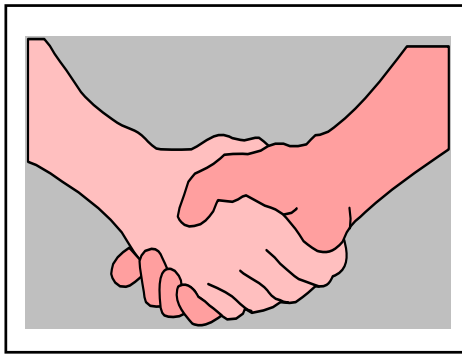


# **AN EXAMINATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDES AND NEAR FATALITIES IN PINELLAS COUNTY FLORIDA 2006 REPORT**



An annual report created by the Fatality Review Team, a committee of the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force. The purpose of the Task Force is to promote the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, to enhance victim safety and to hold batterers accountable. Goals include developing and implementing prevention strategies, facilitating a coordinated community response to domestic violence, and providing ongoing education and assessment of the coordinated community response. All concerned members of the community are urged to join the Task Force. Contact information on last page of report.

[www.dvtf.org](http://www.dvtf.org)

**THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO DOMESTIC  
HOMICIDE VICTIMS, NEAR FATALITY SURVIVORS,  
AND THEIR FAMILIES**

# **INDEX**

The Problem.....	3-4
Overview of the Fatality Review Team.....	5
Historical Background.....	6-7
Mission and Objectives.....	7
Changes Implemented As a Result of Reviews.....	8-9
Prior Report Recommendation Review.....	9-10
2006 Cases Reviewed.....	10
2006 Graphic Representation.....	11-13
Results of 2006 Reviews.....	14
Cumulative Data (2000-2006) Cases Reviewed.....	14-15
Cumulative Data Graphic Representation.....	16-17
Analysis of Cumulative Data.....	18-19
2006 Recommendations.....	19
References.....	19
Acknowledgements.....	19-20
Contact Information.....	20
Executive Summary.....	21-22

## **THE PROBLEM**

Domestic violence in its worst and ultimate form is homicide. 2005 was a deadly year for Pinellas County residents. Actually, the deadliest on record related to domestic violence. In 2005, sixteen of our citizens lost their lives at the hands of a loved one. Domestic homicides accounted for 32% of the county's fifty homicides.

Each year since 1993 the Florida Department of Law Enforcement has disseminated crime statistics to the state and community. Due to logistics, there is a six month delay in reporting annual totals. Therefore, 2006 numbers will not be available until June of 2007. Crime totals for the first half of 2006, however, reveal that the domestic murder rate in Florida has increased 47.1% since 2005. In the first half of 2005 there were 68 domestic murders in Florida. For the first half of 2006 there were 100 domestic murders. While there is no county by county breakdown available yet, the sharp increase in state numbers raises concerns that 2006 final numbers will result in another deadly year in Pinellas County.

In an effort to address this important issue, our community has been consistently reviewing local domestic violence homicide cases since 2000. Our cumulative results (2000-2006) reveal a number of notable issues and concerns. First, of the 66 cases, only 12% (8) had been ordered to a Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) yet 44% (29) had prior domestic violence arrests. This raises concerns that our criminal justice system is not adequately identifying the danger that a perpetrator poses and the need for BIP as a condition of any plea or sentence. In addition, only 17% (11) of the victims had obtained an injunction for protection against domestic violence. It is possible that our community is not adequately referring victims to obtain injunctions for protection. Or, there may be a perceived lack of confidence in the effectiveness of an injunction for protection. It may also very well be that individuals who obtain injunctions for protection are more connected to community resources, have received safety planning and lethality assessment and are more protected from homicide. At this time, we are unable to determine the actual cause of this low statistic but it is an area for our

community to continue to watch and assess. In the same vein, only 2% (1) of the victims utilized a domestic violence shelter. This telling statistic points to the use of shelter or domestic violence center services as being a potential protective factor for victims and reinforces the need for continued funding to our local domestic violence centers for the provision of services.

Fifty percent (33) of our cases reviewed since 2000 have involved a firearm and 24% (16) have involved stabbing. National studies find that when a gun is in the home, an abused woman is six times more likely than other abused women to be killed (Campbell, et al, 2003). This coupled with the national statistic that 75% of the individuals killed in domestic violence relationships are in the process of separation or have separated raises concerns about the easy availability of firearms and the problems of securing weapons when an injunction for protection has been ordered. The deputy or officer serving the injunction for protection inquires about weapons but does not have the authority to search for weapons, supporting petitioners' frequent reports that respondents have not surrendered their weapons. Similarly, while a 2004 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that nationally 76% of domestic homicide victims are female and 79% of perpetrators are males, in our local cases 86% (57) of the victims were women and 86% (57) of the perpetrators were men. In addition, fifty-eight percent of our local cases involved an age difference of six or more years. Studies reveal that age discrepancy is associated with higher risk of intimate partner homicide (Breitman, Shackelford, Block, 2003).

Furthermore, national studies reveal that women in cohabiting relationships are at greater risk of being killed by their partner than are women in marital relationships (Shackelford, 2001). These studies also point out that cohabiting middle aged women (ages 35-44) appear to have the greatest risk. Among married women the risk is greatest for young women less than 25 years of age. Our local cases have a fairly equal representation of married versus cohabiting couples but we have the largest number of victims in the 36-45 year age bracket, 21 individuals or 32% of the cases. In addition, we have an over representation of Black individuals in our cases compared to the population of Pinellas County. Our cases involve 20% (13) Black victims and 27% (18) Black perpetrators.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW TEAM**

Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent legal and social problems in the United States. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), (June, 2005), family violence accounts for about 1 in 10 violent victimizations and 33% of all violence investigated by the police.

Domestic violence in its worst and ultimate form is homicide. Each year approximately 1400 adults die at the hands of a spouse or intimate partner in the United States. Females are victims of domestic homicide in about 76% of these cases, males are perpetrators in 79% of the cases (BJS, June, 2005).

As our society struggles to address the issue of domestic violence, many initiatives, laws, programs, and policies have been implemented. One such recent effort is the creation of a fatality review process. A fatality review team or committee is a group of individuals from various agencies and professions who convene periodically to review local domestic violence homicide cases. The team operates under the belief that by better understanding how and why a homicide occurred, the community can work to help prevent future deaths.

Pinellas County has been working to improve its Coordinated Community Response to domestic violence. Fatality reviews enhance that response as they provide a forum for discussion of patterns and trends, and issues of system response, social change, and enhanced coordination among individuals and agencies. Through dissemination of reports and findings, the Fatality Review Team endeavors to encourage all members of the Pinellas County community to recognize risks and work to prevent future deaths.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In August 1999, about fifteen leaders in Pinellas County were invited to discuss convening a Fatality Review Team. Initially, throughout the county, there was great reluctance to become involved in this review process. Individuals addressed fears that their organization or agency might be blamed after the fact for perceived mistakes. Some were especially concerned about time, resources, and other costs that might be required to be involved.

Gaining commitment was slow in Pinellas. Eventually several participants from Pinellas attended a conference in Orlando on fatality review teams. Working together to discuss hypothetical cases at the conference helped some to develop more enthusiasm for the potential of forming a team in Pinellas. Probably the most significant event that allowed the State Attorney's Office in Pinellas to feel more positive about joining the team was the Florida legislature's passage of legislation protecting fatality review teams.

The Fatality Review Team was constituted on May 11, 2000 and consisted of several agencies including, but not limited to, the Pinellas County State Attorney's Office, multiple law enforcement agencies, correctional agencies, family service organizations, domestic violence shelters, and others.

At that time, it was decided that the team would become a subcommittee of the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force and several procedures and guidelines were put in place. We would: only review cases involving violence between intimate partners; only review closed cases; not attempt to re-open the investigation; not interview friends, family or neighbors during our reviews; be closed to the media; and not assign blame. Also, we would: look at cases from 1996 forward; look at murder/suicides that were domestic related; review confidentiality statements from other teams in an effort to establish one locally; and ask homicide detectives from appropriate agencies to present the case being reviewed if at all possible.

A confidentiality statement was established that is signed at each meeting. The team meets for about two hours and generally reviews one or two cases per meeting. Within a few years the Team saw value in reviewing near

fatality cases. After each review, possible trends are noted and discussed. Prevention and intervention strategies are identified that could have possibly affected the outcome of the current case or future cases. Relevant characteristics of the case are also noted. The reviews have been enlightening and amicable. The team reports on trends at the Domestic Violence Task Force meetings and annual reports are generated and distributed throughout the county. Establishing a Fatality Review Team has resulted in partnerships and enhanced communication between agencies that has not existed in the past. The Team believes that these activities lead to a better coordinated community response to domestic violence.

## **MISSION AND OBJECTIVES**

The purpose or mission of the Fatality Review Team is: To conduct multi-disciplinary reviews of domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities in Pinellas County Florida and to use the data to provide community prevention education and awareness activities as well as to make recommendations for legislative and public policy to reduce domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities.

The objectives of the Fatality Review Team are:

1. To describe trends and patterns of domestic violence related fatalities and near fatalities in Pinellas County Florida.
2. To identify high risk factors, current practices, gaps in systemic responses, barriers to safety in domestic violence situations, and recommend prevention or intervention activities to the Domestic Violence Task Force for implementation.
3. To educate the public, policy makers, and funders about fatalities and near fatalities due to domestic violence and about strategies for intervention.
4. To recommend policies, practices, and services that will encourage collaboration to prevent and reduce fatalities and near fatalities due to domestic violence.
5. To improve the process of sharing information between agencies and offices that work with domestic violence victims.

6. To more effectively facilitate the prevention of domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities through multi-disciplinary collaboration.

## **CHANGES IMPLEMENTED IN OUR COMMUNITY AS A RESULT OF REVIEWS**

While the Fatality Review Team's recommendations that follow in this annual report embrace a coordinated, community-wide response, many crucial steps to increase victim safety can be taken on an individual or agency level. Indeed, as a result of their participation in the bimonthly Fatality Review Team reviews, several individual members have taken steps to augment existing and/or create new policies, practices, and procedures in their respective agencies. For example, one law enforcement member, when investigating a domestic homicide or near fatality, now elicits from witnesses and family members more history type information about the parties such as prior domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse by either party, and pending separations. Another law enforcement member, who supervises victim advocates, now timely scans all incoming cases for the presence of red flags and patterns/trends identified by the Fatality Review Team, and refers a victim advocate to follow up with immediate contact for safety planning and referrals. Probation Counselors who encounter a domestic battery shortly after the incident has occurred now provide support for the victim by staying with the victim until the police arrive on scene to investigate.

Also as a result of their participation in the bimonthly reviews, several domestic violence center and law enforcement trainers now routinely include information in their presentations about the patterns/trends/signs identified by the Fatality Review Team. These members also pass out the "Elderly" and "Family and Friends" brochures created by the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force upon a prior recommendation of the Fatality Review Team. A Health Department team member is revising how the Department counsels pregnant women and other clients to notify their partners of a positive pregnancy test or a positive HIV or STD test, particularly when domestic violence indicators are present or possible. This Fatality Review Team member explains in her training the potential lethality of these situations by relaying a case involving previous violence where the ex-



boyfriend nearly killed a woman when she disclosed to him she was pregnant by him. Also included in her presentations is the mandatory abuse reporting requirement for vulnerable adults, citing the case of a disabled elderly adult who had sought medical treatment for injuries, and who was later killed by her abuser. Finally, one domestic violence center began offering a “Friends and Family” support group, after identifying this need from their participation on the Fatality Review Team.

## **PRIOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>
2000-2001	1. Create 3 brochures/flyers: general, family/friends, youth	PCSO printed a family/friends brochure for Task Force.
	2. Discuss grant opportunities at each Task Force meeting	Completed; on-going
	3. Integrate various community groups and issues based upon the broad findings of the Fatality Review Committee	Completed; on-going
2001-2002	1. Create 3 brochures/flyers: general, family/friends, youth	PCSO printed family/friends brochure and created/printed an elder brochure for Task Force.
	2. Begin to review “near fatality” cases	On-going
	3. Begin and continue to examine cases where police were involved prior to incident to determine if more outreach efforts could be made	On-going
2003	1. Share Fatality Review findings with professionals/agencies in the substance abuse field to develop screening tools for domestic violence perpetrators	Contact has been made, discussion is on-going
	2. Distribute elder and friends/family brochures	On-going as they have been available
	3. Continue review of both homicide and “near fatality” cases	On-going
	4. Include analysis of stalking behaviors	Completed; on-going
	5. Disseminate Report findings widely throughout the community	Completed; on-going
	6. Educate community of the high rate of firearm use in DV homicides; enlist the assistance of others in this process	Completed; on-going
2004	1. Seek funding to cover cost of printing more family/friends and elder brochures	Completed in 2006 with grant from Pinellas Safe Start
	2. Distribute Report to local law enforcement and DV Centers	Completed; on-going
	3. Track unanswered questions to be used in law enforcement training	There have been no common unanswered questions. Committee will continue to track this item.
	4. Continue to track stalking behaviors	On-going
	5. Review the Report Recommendations with Task Force at least twice per year	Completed
	6. Present Report in March vs. October	Committee is working on achieving this goal. Report has been presented earlier each year since recommendation.
	7. Develop a plan to work with substance abuse professionals in the area.	Not completed

2005	1. Keep track of the years that cases occurred to compare with changes in the community at large	Completed; on-going
	2. Prepare list of important information for law enforcement to gather during homicide investigations	In process; final yet to be completed
	3. Review 2004 Recommendations and determine ways to complete all	On-going
2006	1. Distribute copies of Report to focus groups, i.e. Battered/Formerly Battered Women's Caucus of FCADV	
	2. Distribute copies of Report to survivors who are staff and/or volunteers of CASA and The Haven for feedback	
	3. Create 1-page Executive Summary of the lethality indicators	Completed, part of this report
	4. Develop a substance abuse committee of the Task Force to include at least one batterer intervention provider to work with and train substance abuse professionals on assessment of abusers.	

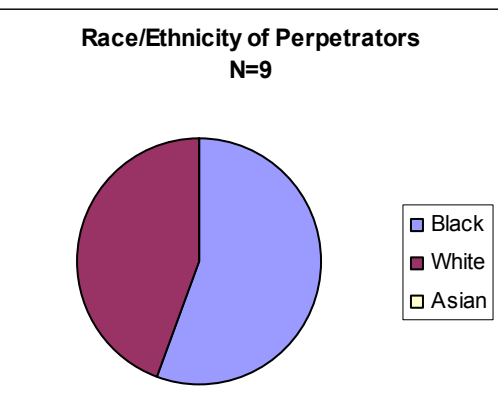
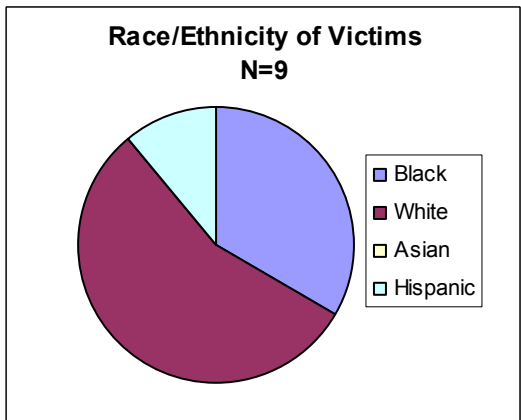
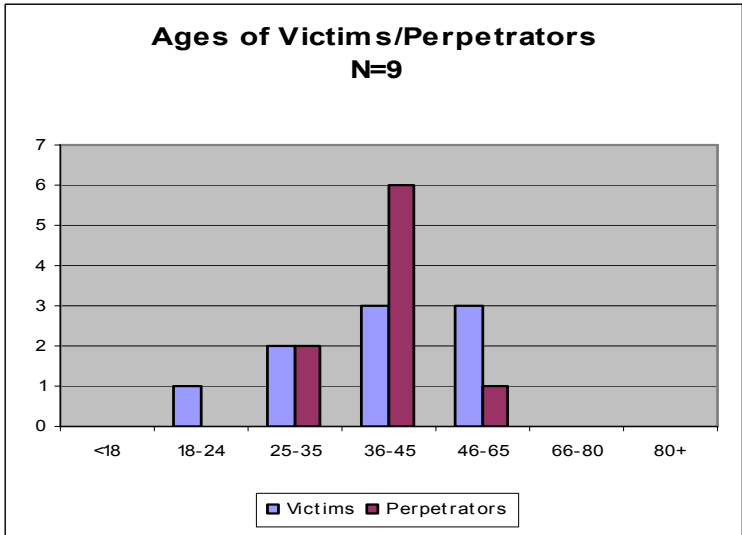
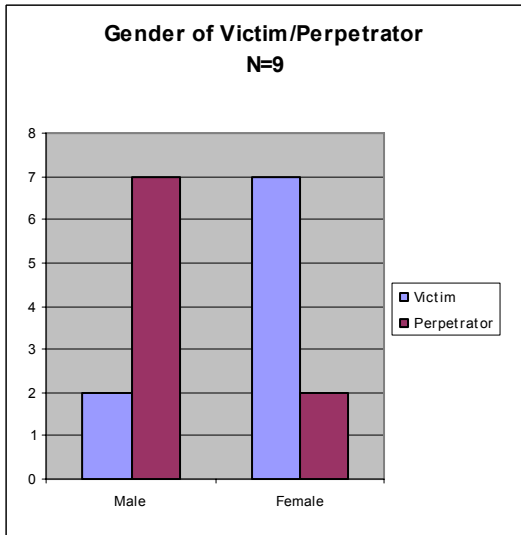
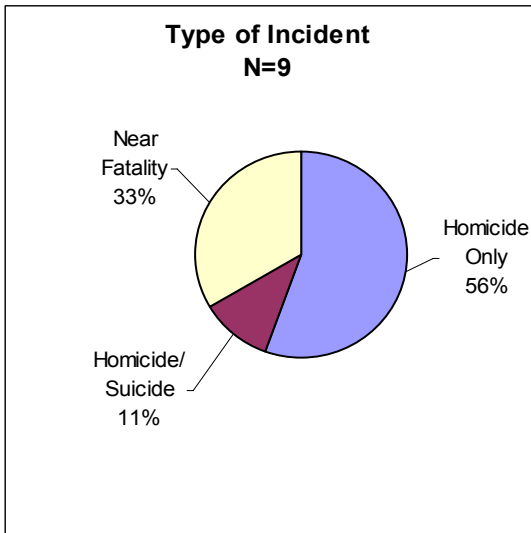
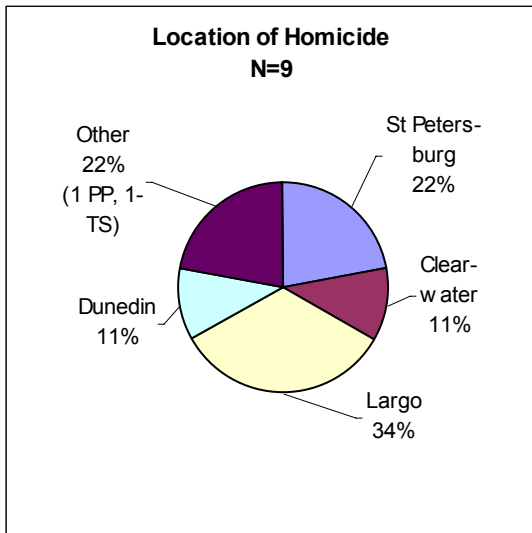
## **2006 CASES REVIEWED**

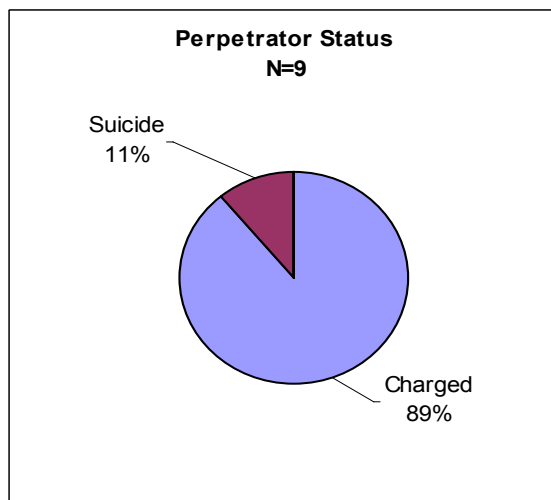
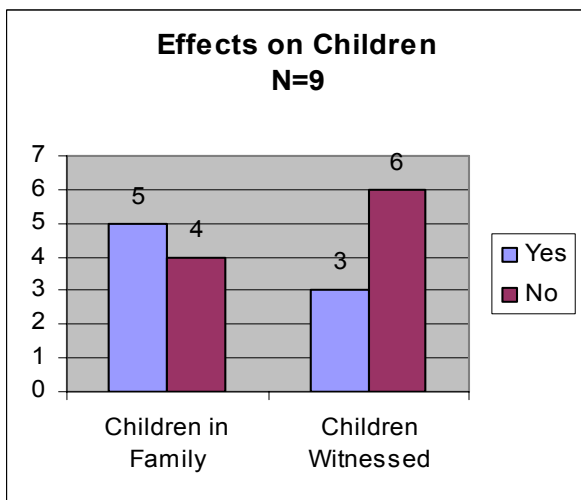
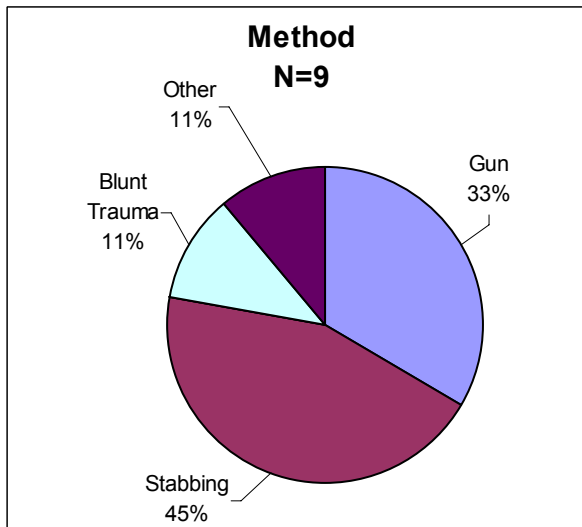
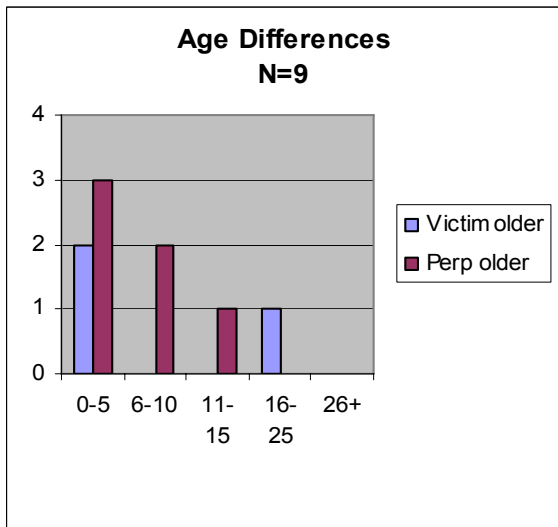
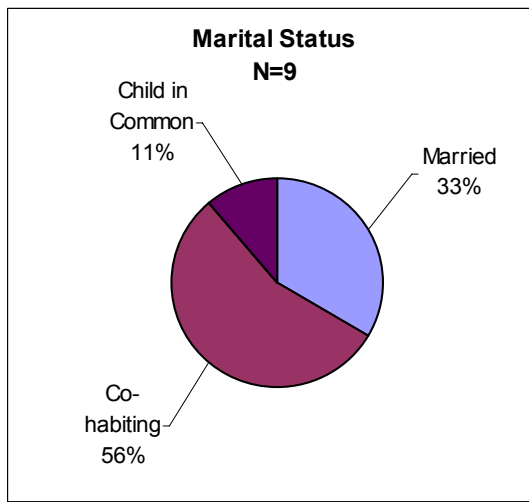
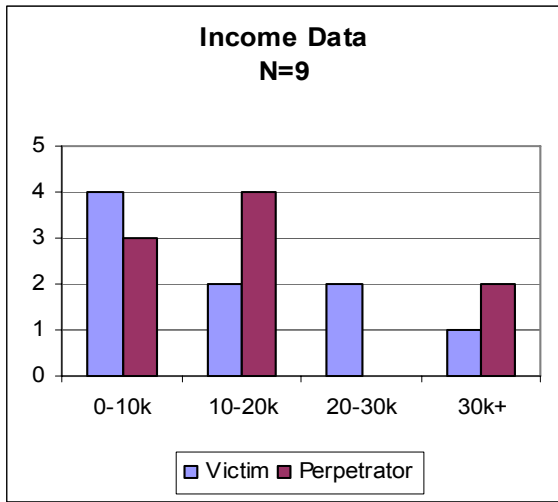
The team reviewed nine (9) cases during 2006. It is important to note that reviewed cases are closed cases and therefore did not necessarily occur during 2006. Fifty-six percent (5) were homicides, 11% (1) were homicide/suicide, and 33% (3) were near fatalities. Cases reviewed were from Clearwater, Dunedin, Largo, Pinellas Park, St. Petersburg, and Tarpon Springs.

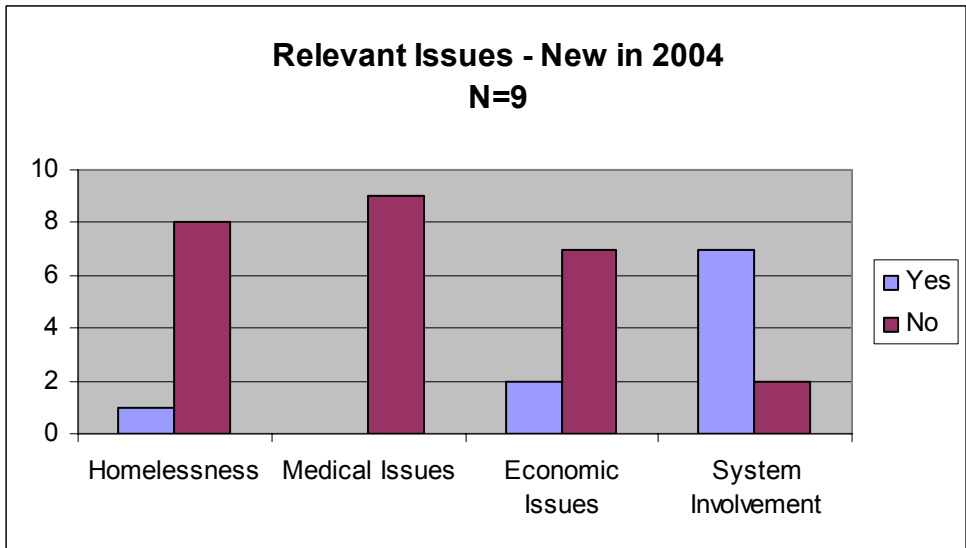
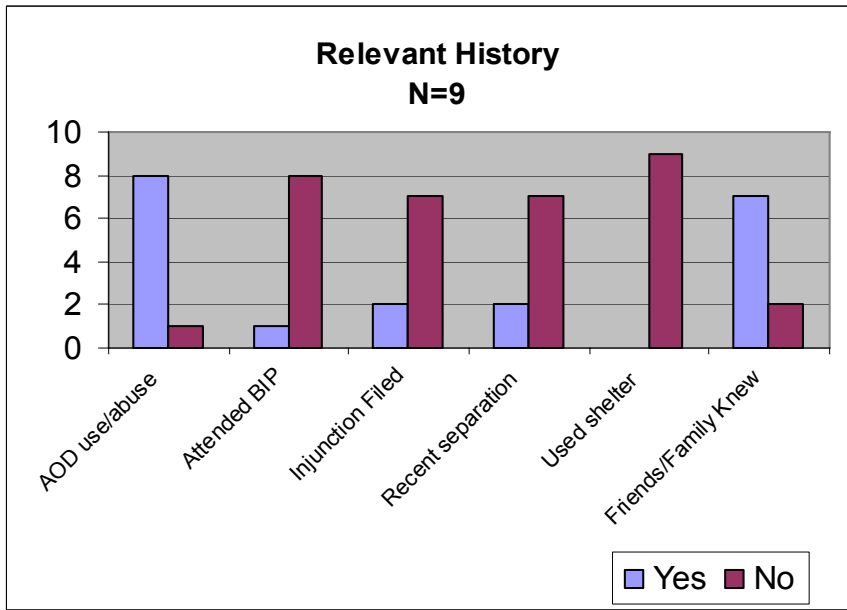
Demographics reveal that 33% (3) of the couples were married, 56% (5) were co-habiting, and 11% (1) had a child in common. Seventy-eight percent (7) of the victims were female. Seventy-eight percent (7) of the perpetrators were male. In addition, 33% (3) of the victims were black, 56% (5) were white, and 11% (1) were Hispanic. Fifty-six percent (5) of the perpetrators were black and 44% (4) were white. The ages of the victims ranged from 16 to 62 years. The ages of the perpetrators ranged from 26 to 50 years. Length of the relationships ranged from two months to 14 years.

Thirty-three percent (3) of the cases involved a firearm, 45% (4) stabbing, 11% (1) involved blunt trauma, and 11% (1) used a vehicle.

Graph representations of these and other statistics follow.







## **RESULTS OF THE REVIEWS**

The team evaluates each case and determines if any patterns or trends are present. The following list highlights the patterns or trends identified during 2006.

Pattern or Trend	#2006 Cases	% of Cases
Substance use	8	89%
Family, friends, or coworkers knew about abuse	7	78%
Criminal history (perpetrator)	7	78%
System involvement	7	78%
Prior dv history this relationship	7	78%
Prior dv history other relationship (perp)	5	56%
Prior dv arrest (perpetrator)	5	56%
Age difference of 6 or more years	4	44%

Several of these patterns or trends are consistently present each year in the cases reviewed, especially substance use and family, friends, or coworkers knowing about the abuse but not knowing what to do to help.

## **CUMULATIVE DATA: 2000-2006**

In recognition of the fact that the relatively small number of cases (9) reviewed in 2006 does not provide statistically significant information on its own, this section reports on the cumulative data from the 66 reviews since the team was formed in 2000.

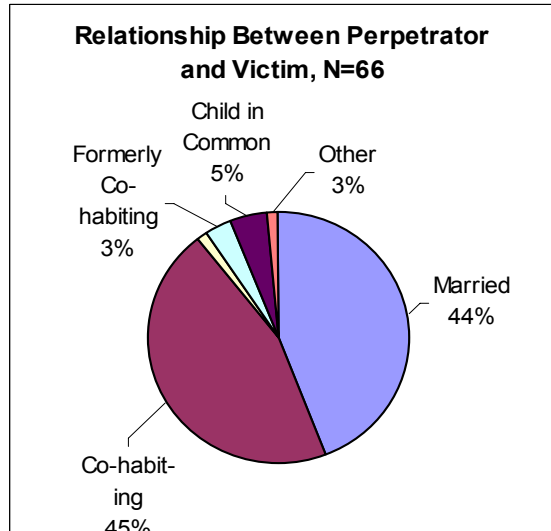
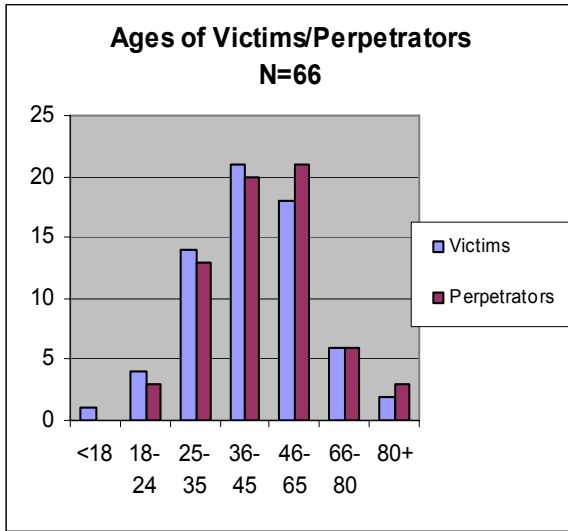
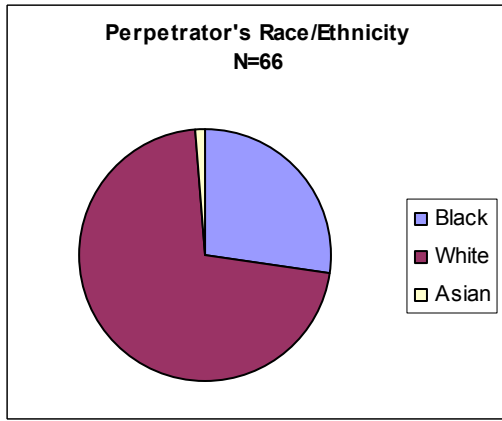
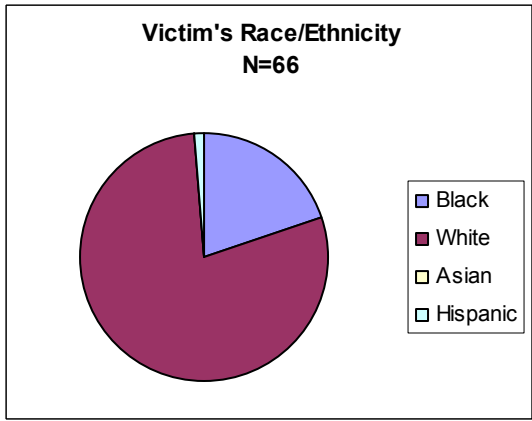
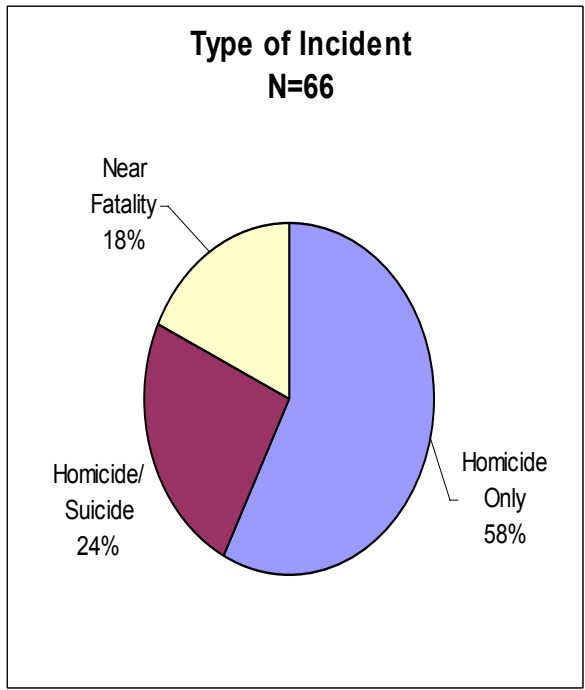
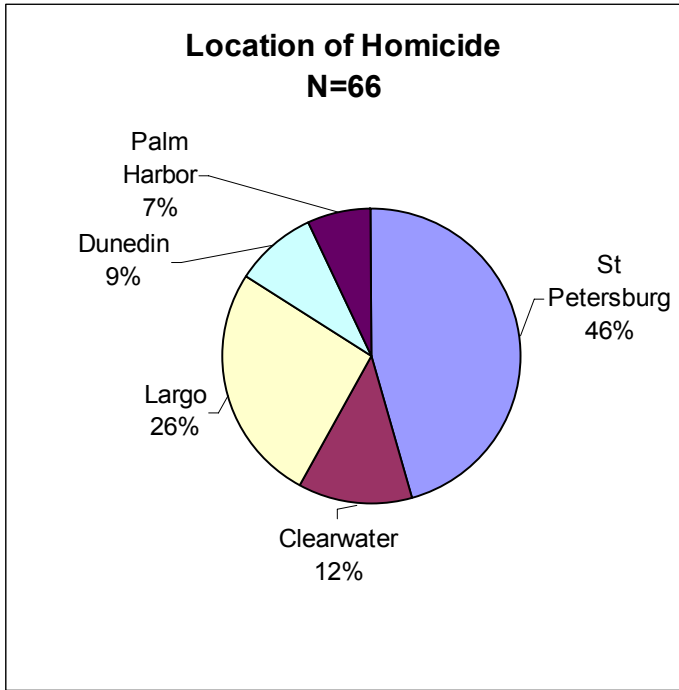
Of those cases, 38 (58%) were homicides, 16 (24%) were homicide/suicides, and 12 (18%) were near fatalities (near fatalities have only been included

since 2003). Eighty-six percent (57) of the victims were women and 86% (57) of the perpetrators were men. In more than half of the cases the age difference between the victim and the perpetrator was 6 or more years. Fifty percent of the cases involved firearms, 24% were stabbings, 12% were strangulations, 11% involved blunt trauma, and 3% were from other causes. The relationships between the victim and perpetrator were primarily married (44%, 29 cases) or cohabiting (45%, 30 cases), while 7 cases (11%) were people no longer in a current relationship. It was known by friends or family members in 33% of the relationships that the parties were experiencing separation issues, which is one expected precursor to an escalation in an already violent relationship. Our team is not able to know whether a discussion about separation precedes a homicide unless that fact is known to friends and family. Nationally, separation issues are viewed as an antecedent to domestic homicide.

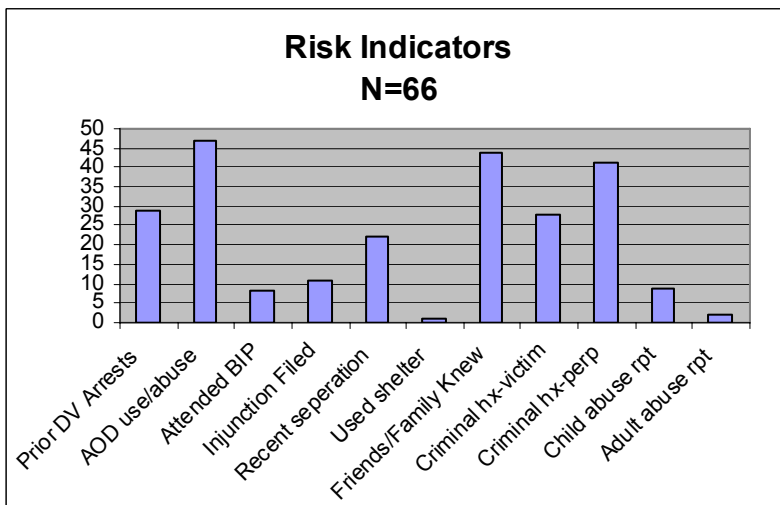
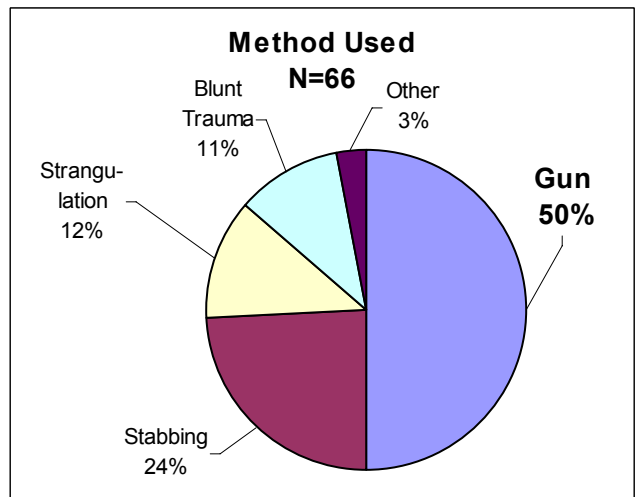
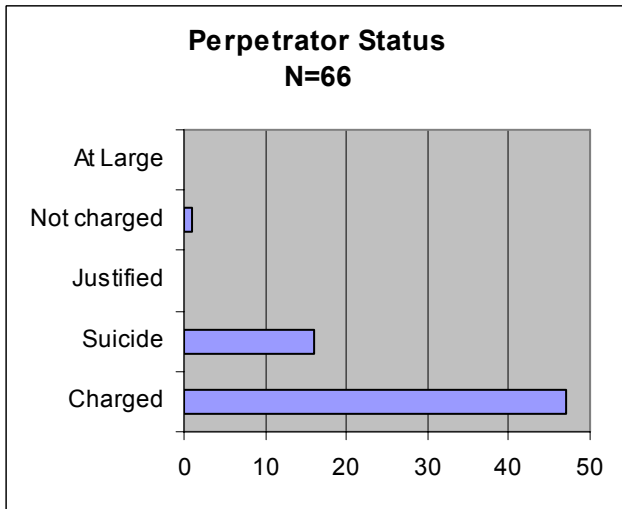
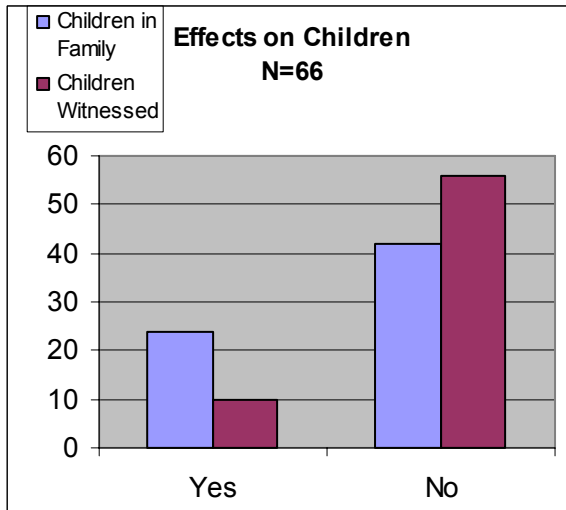
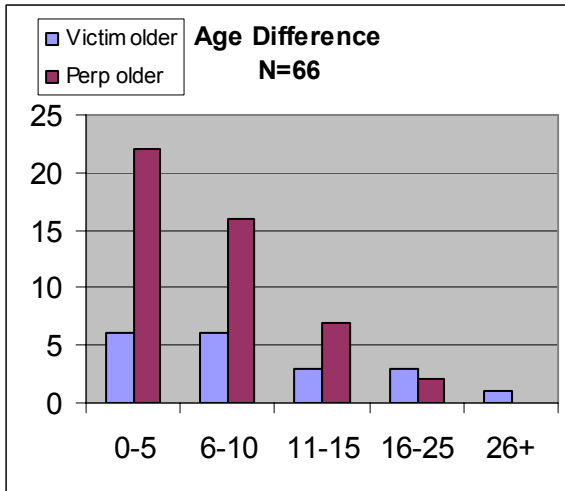
Seventy-one percent (47) of the cases involved some alcohol or other drug use by either the victim, perpetrator or both parties. In 67% (44) of the cases, it was known that friends and/or family were aware of prior violence. Sixty-two percent (41) of the perpetrators and 42% (28) of the victims had a criminal history.

Graph representations of these and other statistics follow.

Note: We discovered several errors in the cumulative graphs we presented last year (the program we used was not automatically updating numbers as we had assumed). As a result, we went back, re-analyzed the data, and corrected the errors. Also, previously the “weapon used” graph indicated the types of weapons/methods used in an incident but the numbers became confusing when more than one method was used. We will now be reporting the method that produced the actual cause of death.







## **ANALYSIS OF THE CUMULATIVE DATA**

The breakdown of the cases noted above are very similar to the cumulative data in recent years, so there seems to be some consistency in the patterns of homicide vs. homicide/suicide, an age difference of six years or more, the method or weapon used, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, the involvement of alcohol and other drugs, and whether family and/or friends were aware of the violence.

Further, the profiles of the most likely victim and perpetrator have changed little since reviews began. The most likely victim is still a white female, between 36-65 years old, with an income of less than \$20,000/year and a partner six or more years older than she. The most likely perpetrator can still be described as a white male, in the same age and income bracket as the most likely victim, and older than his victim by six years or more. While any domestic violence victim can be killed by their abuser, and any abuser can become a murderer, these profiles help us to see 'red flags' or lethality indicators when working with victims and perpetrators.

In addition to these consistent factors that create a profile, it is important to note how the demographics of some victims and perpetrators differ from the general population. In Pinellas County, the population between 25-45 years old is 25% of the total whereas that age group represents 53% of the victims of these cases and 50% of the perpetrators, virtually double. Also, in Pinellas County, less than 10% of the population lives on an income of under \$10,000 per year, whereas 44% of the victims are in this income bracket and 39% of the perpetrators are, which is more than 4 times the rate in the general population.

The geographic spread of cases also seems to concentrate in some areas more so than the general population. In St. Petersburg, for instance, only 24.2% of the county's population lives there but 39% of these cases took place in St. Petersburg. For Largo the statistics are 7% of the population but 23% of the cases, and for Dunedin (while a small actual number) had 3.8% of the population but 8% of the cases. Finally, the racial breakdown is also

important to note. While the Black population of Pinellas County is 9.8%, the victims in these cases were 19.6% Black and the perpetrators were 27% Black.

## **2006 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Distribute copies of Report to focus groups, i.e. Battered/Formerly Battered Women’s Caucus of FCADV
2. Distribute copies of Report to survivors who are staff and/or volunteers of CASA and The Haven for feedback
3. Create 1-page Executive Summary of the lethality indicators
4. Develop a substance abuse committee of the Task Force to include at least one batterer intervention provider to work with and train substance abuse professionals on assessment of abusers.

## **REFERENCES**

Campbell, Jacqueline, et al. “Assessing Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Homicide”, NIJ Journal 250, 14-19, (2003).

Durose, Matthew, et al. Family Violence Statistics. June 2005, Washington, D.C.: US Department of Justice.

Shackelford, Todd. “Cohabitation, Marriage, and Murder: Woman-killing by Male Romantic Partners”, Aggressive Behavior 27, 284-291, (2001).

## **THANK TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS FOR MAKING THIS REPORT POSSIBLE**

Wendy Loomas, Injury and Violence Prevention Office, Pinellas County Health Department, for creating the graphs and several sections in this report and serving on the report committee.

Margaret Pearce, Gulfcoast Legal Services, and Bonnie Rosendale, CASA, for creating part of the report and serving on the report committee.

Family Service Centers, Inc. for providing the Team with a meeting space and Karen Cochran for serving morning beverages.

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

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

Report compiled by:  
Frieda Widera  
Largo Police Department  
201 Highland Ave.  
Largo, FL 33770  
(727)586-7481  
[fwidera@largo.com](mailto:fwidera@largo.com)

For further information on the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force log on to [www.dvtf.org](http://www.dvtf.org)

Or contact the Chairperson:  
Wendy Loomas  
Pinellas County Health Department  
Injury and Violence Prevention Office  
205 Martin Luther King Jr. St. N.  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701  
(727)824-6979  
[Wendy\\_Loomas@doh.state.fl.us](mailto:Wendy_Loomas@doh.state.fl.us)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Fatality Review Team Results in Pinellas County**

Our local cases reveal the following lethality indicators:

- Substance use by one of parties or both of parties
- Firearm in home
- Friends, family, or coworkers aware of abuse but unsure what to do to help
- Age disparity of six or more years
- Prior criminal history for perpetrator

Note: Any domestic violence victim can be killed by their abuser, and any abuser can become a murderer, these profiles help us to see “red flags” when working with victims and perpetrators. They are about awareness so that as a community we can take extra precautions when we see these factors in a case we are working.

Our cases also reveal:

- A higher incidence within the Black population when compared to the general population.
- A higher incidence in St. Petersburg, Largo, and Dunedin when compared to the actual population of the cities.
- A higher incidence of victims and perpetrators with incomes under \$10,000 per year as compared to county statistics.
- A higher incidence of victims and perpetrators in the age range 25-45 when compared to county statistics.

The most likely victim of domestic homicide or near fatality is:

A white female, between the ages 36-65, with an income less than \$20,000 a year and a partner six or more years older than she.

The most likely perpetrator of domestic homicide or near fatality is:

A white male, between the ages 36-65, with an income less than \$20,000 a year and a older than his victim by six or more years.

## NATIONAL TRENDS OR ANTECEDENTS TO DOMESTIC HOMICIDE (multiple sources):

- Prior domestic violence history in relationship
- Separation issues
- Extreme jealousy, possessiveness
- Substance use by perpetrator
- Criminal history for perpetrator
- Perpetrator's lack of employment
- Firearm in house
- Prior threat with firearm or weapon
- Prior threats to kill
- Prior attempts to strangle
- Child in home, perpetrator is not biological father
- Forced sex