

**Pinellas County  
Domestic Violence Task Force**

**FATALITY REVIEW TEAM  
2007 ANNUAL REPORT**

**Examination of  
Domestic Violence  
Homicides  
and Near Fatalities**

This Report is dedicated to  
domestic violence homicide  
victims,  
near fatality survivors,  
and their families.

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

## **PINELLAS COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK FORCE** **PURPOSE AND GOALS**

### **Purpose:**

To promote the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, to enhance victim safety, and to hold batterers accountable.

### **Goals:**

1. To develop and implement primary prevention strategies.
2. To facilitate and implement a Coordinated Community Response to domestic violence.
3. To provide ongoing education and assessment of the Coordinated Community Response.

The Fatality Review Team is a committee of the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force.

## **MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF** **THE FATALITY REVIEW COMMITTEE**

### **Mission:**

The mission of the multi-disciplinary Pinellas County Fatality Review Team is to review domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities for public policy change needed to prevent domestic violence.

### **Objectives:**

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 multidisciplinary collaboration.

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# Domestic Homicide Statistics

## Pinellas County, Florida

- Every year, domestic homicides account for nearly *one in every four* homicides in Pinellas County, impacting law enforcement resources and surviving family, friends, coworkers and neighbors.
- The 75 cases reviewed for this report occurred between 1996-2007, and represent *62%* of the *121 domestic violence murders* committed during those 12 years in Pinellas County.
- With over *6,000 domestic violence arrests* and over *20,000 calls to domestic violence hotlines* every year in Pinellas County, it is apparent that these killings are just the tip of the iceberg of the violence in many homes in our community.
- In 2007, *12 people were killed* in domestic violence-related homicides – *8 were women, 2 were men, and 2 were very young children*.
- On average, these numbers have not decreased in the last 10 years, so this report highlights recommendations that seek to change that trend.

*Read on to learn more!*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Domestic violence in its worst and ultimate form is homicide, and 2007 was another deadly year for Pinellas County residents. During 2007 in Pinellas County, nine people were murdered by an intimate partner, seven of whom were women killed by men. Two additional victims were the young children of a victim and one woman was killed because she was the new partner of a victim. Two men were also killed by their female partners in 2007, bringing the local domestic violence homicide toll to 12 in 2007. While these numbers fluctuate from year to year, they have not decreased significantly since 1996 when the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force began to track homicide statistics.

## **TRENDS**

The Fatality Review Team has reviewed 75 cases that occurred from 1996 to 2007. The reviewed cases were closed cases and therefore did not necessarily occur during the year they were reviewed. All the cases summarized in this report involved one victim and one perpetrator.

1. Thirty of these reviewed cases (40%) had at least one prior domestic violence arrest on record for either the victim or the perpetrator. This raises the concern that opportunities for intervention are being missed, or are not sufficient, when domestic violence comes to the attention of the legal system.
2. Eleven victims had obtained a domestic violence injunction for protection and seven perpetrators had been ordered to a Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP). Again, these statistics reflect possible missed opportunities for victim protection and batterer accountability and behavior change.
3. Forty of the cases reviewed (53%) were committed with a firearm. A recent national study found 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 highlights the need for prevention efforts related to firearms.

4. The vast majority of victims and perpetrators in reviewed cases fell into the ages of 36-65. One national study showed that cohabiting middle-aged women (ages 35-44) have the greatest risk of homicide and married women were at greatest risk under 25 years of age (Shackelford, 2001). Cases we reviewed locally had an equal representation of married versus cohabiting couples. The highest number of victims was in the 36-45 age group. Since most domestic violence homicides occur in the context of a committed relationship, and there usually has been violence for some period of time prior to the homicide, these numbers indicate again that intervention needs to occur earlier to prevent homicides.
5. There is an over-representation of Black individuals in local reviewed cases compared to the population of Pinellas County. Reviewed cases involve 15 (20%) Black victims and 21 (28%) Black perpetrators, whereas the county only has a 9.8% Black population. To reduce domestic violence homicides, specialized outreach among Blacks may be warranted.
6. Finally, only one of the 75 victims had utilized a domestic violence center. This telling statistic points to the use of domestic violence center services as a potential protective factor for victims and reinforces the need for continued funding and support for those resources.
7. In 50 of the 75 reviewed cases family members and/or friends of the victims were aware of prior incidents of abuse in the relationships. This indicates the need for on-going

education of the public (family, friends, employers, teachers, coaches, neighbors) on how to access community resources for the victims.

Clearly, domestic violence is one of the most prevalent legal and social problems locally as well as in the United States. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2005, family violence accounts for about one in 10 violent victimizations and 33% of all violence investigated by the police. In 2006 in the U.S., 1,290 people were murdered by an intimate partner. Nearly 80% were women killed by men.

Over the last decade, 81 law enforcement officers across the country were killed while responding to domestic disturbance calls. In 2007, 12 U.S. officers were shot to death in the line of duty while responding to a domestic disturbance.

The Fatality Review Team and this report are two important ways for the community to learn from these homicides in order to prevent future homicides and future domestic violence in general. By reviewing the details of each case and learning more about the circumstances prior to the homicide, the team can make recommendations for improvement in this community's response to, and prevention of, domestic violence.

Those recommendations are contained herein, and the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force asks every member of this community to do their part in implementing them.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND & GUIDELINES**

The Fatality Review Team was established as a subcommittee of the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force on May 11, 2000 and consists of several agencies including, but not limited to, the Pinellas County State Attorney's Office, court personnel, legal services, multiple law enforcement agencies, correctional agencies, children and family service organizations, public health, medical examiner, domestic violence centers, and others. The Team began by reviewing one or two homicides per bi-monthly meeting. Within a few years, the team saw the value of including near-fatality cases for review.

The reviews are enlightening. The Team reports on the trends to the Domestic Violence Task Force and the Annual Report is compiled and copies are distributed throughout the county. Establishing the Team has resulted in partnerships and enhanced communication between agencies that did not exist in the past. These activities lead to a stronger "Coordinated Community Response" to domestic violence.

There are similar teams in many counties throughout Florida. Each of the teams operates under Florida State Statute 741.316 which provides guidelines for membership as well as for confidentiality and closed meetings. All teams contribute local information to an annual statewide report that is collected by the Florida Dept. of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and presented to the Governor.

### **Case Review Guidelines:**

- The Team only reviews cases involving violence between intimate partners that are homicides, murder/suicides, or near fatalities.
- The Team only reviews closed cases and does *not* attempt to re-open the investigations.



- The Team does *not* interview family members, friends, or neighbors during the reviews.
- The Team’s reviews are closed to the media due to our confidential and exempt status under Florida State Statute 741.316.
- The Team does *not* assign blame.
- The Team continues to review cases from 1996 forward.
- The Team requests that homicide detectives from the appropriate agencies present the case being reviewed.
- A “Confidentiality Statement” is signed by all Team members at each review.
- The Team meets for approximately two hours every other month and generally reviews one or two cases.
- After each review, trends that may be helpful in preventing future domestic violence are noted and discussed.
- Relevant characteristics of the cases are noted and possible prevention and intervention strategies are identified.

## **CASES REVIEWED IN 2007**

The team reviewed nine (9) cases during 2007. Since cases reviewed are closed cases, the cases did not necessarily occur during 2007.

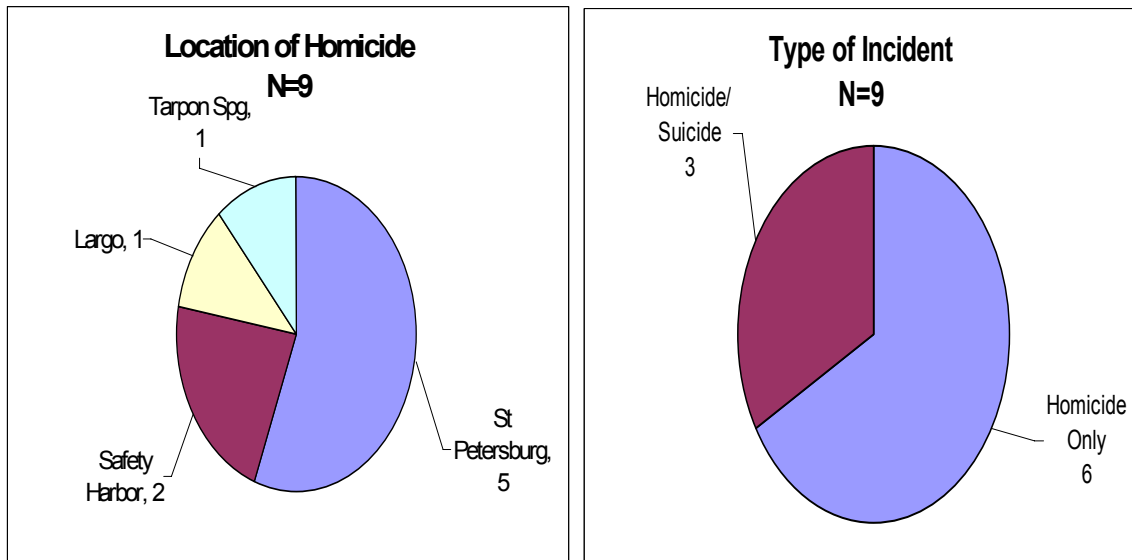
For 2007 the reviewed cases revealed the following information:

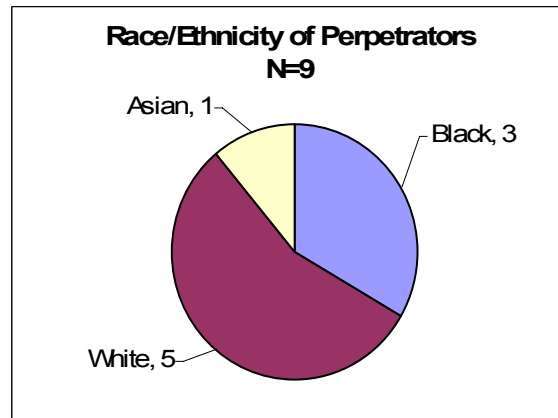
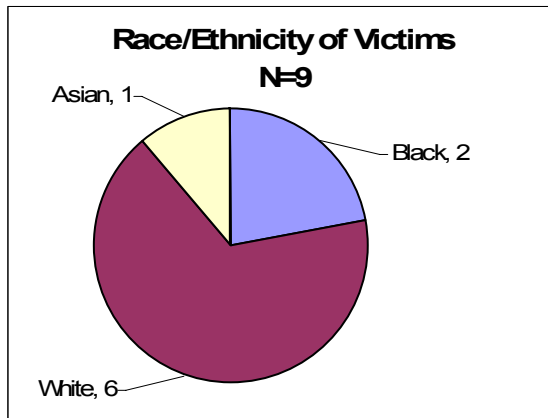
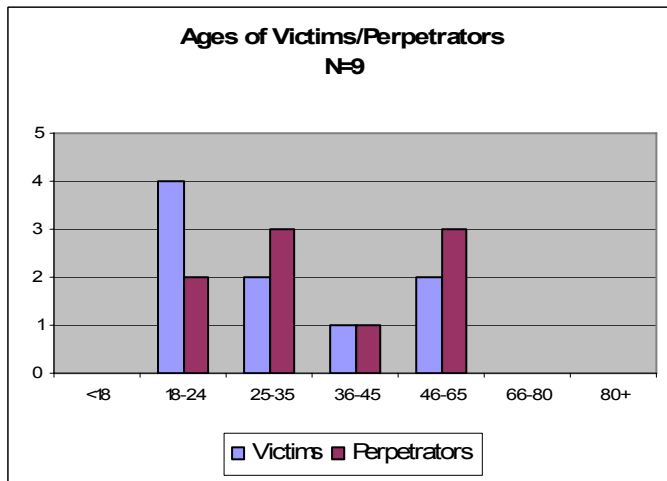
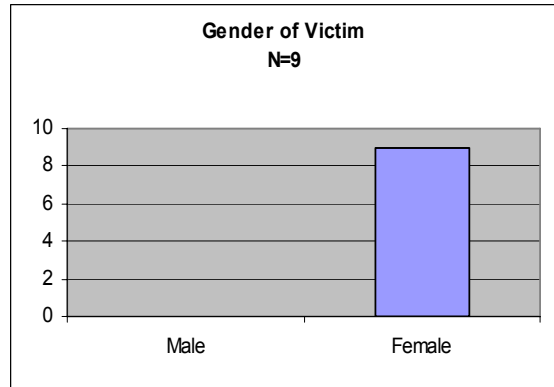
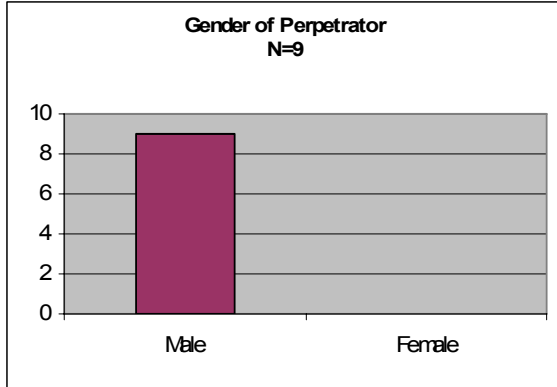
- The incidents occurred in 2004(2), 2005(3), 2006(3), and 2007(1)
- Six (67%) were homicides, three (33%) were homicide/suicide, and none were near fatalities.
- Cases reviewed were from Largo, Safety Harbor, St. Petersburg, and Tarpon Springs.
- Four (44%) of the couples were married, three (34%) were co-

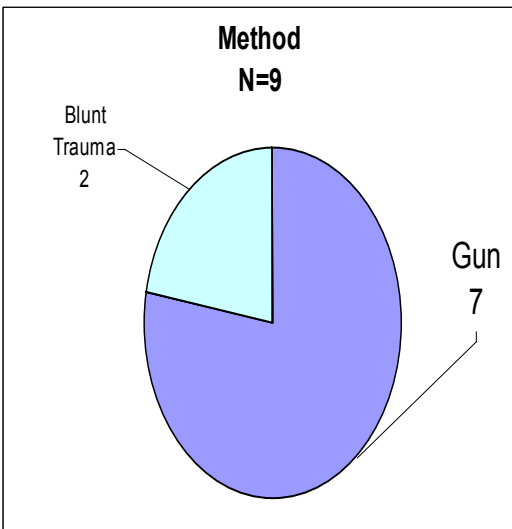
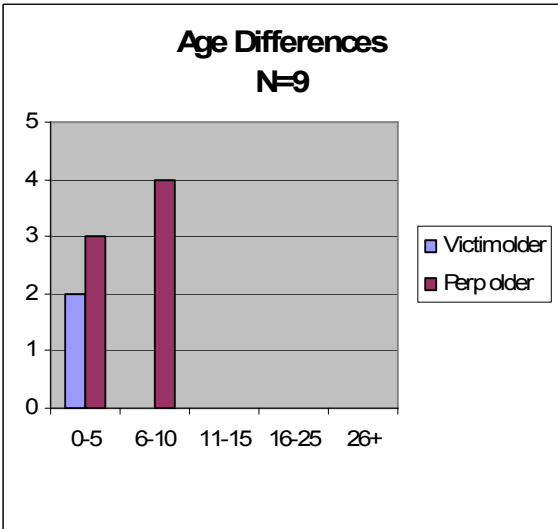
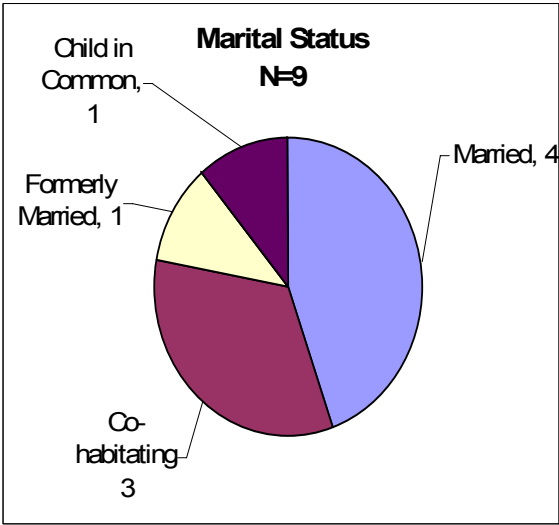
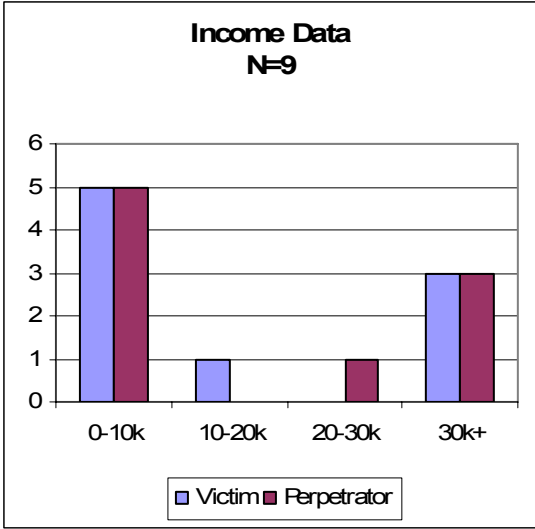
habiting, one (11%) were formerly married, and one (11%) had a child in common.

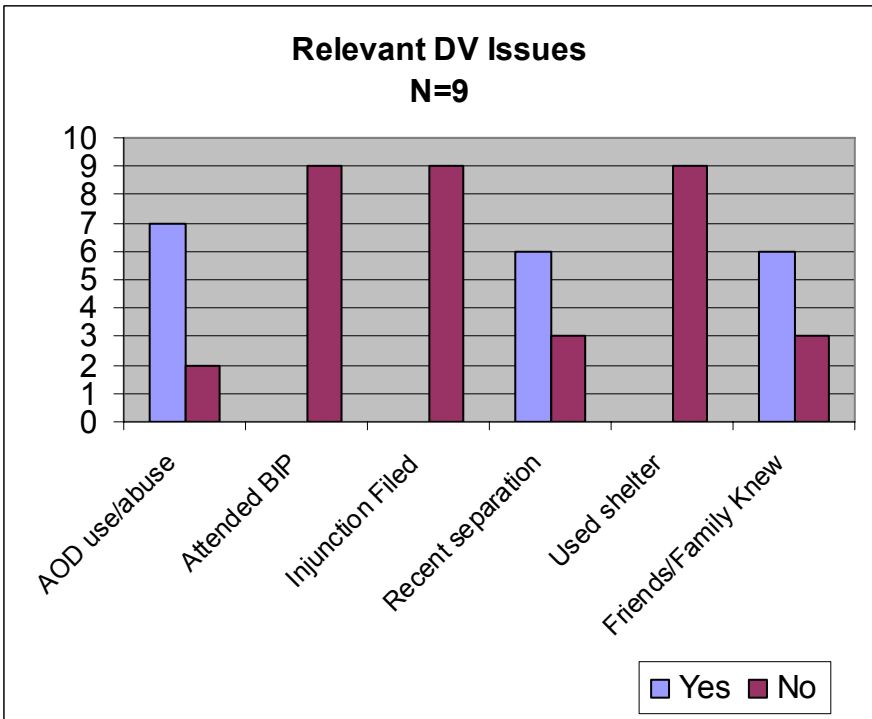
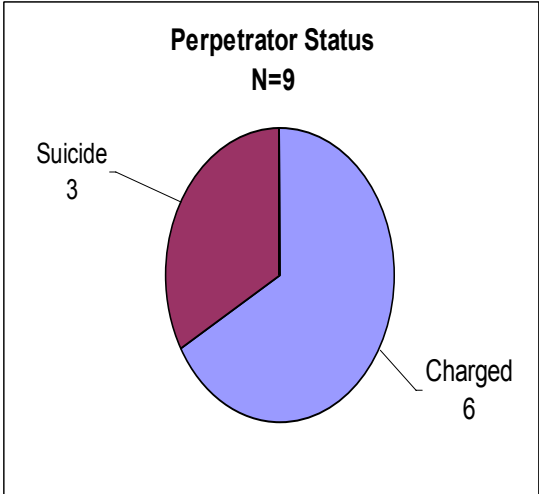
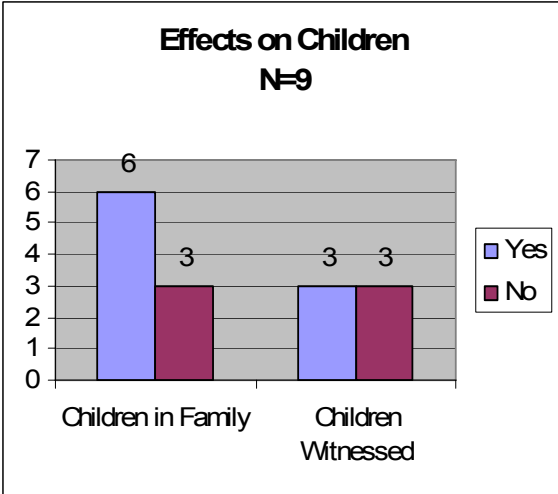
- All nine of the victims were female and all nine of the perpetrators were male.
- Two (22%) of the victims were Black, six (67%) were White, and one (11%) was Asian. Three (33%) of the perpetrators were Black, five (56%) were White, and one (11%) was Asian.
- The ages of the victims ranged from 18 to 59 years. The ages of the perpetrators ranged from 20 to 59 years.
- Length of the relationships ranged from two months to 28 years.
- Seven (78%) of the cases involved a firearm and two (22%) involved blunt trauma.

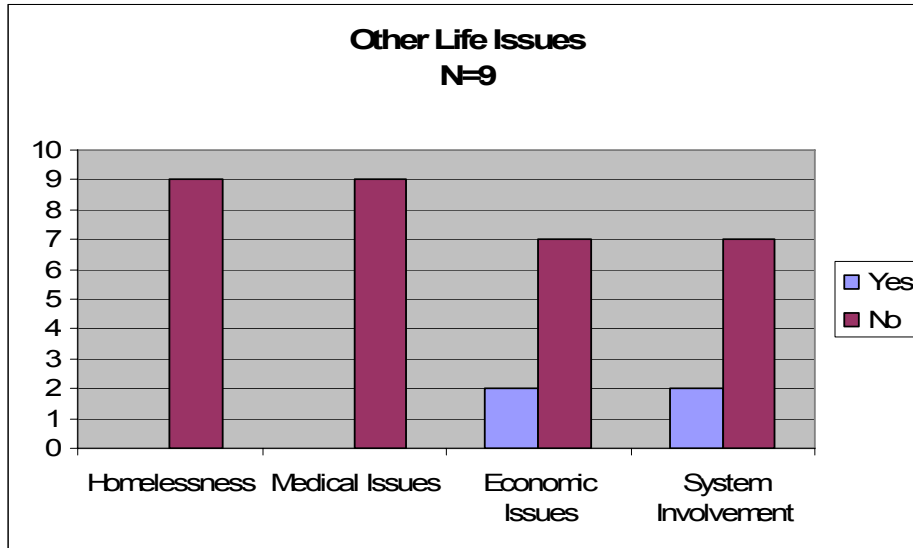
Graph representations of these and other statistics follow.











## **RESULTS OF THE REVIEWS**

The team evaluates each case and determines if any patterns or trends are present. Several of these patterns or trends are consistently present each year in the cases reviewed, especially firearm involvement, substance use and family, friends, or coworkers knowing about the abuse but not knowing what to do to help. The following list highlights the patterns or trends identified during 2007.

| Pattern or Trend                               | #2007 Cases | % of Cases |
|--|-------------|------------|
| Firearm involvement                            | 7           | 78%        |
| Substance use                                  | 7           | 78%        |
| System involvement                             | 7           | 78%        |
| Prior dv history this relationship             | 7           | 78%        |
| Family, friends, or coworkers knew about abuse | 6           | 67%        |
| Criminal history (perpetrator)                 | 6           | 67%        |
| Separation issues                              | 6           | 67%        |
| Prior dv history other relationship (perp)     | 5           | 56%        |
| Prior dv arrest (perpetrator)                  | 5           | 56%        |
| Age difference of 6 or more years              | 4           | 44%        |

## **CUMULATIVE DATA: 2000-2007**

Recognizing that the relatively small number of cases reviewed in 2007 (9) may not provide statistically significant information on its own, this section reports on the cumulative data from the 75 reviews since the team was formed in 2000.

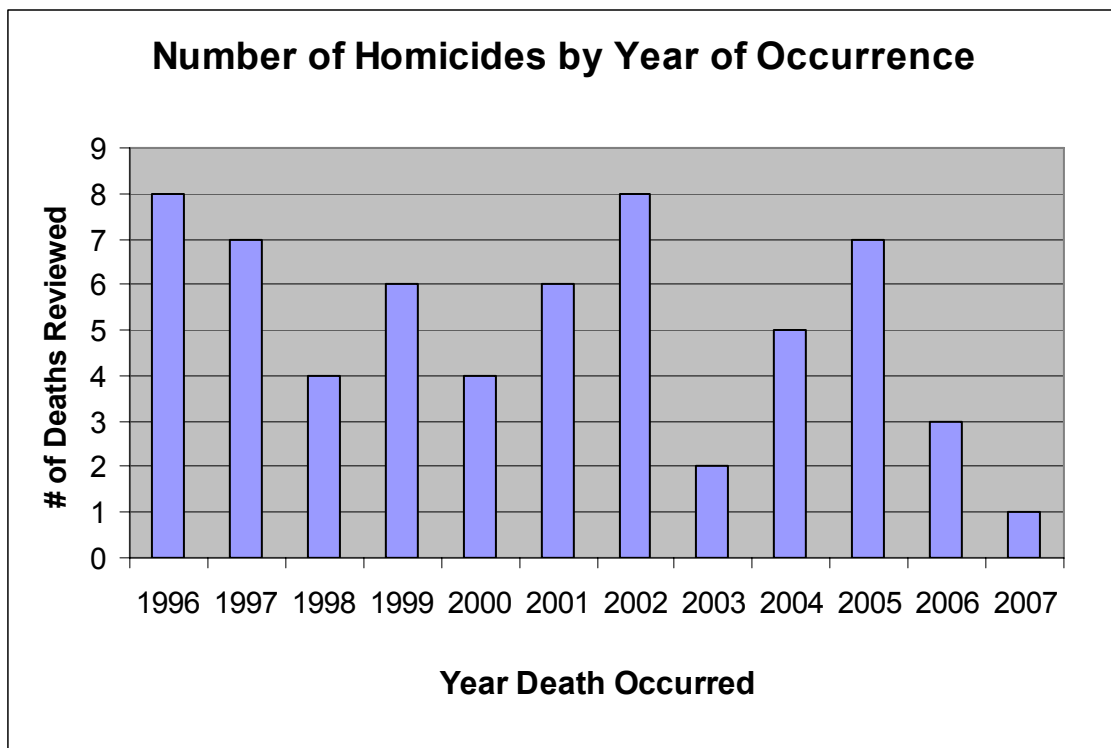
The cumulative data from the 75 reviews reveals the following information:

- 59% were homicides, 25% were homicide/suicides, and 16% were near fatalities (near fatalities have only been included since 2003).
- 88% of the victims were women and 88% of the perpetrators were men.
- In 56% of the cases, the age difference between the victim and the perpetrator was 6 or more years.
- Fifty-three percent (53%) of the cases involved firearms, 21% were stabbings, 11% were strangulations, 12% involved blunt trauma, and 3% were from other causes.
- The relationships between the victim and perpetrator were primarily married (44%) or cohabiting (44%), while 12% were people no longer in a current relationship.
- 72% of the cases involved some alcohol or other drug use by either the victim, perpetrator or both parties.
- In 67% of the cases, it was known that friends and/or family were aware of prior violence.
- Sixty-three percent (63%) of the perpetrators and 43% of the victims had a criminal history.

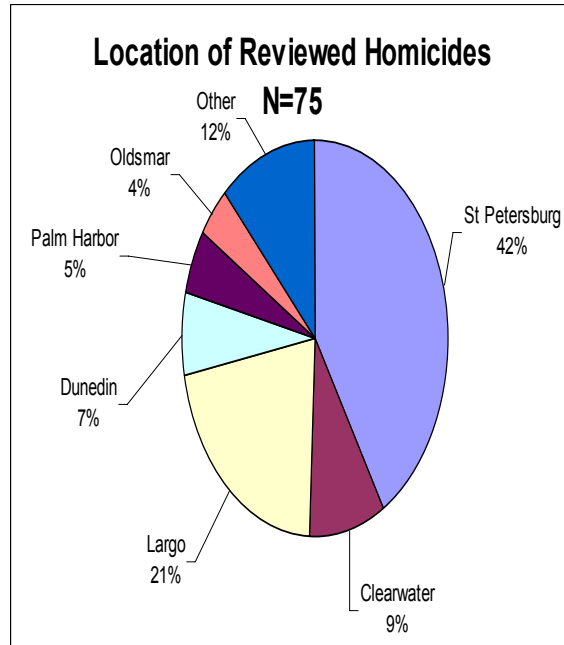
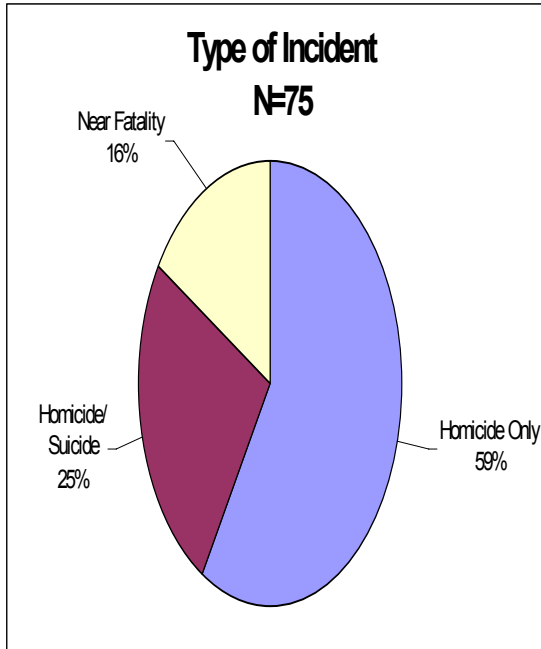
It was known by friends or family members in 37% of the relationships that the parties were experiencing separation issues, which is one expected precursor to an escalation in an already

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.

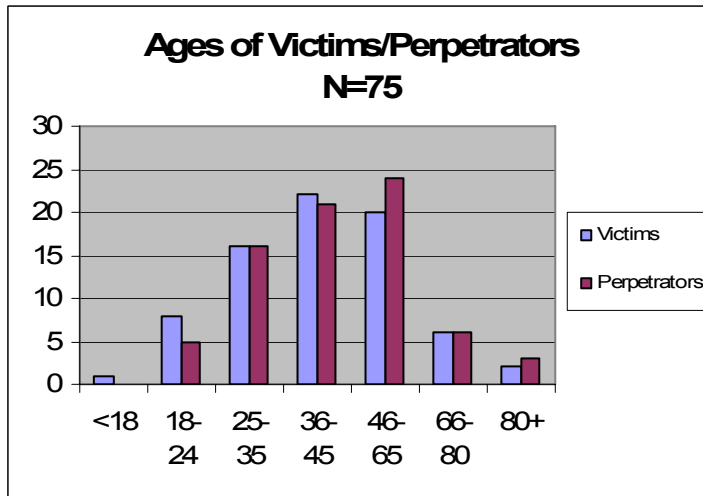
Graph representations of these and other statistics follow.

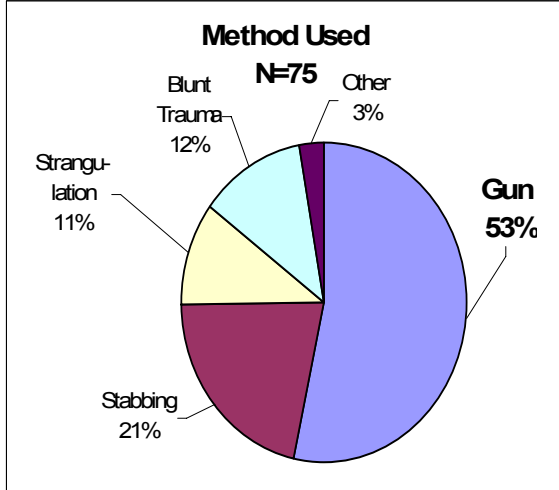
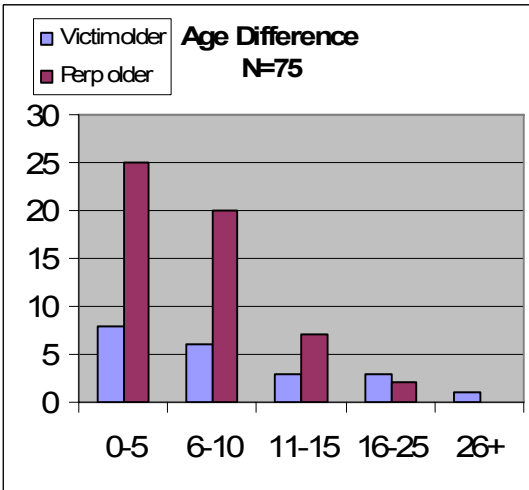
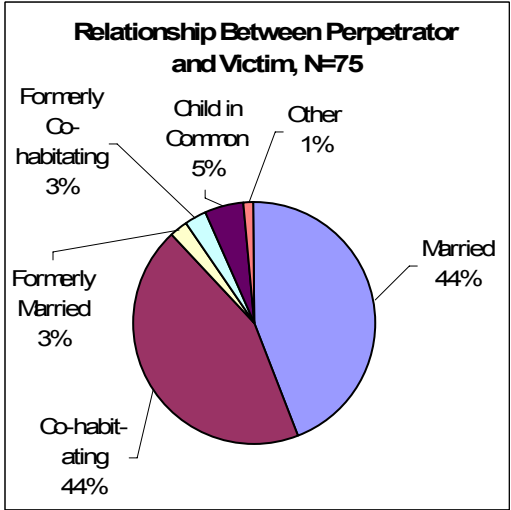
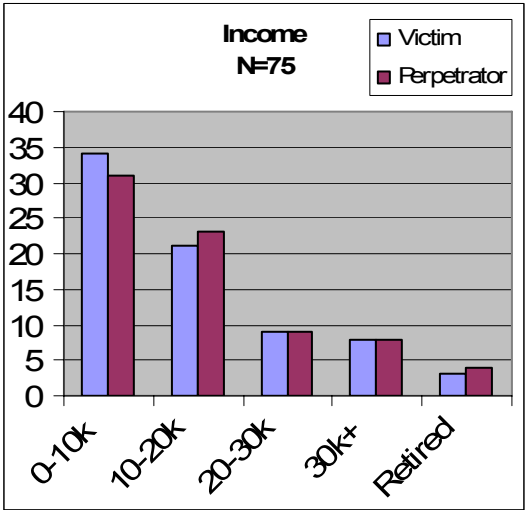
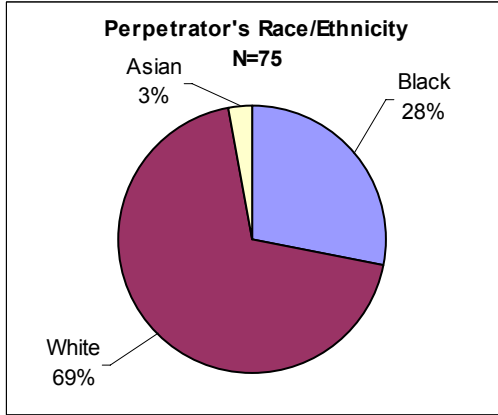
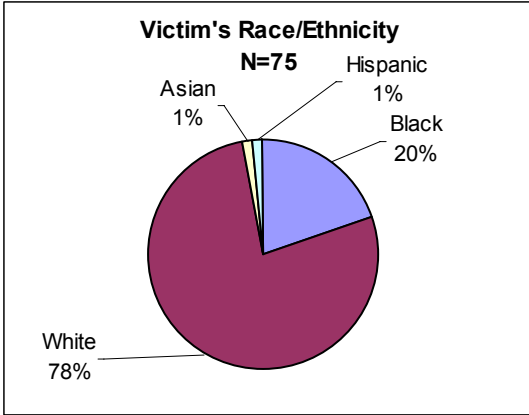


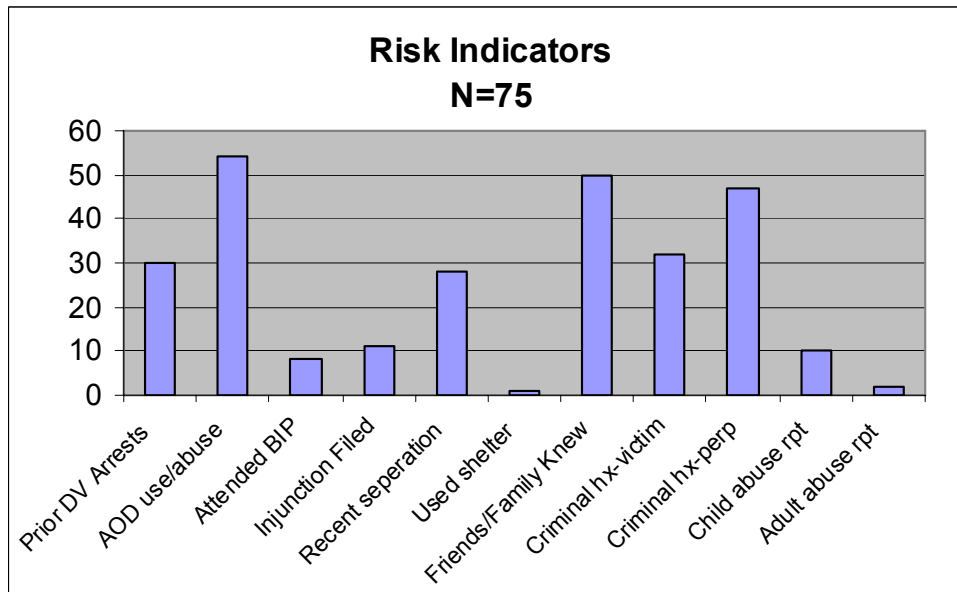
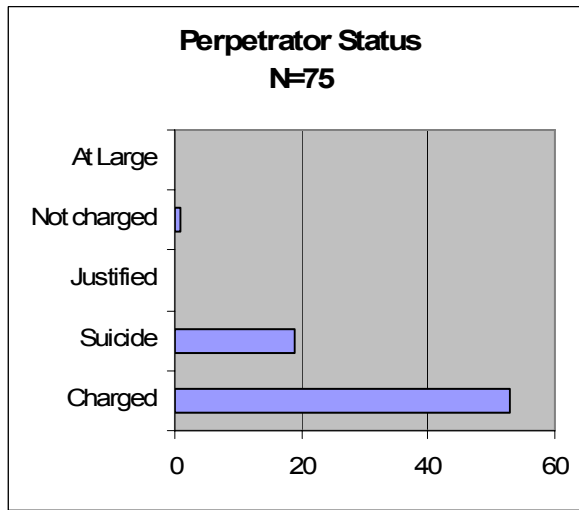
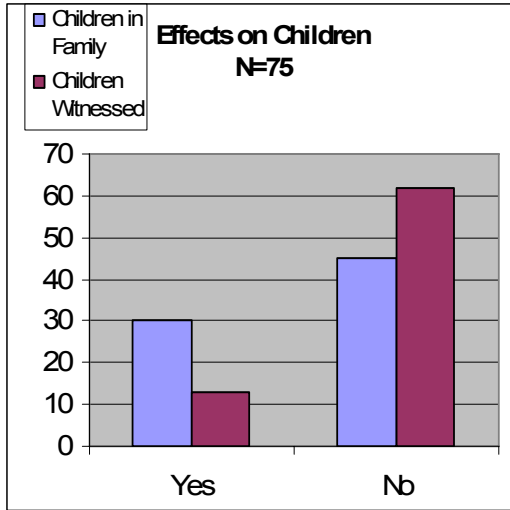




Note: These graphs represent only the reviewed cases and not all domestic violence homicides that occurred from 1996 through 2007.







## **ANALYSIS OF CUMULATIVE DATA: 2000-2007**

The breakdown of cases noted above continues to be extraordinarily similar to the cumulative data in recent years. Therefore, there appears to be a consistency in the patterns of homicide, homicide/suicide, and near fatalities in terms of age differences, weapons used, the relationship between victim and perpetrator, involvement of alcohol and/or other drugs, and whether family or friends were aware of the violence in the relationship.

Furthermore, the profiles of the most likely victim and perpetrator have not changed since the reviews began. The most likely victim is still a white female between the ages of 36 and 45 years with an income of less than \$20,000 per year. The most likely perpetrator can still be described as a white male, in the same age and income bracket as the most likely victim. However, most perpetrators (54% in cases reviewed) are at least six years older than their victims.

While victims of domestic homicide can fall within all age, income, and have other distinguishing characteristics, these trends may help to identify lethality indicators which can alert those working with victims and perpetrators, as well as their friends and families to a higher risk for homicide.

## **PRIOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW**

Since its beginning, the Fatality Review Team has made specific recommendations to the community based on the findings of the reviews. Several of the recommendations have been accomplished by changes that have been incorporated as new standards and policies.

Examples of this include:

- Creation and distribution of brochures that address families and friends of victims and the elder population.
- Review of near fatality cases.
- Sharing Annual Reports with professionals and agencies in the substance abuse field.
- Creation of a one-page summary to be used as a pull-off reference sheet.
- Several statistical additions that have provided valuable information.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2008**

1. Implement a semi-annual “round-table” discussion with the Judiciary and representatives of the task force to share updated resources, research, programs, and the latest trends and data, as well as hearing the courts’ concerns and suggestions.
2. Representatives from the Fatality Review Team meet with representatives from the BIP sub-committee to develop a protocol that will identify and address high-risk individuals and situations.
3. The Fatality Review Team will recommend a risk assessment for law enforcement that is easy-to-use in the field to increase victim and officer safety.
4. The task force requests that the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence advocate for two legislative actions.
  - a. Close the firearm purchase loophole that allows guns to

be purchased at gun shows without the 3-day waiting period.

- b. Create a provision in state law that aligns with federal law that prohibits the possession/purchase of firearms when there is a conviction of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes.
5. The task force create a brochure that specifically focuses on the high lethality rate for Blacks, find funding for printing the brochure, and then disseminate it appropriately among Blacks.
6. The task force disseminate the Fatality Review Annual Report to the funders of the domestic violence centers to reinforce the value of these life-saving resources.
7. Develop a plan with substance abuse professionals to create a screening tool to identify domestic violence abusers.
8. The task force develop and distribute a survey to the major employers and Chambers of Commerce in Pinellas County to determine whether HR policies address domestic violence in the workplace.

## **MODEL CHANGES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

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. Several individuals have taken steps to either augment existing policies, practices, and procedures, or create new ones, in their respective agencies. These models include:

- At least one law enforcement detective, when investigating a domestic homicide or near fatality, now elicits from witnesses and family members more historical information about the parties such as prior domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse by either party, and pending separations.

- Several law enforcement personnel now timely scan all incoming cases for the presence of red flags and patterns/trends identified by the Fatality Review Team, and refer the case to a victim advocate to follow-up with contact for safety planning and referrals. In addition, one sergeant not only includes these patterns and trends in new recruit orientation training but also makes the Crimes Against Children and Families Unit and the homicide unit aware of the patterns and trends.
- 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.
- Several community trainers, including from law enforcement, the health department, and domestic violence centers, now routinely include information in their presentations about the patterns/trends/signs identified by the Fatality Review Team, as well as emphasize information about such matters as mandatory reporting of abuse of vulnerable adults.
- Many agencies now distribute the “Elderly” and “Family and Friends” brochures created by the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force.
- A domestic violence center began offering education and support to families and friends of victims, after identifying this need from their participation on the Fatality Review Team.

Tear off to use for a quick reference guide!

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

Pinellas County reviewed cases reveal the following lethality indicators:

- Substance use by one or both parties.
- Firearm in the home.
- Friends, family, or coworkers were aware of abuse but unsure what to do to help.
- Age disparity of six or more years between victim and perpetrator.
- 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.

These cases also reveal:

- A higher incidence within the Black population when compared to the general population.
- A higher incidence of victims and perpetrators with incomes under \$10,000 per year.
- A higher incidence of victims and perpetrators in the age range of 36-65 years.

The most likely victim of domestic homicide or near fatality:

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

The most likely perpetrator of domestic homicide or near fatality:

A white male, between the ages 36-65, with an income less than \$20,000 a year, with access to a firearm, and is 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 the home.
- Prior threat with a firearm or other weapon.
- Prior threat to kill.
- Prior attempt to strangle.
- Child in home, perpetrator is not biological father.
- Forced sex.

For more information on domestic homicide or this report, please contact:

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