

Pinellas County
Domestic Violence Task Force

FATALITY REVIEW TEAM 2008 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.**

Visit us online at 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 TEAM

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.

INDEX

Mission and Objectives.....	2
Pinellas Domestic Homicide Statistics.....	4
Important Note About This Report.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Trends.....	5-7
2008 Cases Reviewed.....	7-8
2008 Cases Graphic Representation.....	8-11
Results of 2008 Reviews.....	12
Cumulative Data (2000-2008) Case Reviews.....	12-13
Cumulative Data Graphic Representation.....	14-17
Analysis of Cumulative Data.....	17-18
Recommendations Revisited.....	18-19
Summary (Tear off sheet).....	20-21

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 81 cases reviewed for this report occurred between 1996-2008, and represent 65 % of the *domestic violence murders* committed during those 13 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 2008, *5 people were killed* in domestic violence-related homicides – *4 were women and 1 was a man*.
- 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!

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS REPORT

In 2008, the Fatality Review Team reviewed six cases. Since the additional number and the trends identified within them do not significantly change the cumulative data, we are presenting an abbreviated annual report that does not include history, new recommendations, and changes that have been made in our community. We plan to make the report for next year more comprehensive.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence in its worst and ultimate form is homicide, and 2008 was another deadly year for Pinellas County residents. During 2008 in Pinellas County, 4 people were murdered by an intimate partner, all of whom were women killed by men. 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 81 cases that occurred from 1996 to 2008. 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-two 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 eight 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-two of the cases reviewed (52%) were committed with a firearm. A recent national study found that an abused woman living in a home where there is a gun is six times more likely than other abused women to be killed, and that if there are prior threats with a firearm, an abused woman is 20.2 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 and 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 16 (20%) Black victims and 23 (28%) Black perpetrators, whereas the county only has a 11% Black population. To reduce domestic violence homicides, specialized outreach among Blacks may be warranted.
6. Finally, only two of the 81 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 55 of the 81 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 nationally. 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.

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.

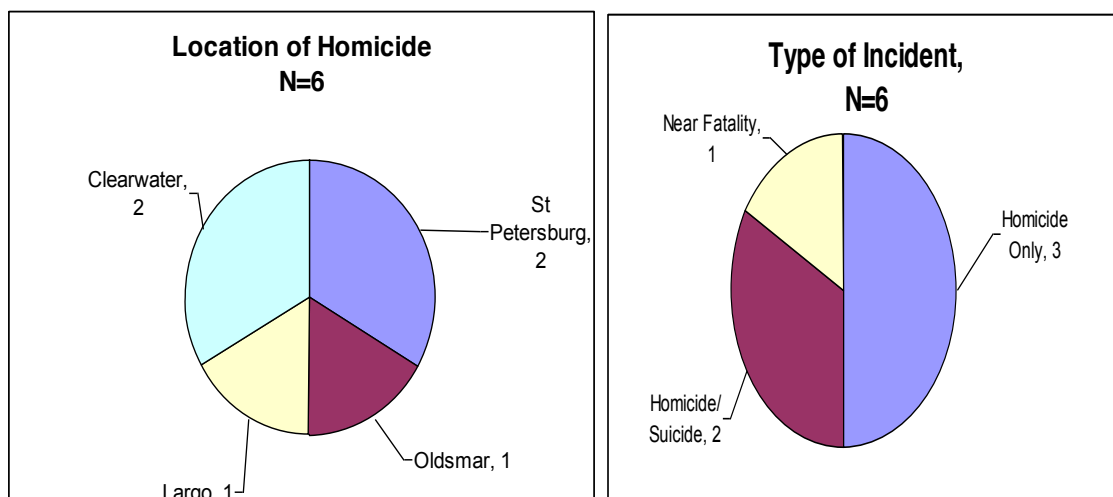
CASES REVIEWED IN 2008

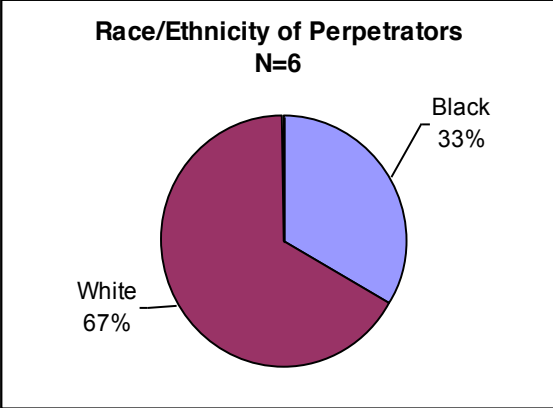
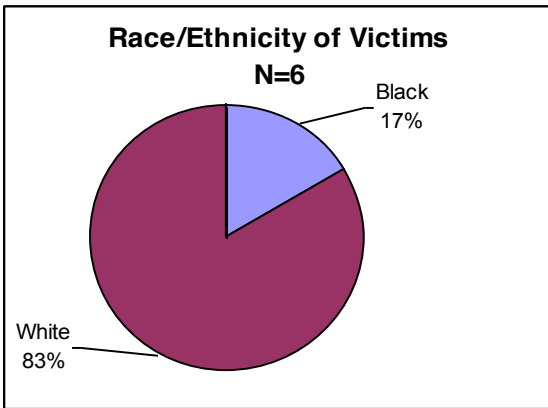
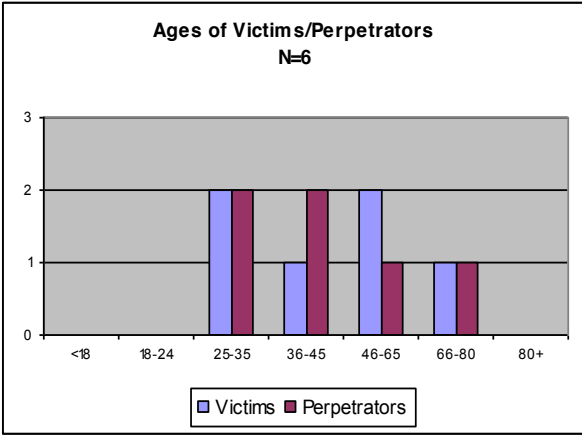
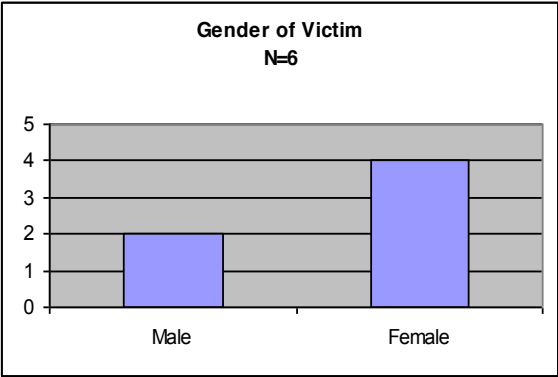
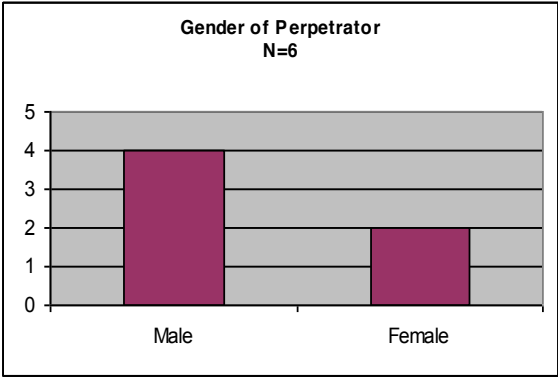
The team reviewed six (6) cases during 2008. Since cases reviewed are closed cases, the cases did not necessarily occur during 2008.

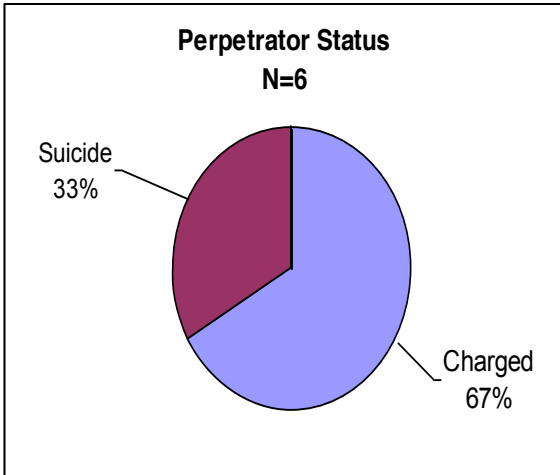
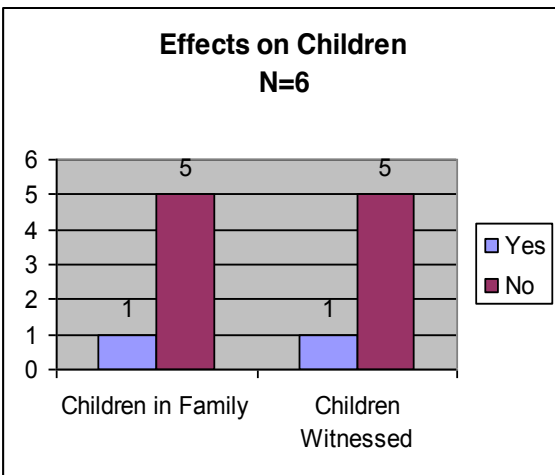
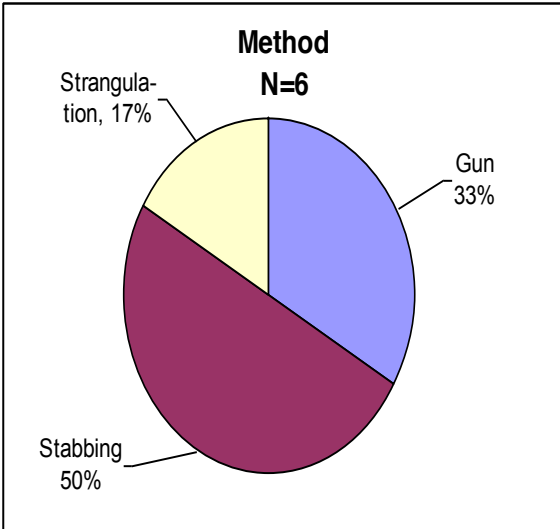
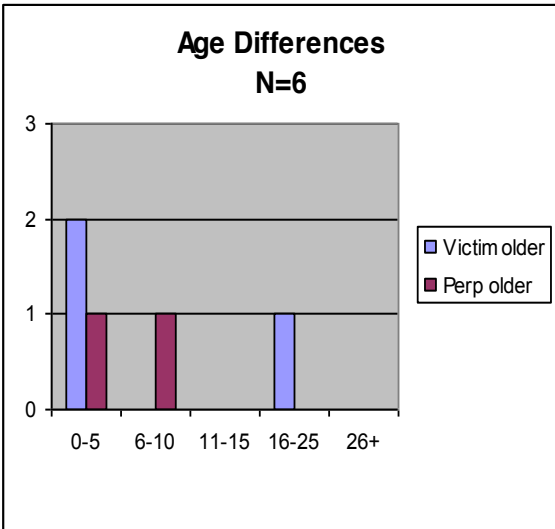
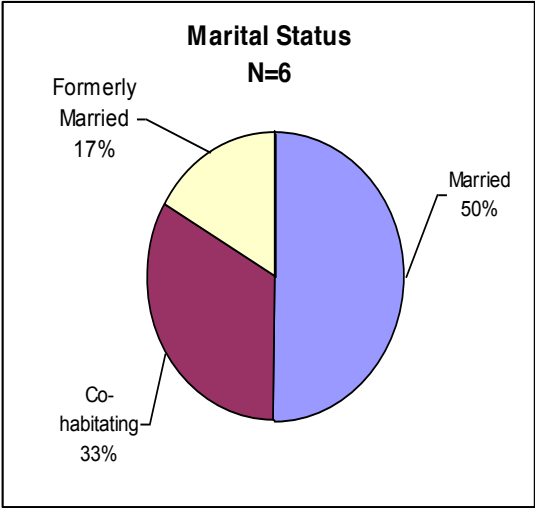
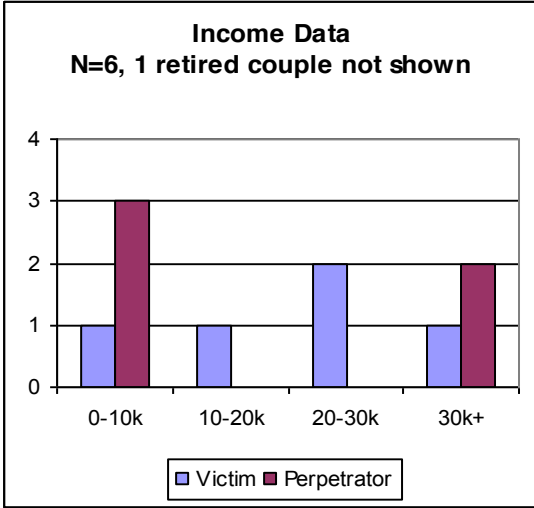
For 2008 the reviewed cases revealed the following information:

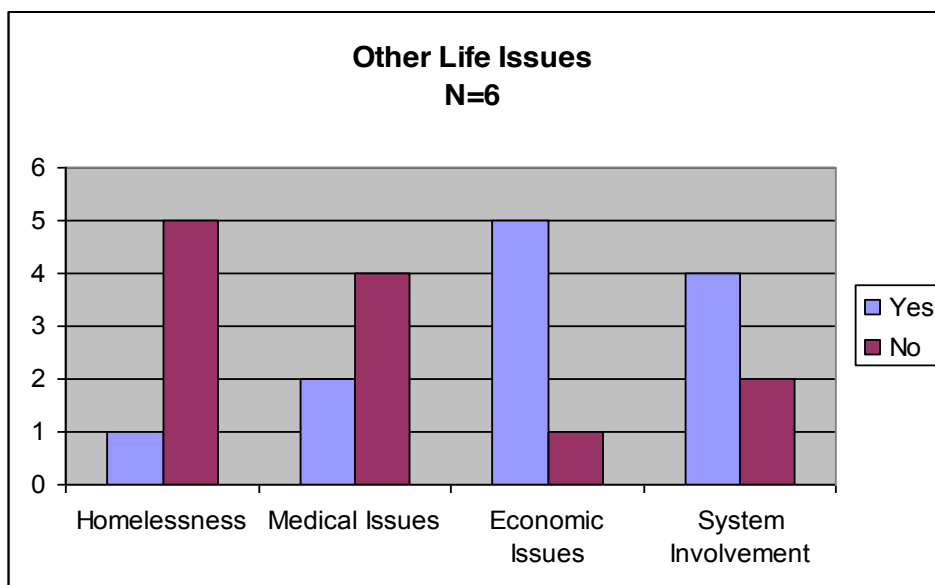
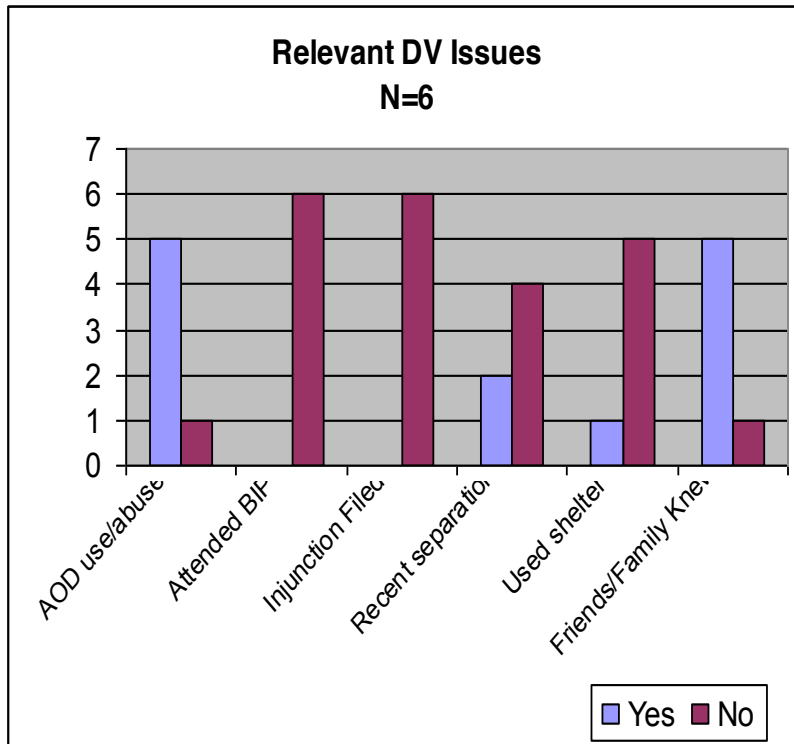
- The incidents occurred in 2003(1), 2005(1), 2006(2), and 2007(2)
- Three (50%) were homicides, two (33%) were homicide/suicide, and one (17%) was a near fatality.
- Cases reviewed were from Clearwater, Largo, Oldsmar, and St. Petersburg.
- Three (50%) of the couples were married, two (33%) were cohabiting, and one (17%) was formerly married.
- Four (67%) of the victims were female and two (33%) of the victims were male.
- One (17%) of the victims was Black and five (83%) were White. Two (33%) of the perpetrators were Black and four (67%) were White.
- The ages of the victims ranged from 27 to 77 years. The ages of the perpetrators ranged from 32 to 78 years.
- Length of the relationships ranged from three months to 15 years.
- Two (33%) of the cases involved a firearm, three involved stabbing (50%), and one (17%) involved strangulation.

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 2008.

Pattern or Trend	#2008 Cases	% of Cases
Substance use	5	83%
Family, friends, or coworkers knew about abuse	5	83%
Criminal history (perpetrator)	5	83%
Prior dv history other relationship (perp)	5	83%
System involvement	4	67%
Prior dv history this relationship	3	50%

CUMULATIVE DATA: 2000-2008

Recognizing that the relatively small number of cases reviewed in 2008 (6) may not provide statistically significant information on its own, this section reports on the cumulative data from the 81 reviews since the team was formed in 2000.

The cumulative data from the 81 reviews reveals the following information:

- 58% were homicides, 26% were homicide/suicides, and 16% were near fatalities (near fatalities have only been included since 2003).
- 86% of the victims were women and 86% of the perpetrators

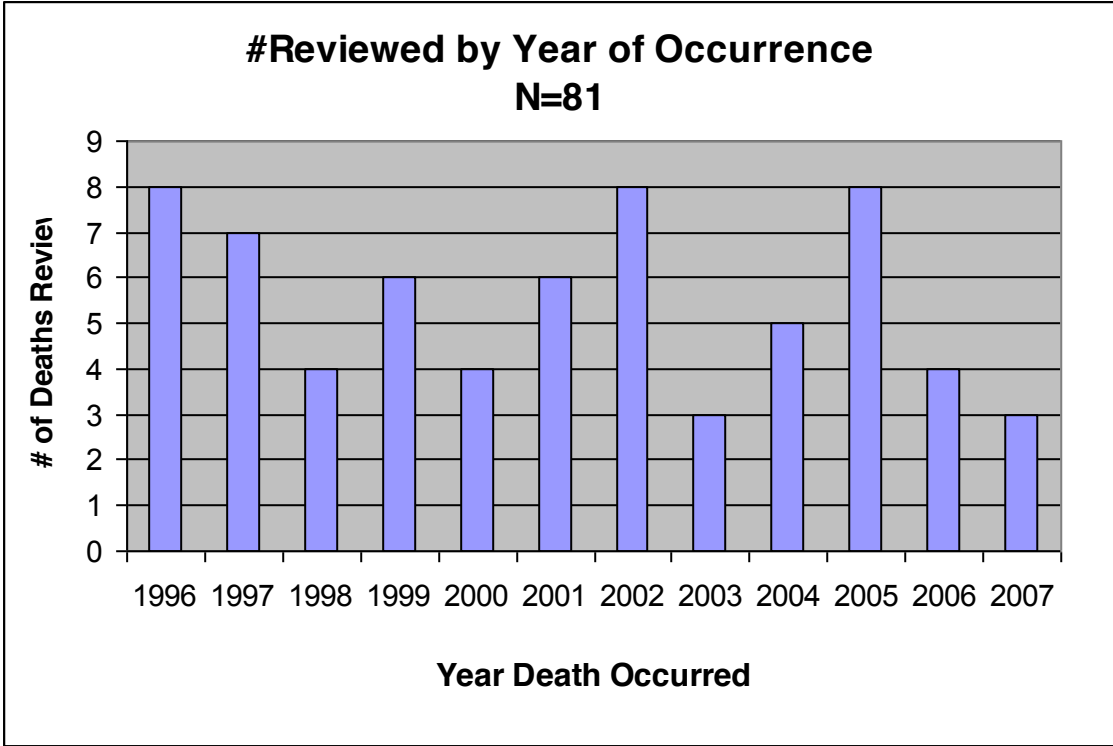
were men.

- In 56% of the cases, the age difference between the victim and the perpetrator was 6 or more years.
- Fifty-two percent (52%) of the cases involved firearms, 23% were stabbings, 11% were strangulations, 11% 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.
- 73% of the cases involved some alcohol or other drug use by the victim, perpetrator, or both.
- In 68% of the cases, it was known that friends and/or family were aware of prior violence.
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of the perpetrators and 43% of the victims had a criminal history.

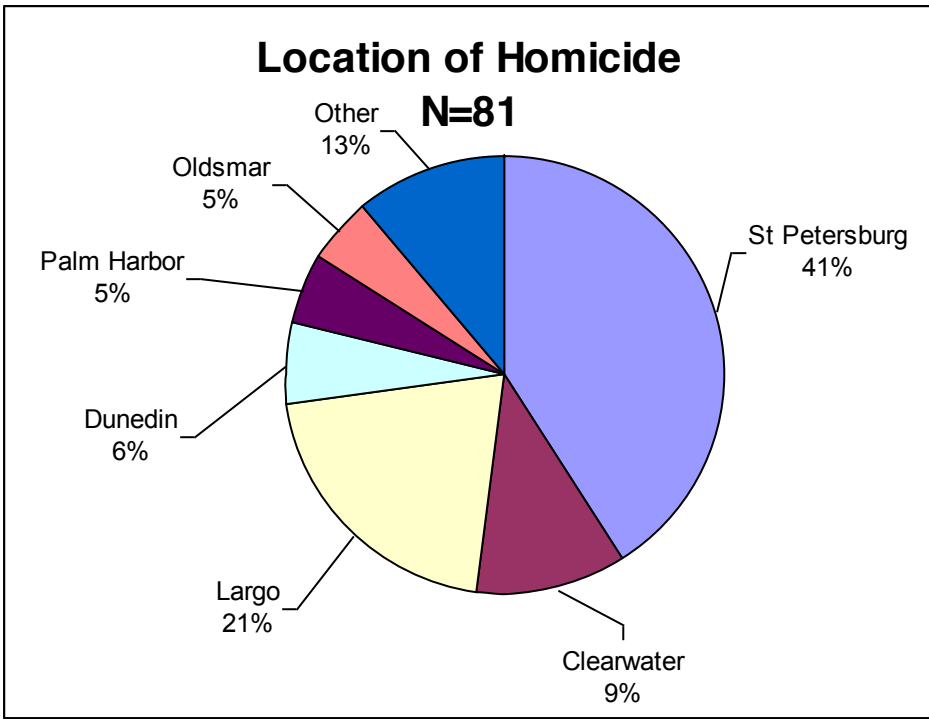
It was known by friends or family members in 37% of the relationships that the parties were experiencing separation issues, which is one expected precursor to an escalation in an already violent relationship. Our team is not able to know whether a discussion about separation precedes a homicide unless that fact is known to friends and family. Nationally, separation issues are viewed as an antecedent to domestic homicide.

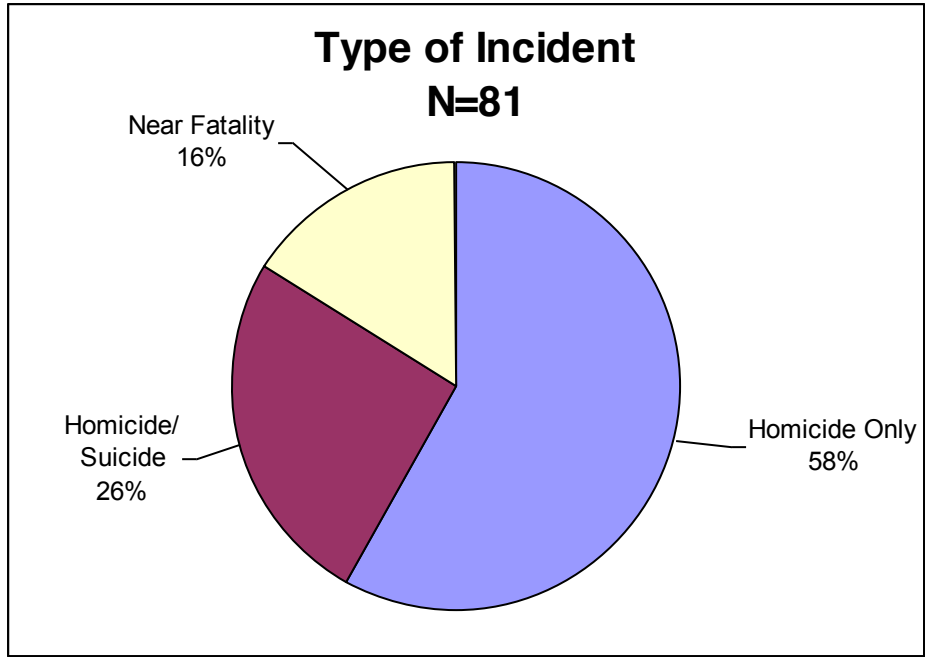
Graph representations of these and other statistics follow.

Note: These graphs represent only the reviewed cases and not all domestic violence homicides that occurred from 1996 through 2008.

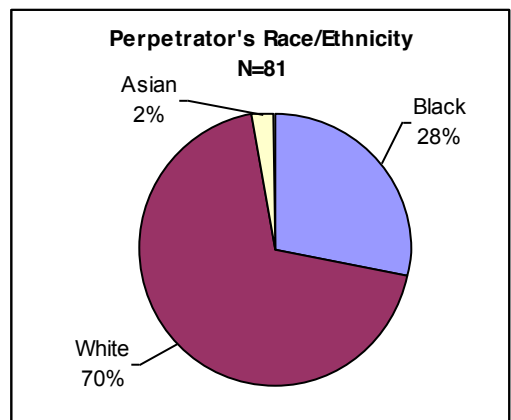
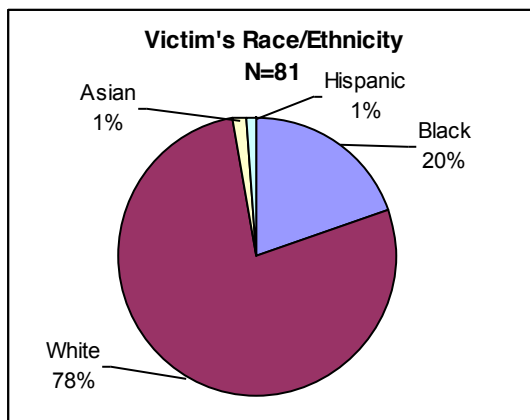
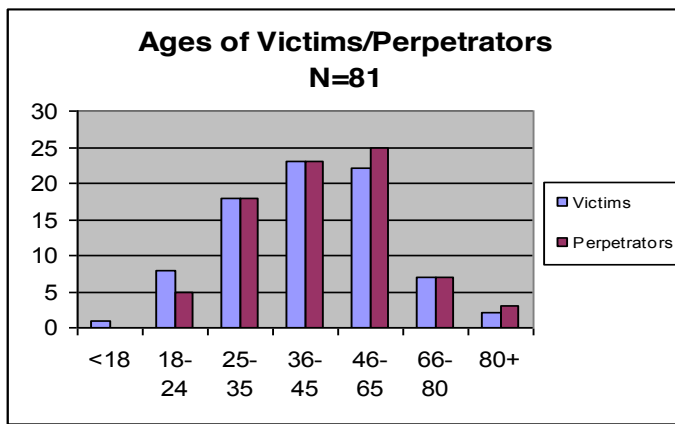


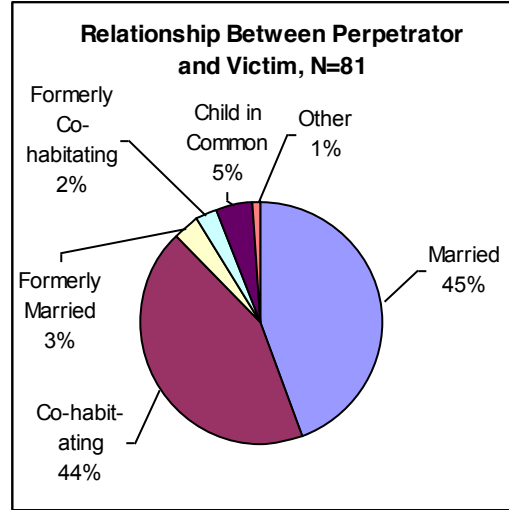
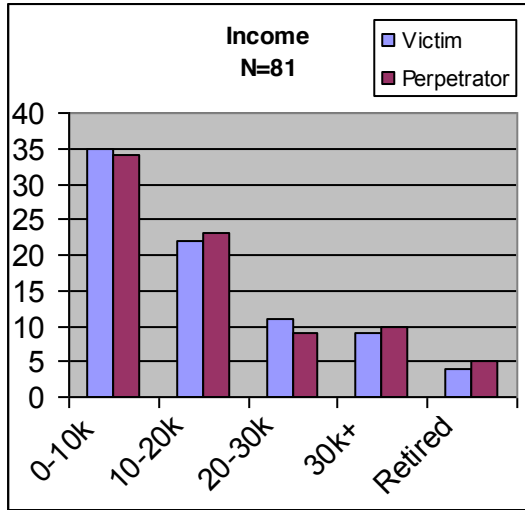
Distribution of Reviewed Cases
Cumulative Data: 2000-2008



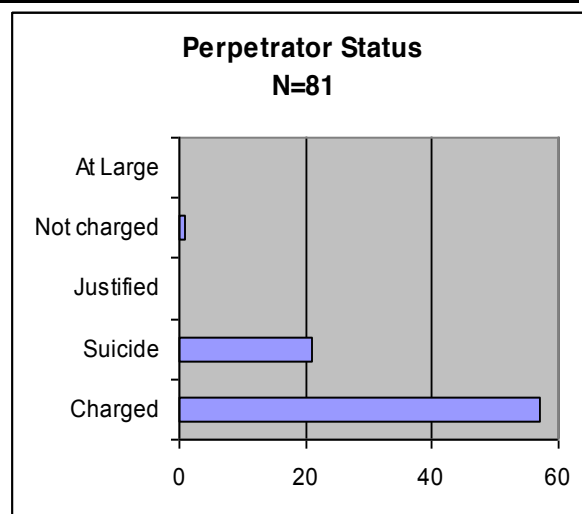
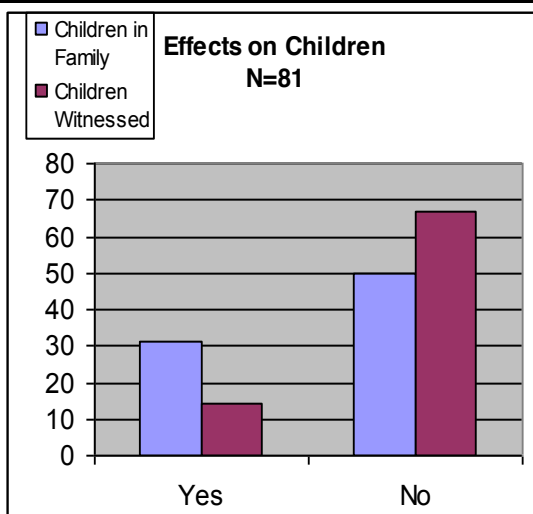
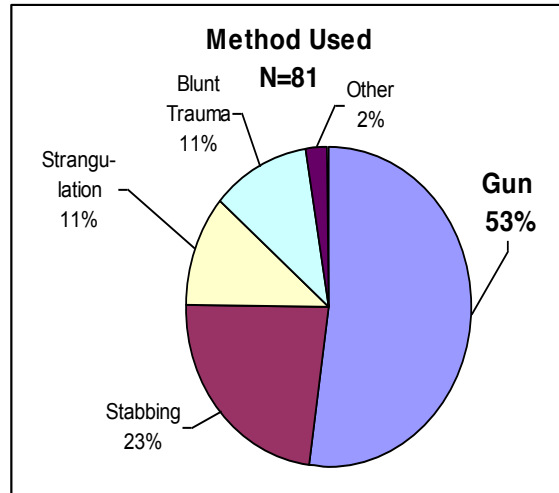
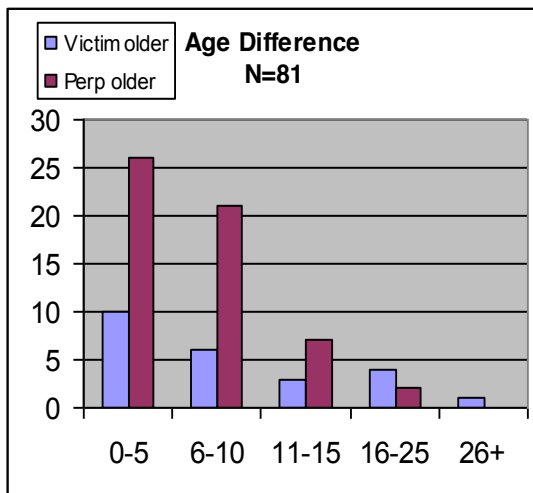


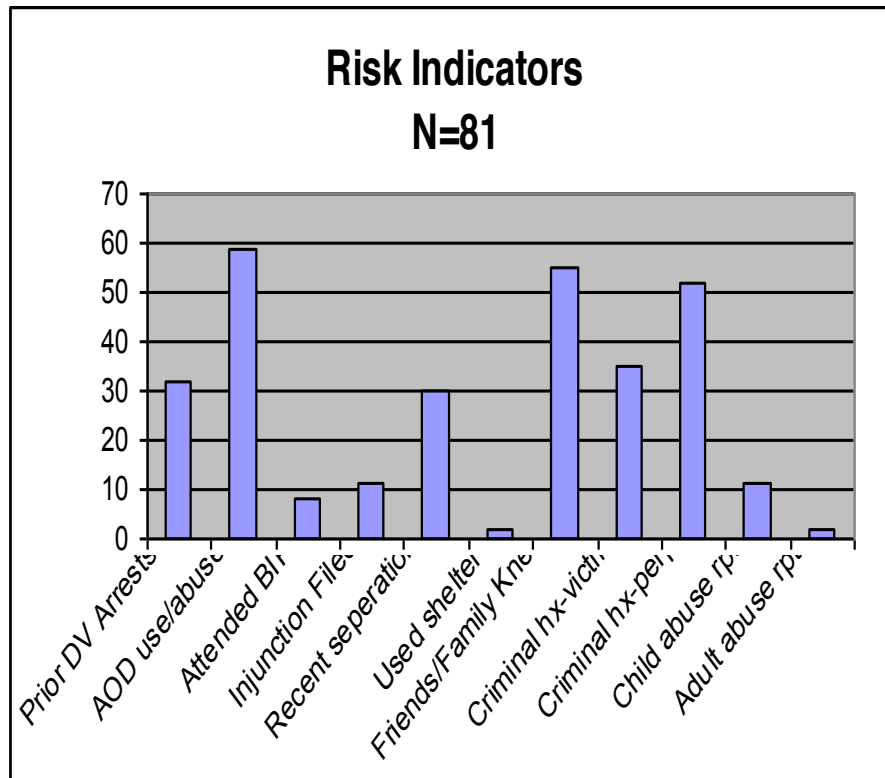
Demographics for Reviewed Cases Cumulative Data: 2000-2008





Notable Trends
Cumulative Data: 2000-2008





ANALYSIS OF CUMULATIVE DATA: 2000-2008

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 domestic homicide can happen to anyone of any age, income, or marital status, 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2008-2009

The lists that follow provide an update to the recommendations made last year. No new recommendations have been added because this year's data did not reveal a need to do so.

Recommendations accomplished:

1. 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.
2. 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. *(easy to use pocket size laminated cards were disseminated to all law enforcement agencies in Pinellas County)*

Recommendations that are currently being worked on:

3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
 6. Develop a plan with substance abuse professionals to create a screening tool to identify domestic violence abusers.

Recommendations that have not been completed to date:

7. 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.
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.

The Fatality Review Team, in conjunction with the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force, will work on the remaining recommendations during 2008 and report on progress in next year's report.

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. These profiles or red flags are about awareness so that as a community we can take extra precautions when we see these factors in a case we are working with.

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:

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