:

- Dr. Marilyn Armour, author of *Domestic Fatalities: The Impact on Remaining Family Members*, presented her research on the impact of domestic violence homicides on surviving children to the statewide and local fatality review teams on March 7, 2013. Dr. Armour's knowledge and guidance will assist communities in developing methods to ensure that surviving children are offered appropriate services while in foster or relative care to address their trauma.
- FCADV and the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) have identified venues to provide training to judges, service providers and other personnel involved with drug and dependency courts on the unique correlation between substance abuse and domestic violence. OSCA has scheduled a webinar on domestic violence for drug court judges and staff, and FCADV is sponsoring four regional trainings on the dynamics of domestic violence and substance abuse conducted by Patricia J. Bland from the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health.
- FCADV is seeking funding to contract with a national expert to conduct safety audits in communities around the state to collect information from stakeholders. The data collected will be utilized to develop specific recommendations to address the heightened danger to victims when the court denies an *ex parte* petition and sets a hearing, with notice to the respondent, to determine whether to issue a final injunction.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The recommendations are set forth in Faces of Fatality II, available at [www.fcadv.org](http://www.fcadv.org)

<sup>5</sup>Section 741.30 (5)(b), F.S. requires the court to set a hearing when the only basis for denial of a petition for injunction against domestic violence is no appearance of immediate and present danger of domestic violence.

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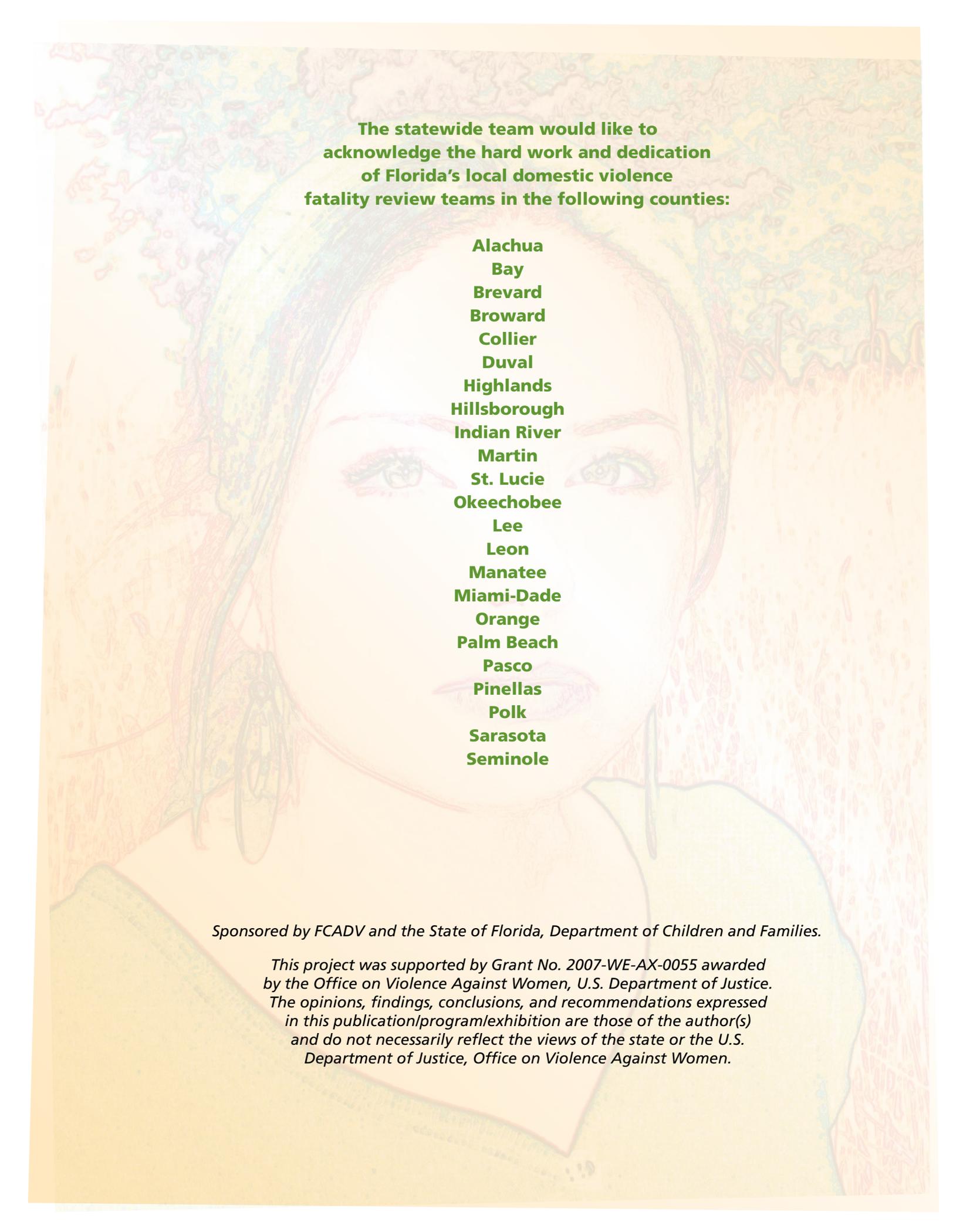
Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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Data analysis

Staff support provided by the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence



**The statewide team would like to  
acknowledge the hard work and dedication  
of Florida's local domestic violence  
fatality review teams in the following counties:**

**Alachua  
Bay  
Brevard  
Broward  
Collier  
Duval  
Highlands  
Hillsborough  
Indian River  
Martin  
St. Lucie  
Okeechobee  
Lee  
Leon  
Manatee  
Miami-Dade  
Orange  
Palm Beach  
Pasco  
Pinellas  
Polk  
Sarasota  
Seminole**

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