

**AN EXAMINATION OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
HOMICIDES IN PINELLAS
COUNTY FLORIDA
2001-2002 REPORT**

WHAT CASES WERE REVIEWED:

The team reviewed fourteen cases between October 2001 and December 2002. Ten of the cases were homicides, two near fatalities, and two non-intimate fatalities that involved a former partner killing a new partner. Of the homicides, 40% were homicide/suicides and 60% were homicides. Cases reviewed were from St. Petersburg, Pinellas Park, Largo, Clearwater, Dunedin, Palm Harbor, and Tarpon Springs.

For purposes of demographics, only the homicides are shown via graph form in this report. Since the number of near fatalities and non-intimate fatalities are so small, their statistical significance alone is limited. Yet, if included with the homicide information, a skew would occur and distort the results. Please note that their data is included in the primary indicators graph due to their significance when combined with homicide information.

The demographics based on the homicide cases reveal that 70% of the couples were married and 30% were co-habiting. The race of all of the victims and perpetrators was white/Caucasian. Victim age ranged from 34 to 82. Perpetrator age ranged from 26 to 83. Twenty percent of the couples had children with those children witnessing the homicide in one case. The overwhelming weapon of choice was a firearm (60% of the cases). Length of the relationship ranged from six months to 60 years.

RESULTS OF THE REVIEW:

A review from Fall 2001 through 2002 of ten domestic violence related homicide cases, two near fatality cases, and two non-intimate fatality cases reveals numerous common patterns and trends, also referred to as indicators. For purposes of this report, the indicators have been divided into three levels with level one being the highest. Level one includes those cases where indicators scoring four or more were present, level two those cases where indicators scoring two or three were present, and level three those cases where indicators scoring zero or one were present.

The indicators in level one (also referred to as primary indicators), being present in four or more of the cases, are:

<u>Primary Indicators</u>	<u># Cases</u>
Use of firearms	9
Alcohol/substance use	7
Separation issues	7
Significant age difference	6
Isolation	4
Family/friends knew of abuse	4

It is interesting to note that, of the level one indicators, the most frequently found include firearm involvement, alcohol/substance use, and separation issues. We were surprised to find a significant age difference of seven or more years between perpetrator and victim in 43% of the cases. Which partner was older did not seem to matter.

Seventy-nine percent (11) of the cases have two, three, or four of the six level one indicators present. By breaking the incidence down we find 43% (6) of the cases have four of the six indicators. Eight percent (1) of the cases have three of the six indicators. And, 29% (4) of the cases have two of the six indicators.

The indicators in level two (also referred to as secondary indicators), being present in two or three of the cases, are:

<u>Secondary Indicators</u>	<u># Cases</u>
No system involvement	3
Financial stress	3
Prior law enforcement response to dv call	3
Domestic violence history with aggressor	2
Domestic violence history with previous partner	2
Abuse witnessed by children	2
Violence toward others	2
Health related issues	2
Destructive lifestyle	2

The seeming inconsistencies of some level two indicators can be explained by the fact that in reality an equal number of cases had no prior system involvement (3) and had prior law enforcement response to domestic violence calls (3). Likewise, two cases had prior history of domestic violence between current partners and two cases had domestic violence history with other partners. Finally, some cases had no reported incidence of domestic violence to the criminal justice or social service system but family and/or friends knew of the violence.

The indicators in level three (also referred to as tertiary indicators), being present in one case, are:

<u>Tertiary Indicators</u>	<u># Cases</u>
Short term relationship	1
Involvement with DCF	1
Homelessness issues	1
Victim moving toward independence	1
Injunction in place	1
Unemployment issues	1
Instability of home life	1
Non-intimate fatality as a result of hurting a prior partner	1

Too few cases have been studied to say that level three indicators are not significant. For example, we know from prior research and experience in the field that indicators such as moving toward independence are significant in domestic violence relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based upon these indicators, we have developed the following recommendations:

- Efforts to produce brochures for dissemination in the community should be continued. A special effort should be made to reach family and friends who are witnesses to violence and may not know how to reach out for help.
- Since near fatality cases provide a wealth of information not normally present in fatality cases, continue to review these cases.
- Examine cases with no police involvement prior to the fatality to determine if increased Outreach efforts could be implemented.

LAST YEAR'S RECOMMENDATIONS REVISITED:

A review of last year's recommendations reveals that efforts have been made in each of the areas discussed. The recommendations were as follows:

1. Develop 3 flyers that describe what someone should do if they see or know about domestic violence-one for the general population, one for senior citizens, and one for youth. These flyers could be very similar to each other with just appropriate changes for the age group. They are designed to reach the family and friends of potential victims since many of the situations reviewed indicated that someone knew about the violence prior to the homicide. These one-page handouts could be given in a copy-ready format to all Task Force members for use in any appropriate outreach activities in which they are involved.
2. Agree to regularly discuss at Task Force meetings any grant opportunities that would assist Task Force members with promoting domestic violence prevention or intervention messages.

3. Discuss ways in which to integrate various other groups and issues into the Task Force utilizing the broad categories that were seen by the Fatality Review Team to be most in need of attention. A long-term goal might be to organize the Task Force into a committee structure following those categories, which are: Education, Legislative Reform, Outreach, Elderly, Youth and Schools, Health Care, Law Enforcement, and Substance Use and Domestic Violence.

A flyer/brochure targeting senior citizens is near completion. The other two flyers will follow (recommendation #1). Discussion of grant opportunities is a standing agenda item for Task Force meetings. Several opportunities have been shared during the last year. One discussion has resulted in the submission of a collaborative grant to the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence with The Haven of RCS as the lead agency. The grant proposal was due the first of July and no award determination had been made at the time of this report's production. In addition, a collaboration with the Juvenile Welfare Board Safe Start program will ultimately result in the implementation of a batterer intervention program in the county jail (recommendation #2). The Task Force has been actively working to include other groups in our efforts. During the last year, we have added a law enforcement committee and a health care committee. In addition, a representative from the Area Agency on Aging has joined the general Task Force and the Fatality Review Team.

THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS FOR MAKING THIS REPORT POSSIBLE:

Wendy Loomas, Violence Prevention, Pinellas County Health Department for creating the graphs for this report.

All of the Fatality Review Team members for their hard work, dedication, perspective, determination, and vision.

Family Service Centers for providing the Fatality Review Team meeting space and morning beverages. A special thanks to Karen Cochran and her assistant Holly.

All the detectives, officers, and victim advocates from local law enforcement agencies who have made presentations at our meetings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

For further information on the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force and/or Fatality Review Team, please contact:

Frieda Widera
Largo Police Department
201 Highland Ave.
Largo, FL 33770
(727)586-7481
fwidera@largo.com

or go to our website: dvtf.org

FATALITY REVIEW TEAM MEMBER AGENCIES:

Administrative Office of the Courts
Area Agency on Aging
CASA
Clearwater Police Department
Department of Veteran Affairs Medical Center, Bay Pines
Family Service Centers
Florida Department of Children and Families
Gulfport Police Department
The Haven of RCS
Help A Child, Inc
Largo Police Department
Medical Examiner's Office
Office of Clerk of Circuit Court
Pinellas County Health Department
Pinellas County Sheriff's Office
Salvation Army Correctional Services
State Attorney's Office
St. Petersburg Police Department
St. Pete Beach Police Department
Tarpon Springs Police Department