

# PINELLAS COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

## FATALITY REVIEW TEAM 2010 ANNUAL REPORT

*This report is dedicated to  
Pinellas County's domestic  
violence homicide victims,  
near fatality survivors, and  
their families.*



# *In honor of...*

*A 24 year old St. Petersburg woman, four months pregnant and mother of two, shot in the chest by her 18 year old boyfriend. Both mother and her unborn child died as a result. Earlier in the year, the victim sought treatment in the emergency room for injuries inflicted by his abusive behavior. They had been together for about a year.*

*A 33 year old daughter, sister, and certified nursing assistant from St. Petersburg, beaten by her jealous ex-boyfriend and then repeatedly run over by his car. He was angry that she had started a new relationship. He stalked her. She reported to friends and co-workers, "He would hound me and follow me wherever I go." She was found dead in a parking lot. Her boyfriend fled to South Florida and was later arrested.*

*A 29 year old Clearwater resident and loving mother of two boys, found stabbed to death by her boyfriend. Prior to her death, their five week old son suffered blunt trauma and was killed while in the care of his father. She then obtained an injunction for protection due to his threats on her life if she left him. Two weeks later he violated the injunction. He was arrested and released with \$1000 bond. Within 48 hours of his release, he broke into her apartment and killed her.*

*A 19 year old St. Petersburg man, just out of high-school, was fatally shot by his girlfriend of two years. They had been living together for over a year. Over the course of the relationship there were numerous arguments and documented police involvement. An early morning argument led to her using a handgun and shooting him in the face.*

*A 30 year old Seminole woman, employed by a local dental office, was shot to death by her husband outside their home. He went back inside to the bedroom and shot himself. At the time of the murder, investigators suggest she was attempting to flee the house. Deputies visited the residence approximately two weeks prior to assist with her moving out after an argument. She moved back into the home the day she was murdered.*

*A 27 year old woman from Largo, killed by her boyfriend who poured gasoline on her and set her on fire. Her boyfriend abused her before and strangled her to the point of urination. Within hours of the homicide, he told people he would kill her because she made him mad.*

*A 24 year old St Petersburg woman, found severely beaten and stabbed to death in her home. She was employed in the customer service department of a local supermarket. Police found her husband seated on the front porch calmly talking on a cell. He admitted he killed his wife because he was jealous and believed she was having an affair. Their young son was not at home at the time.*

**...2010  
homicide  
victims**

## Mission, Objectives and Case Criteria

### **Mission:**

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

### **Reviewed cases met the following criteria:**

- Violence between intimate partners
- Homicides, homicide/suicides, and near fatalities
- Closed cases (investigated, prosecuted with a resolution if appropriate)
- Cases that occurred since 1996

**Please note:** All case information is provided by Fatality Review Team members, including law enforcement, probation, domestic violence centers, court personnel, public health, and social service agencies. As a result, the available data is sometimes limited.

The Fatality Review Team is a committee of the *Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force*, whose purpose is to promote the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, to enhance victim safety, and to hold batterers accountable.

**Definitions and Terminology:** Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is all too common in our community and takes many forms (to include physical, emotional, verbal, financial, and sexual abuse). Homicide is the worst and ultimate form of IPV. Although Florida State Statute defines “domestic violence” as occurring among family or household members and includes siblings, parent/child, and other family in the home, our team focuses on intimate partners only (husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, ex partners, gay/lesbian couples). Therefore, throughout the majority of this document we will use the term “IPV” to describe our cases, and use the term “domestic violence” when referring to the legal term.

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**NOTE:** The last page can be torn off and used as a quick reference to help you recognize potentially lethal cases of intimate partner violence.

## Executive Summary

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement data reflects a 21.2% increase in domestic violence homicides from January 2009 through June 2010. In Pinellas County, 2010 was a deadly year. Eight adults lost their lives to IPV and one five week old infant was killed in an IPV-related situation. During 2010, our team reviewed nine cases. Since the Fatality Review Team waits until cases are finalized in the criminal justice system before review, the nine cases reviewed in 2010 did not occur in 2010.

The Pinellas County Fatality Review Team reviewed 96 local cases in the last 11 years, and this report discusses its findings as well as its recommendations for prevention. Overall, we identified seven trends from the data.

1. In 96% (92) of cases, there was no contact with a domestic violence (DV) center.
2. In 91% (87) of the cases reviewed, there was no record of the batterer ever being ordered to, or voluntarily attending, a Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP).
3. In 86% (83) of the cases, there was a male perpetrator and a female victim.
4. In 86% (83) of the cases, no injunction for protection had been granted.
5. In 72% (69) of the cases reviewed, substance use was involved either for the perpetrator, victim, or both.
6. In 68% (65) of the cases reviewed, friends, family, coworkers, or neighbors knew about intimate partner violence prior to the homicide or near fatality.
7. In 66% (63) of the cases, the perpetrator had a criminal history

The purpose of this report is threefold:

1. To honor victims and their loved ones as we learn from their tragedies and work to prevent future such deaths.
2. To raise awareness of the prevalence and devastation of IPV homicides and near fatalities.
3. To serve as a practical tool for those who are in a position to prevent IPV homicides and near fatalities in our community.

Included in this report are details about these trends, recommendations for prevention, a description about the effects on children, and a list of risk factors. Readers are encouraged to tear off the last page summarizing lethality indicators for use as a quick reference.

***We hope this report inspires you to look within your organization and your own work to identify opportunities for you and your agency to protect lives in our community. We must work together to prevent the need for a fatality review team in the future.***

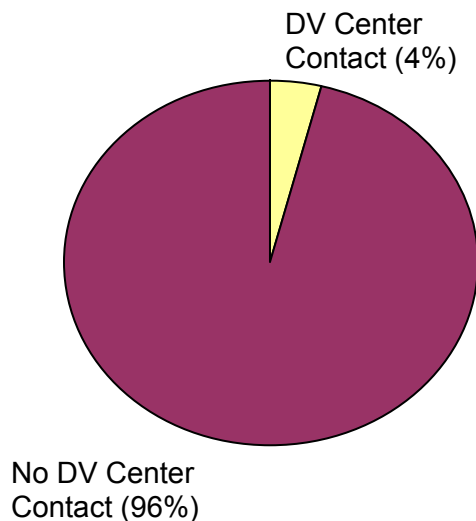
**Fatality Review Team Recommendations**  
**96 Intimate Partner Homicides and Near Fatalities Reviewed**  
**Pinellas County, 2000-2010**

**FACT:** In 96% (92) of cases, there was no contact with a domestic violence (DV) center.

**Discussion:** For more than 30 years, domestic violence (DV) centers have provided an array of interventions proven to enhance safety for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). Unfortunately, when victims do not identify as such or are isolated from possible referral sources and other supports, they do not choose to contact their local DV center or do not know how to do so. Sometimes a victim reaches out to family or friends or service providers who are unaware of these services or do not support their use. Service access and availability are also diminishing in the current economic environment. Whether or not DV center services are protective is difficult to discern because centers cannot follow-up with participants by statute. What is known, however, is that in 2010 Pinellas County DV centers answered 9,228 hotline calls, helped write over 14,000 safety plans, sheltered 630 victims and their children, and assisted with nearly 5,000 injunction petitions. These are measures that potentially could have protected some of the victims in these cases had they made contact with a DV center.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **CASA, The Haven of RCS, and the Domestic Violence Task Force** should maintain and increase their efforts to promote DV center services, especially through non-traditional locations and methods.
2. **Service providers, faith leaders, and healthcare providers** should seek out education and materials about these services and how to safely make referrals.



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**FACT:** In 91% (87) of the cases reviewed, there was no record of the batterer ever being ordered to, or voluntarily attending, a Batterer’s Intervention Program (BIP).

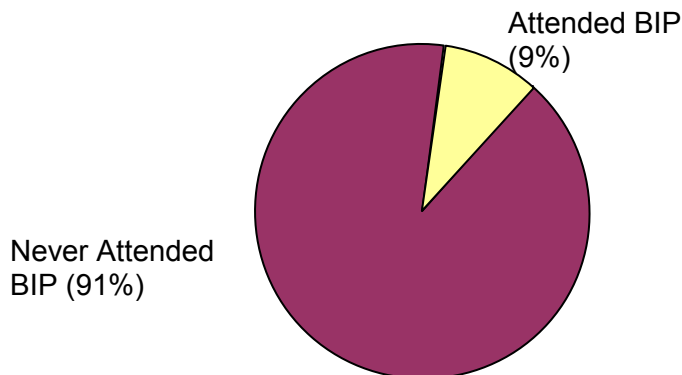
**Discussion:** The Batterers Intervention Program (BIP) is a 26-week program which focuses on accountability, education and healthy conflict resolution. Access to BIP can come from court orders, referrals, or voluntary participation, but in Pinellas County BIP utilization has steadily decreased over the last 10 years. Recent studies show that two-thirds of perpetrators who complete BIP do not reabuse, and attending three or more months significantly reduces the rate of reabuse.

Of the 96 cases reviewed, 39 of the perpetrators had been arrested for a domestic violence crime prior to the homicide or near fatality and only 9 were ever ordered to BIP. In 13 cases, a domestic violence final injunction for protection (DV IFP) had been filed against the perpetrator. These domestic violence (DV) related involvements with the Court represent possible missed opportunities for increased batterer accountability, batterer behavior change, and homicide prevention. For DV IFPs, per Florida Statute 741.2902, it is the legislative intent that the judiciary “consider requiring the perpetrator to complete” BIP, and per Florida Statute 741.30(6)(e) an order to BIP is allowable with all DV IFPs, and mandatory in cases where the respondent willfully violated the ex parte (temporary) injunction, was the respondent to a prior DV IFP, or has a criminal conviction involving violence or threat of violence. Unfortunately, these statutes do not seem to be adhered to as often as they could be, as seen in some non-homicide DV cases throughout Pinellas County.

In 2007, the last year for which data was available, only 4% of final DV IFP respondents were ordered to BIP. Also in that same year, while 81% of misdemeanor domestic violence probationers were ordered to BIP, only 26% completed their probation and BIP. Monitoring the completion of BIP orders is another frequently missed opportunity for courts to hold batterers accountable. In addition, all community members can refer abusers to BIP and batterers can voluntarily attend, although this rarely occurs.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **The Courts** should order BIP whenever possible in cases where someone is convicted of a DV crime or is the respondent in a domestic violence final injunction for protection (DV IFP).
2. **The Courts** should consistently monitor for compliance, and institute sanctions for noncompliance.
3. **Community members** and **service providers** who become aware of IPV occurring in a relationship should provide BIP information to the batterer.



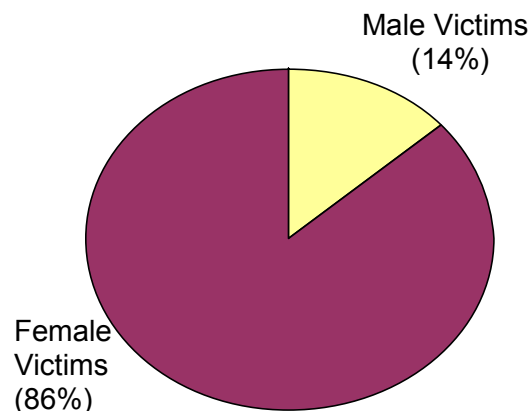
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**FACT:** In 86% (83) of the cases, there was a male perpetrator and a female victim.

**Discussion:** Women were victims of men's violence in the majority of cases reviewed. Risk factors including male privilege, acceptance of male-perpetrated IPV, and an unequal view of women are present in Pinellas County, as they are around the country. These are societal problems, and Pinellas County is not immune to them. Negative depictions of women can be seen on billboards, bus terminals, store fronts, in television ads, in movies, and throughout the internet. These images, both subtle and overt throughout our culture, affect our beliefs about gender and the objectification of women. Most boys will not grow up to abuse women, and most girls will not grow up to be abused. However, all children will see and be affected by these messages to varying degrees and without intervention some will become abusive or abused. Since not all children will learn positive messages at home or from their peers, all children in Pinellas County should receive age-appropriate healthy relationship and gender norms education in school. At this time in Pinellas County, there are only 7 healthy relationship educators for 75 elementary schools, 3 for 23 middle schools, and 1 for 18 high schools. These 11 educators cannot possibly reach the 115,000+ children in Pinellas County.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **The Domestic Violence Task Force, CASA, and The Haven of RCS** should continue and enhance their partnerships with Pinellas County Schools and local private schools to ensure that the most children possible receive age-appropriate information about healthy relationships and nonviolent conflict resolution repeatedly throughout their school years. Parents should also receive education about how to discuss and model healthy relationships and nonviolent conflict resolution.
2. **Local funding agencies and area schools** should increase their funding and focus on prevention education for the county's children.





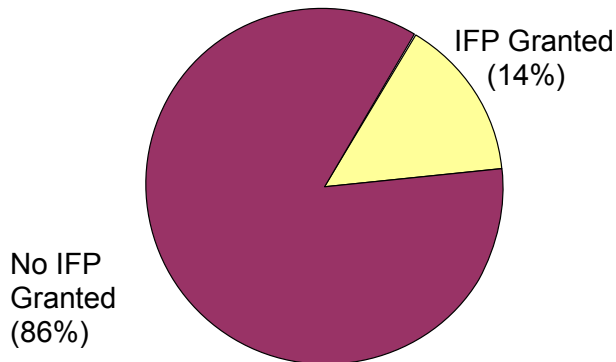
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**FACT:** In 86% (83) of the cases, no injunction for protection had been granted.

**Discussion:** Since domestic violence final injunctions for protection (DV IFPs) appear to be protective, it is important that the process be accessible, the petitions granted as often as possible, and the perpetrators held accountable and supported to change their behavior. The process of obtaining a DV IFP can be a protective factor in itself. When a victim files a DV IFP, whether or not it is ultimately granted, there are several opportunities for the victim to learn more about services available in the community. If the DV IFP is granted, there is additional contact with victim support systems, including law enforcement, and an opportunity for batterer accountability, especially when the DV IFP includes an order to a Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP) as recommended on page 6 of this report. In Pinellas County, approximately 30-35% of the DV IFP's filed are granted. There are complexities in obtaining and being granted a DV IFP, such as incomplete documentation provided on the petition, victims wanting to resume contact, and batterers interfering with the process through victim intimidation and evading legal proceedings. Also, while advocates are available to assist victims/petitioners, they are not able to assist every petitioner or provide legal advice.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **The Domestic Violence Task Force** should review how victims enter the system and recommend how to consistently provide DV IFP information at each entry point.
2. **The Courts** should increase the orders for BIP of DV IFP respondents.



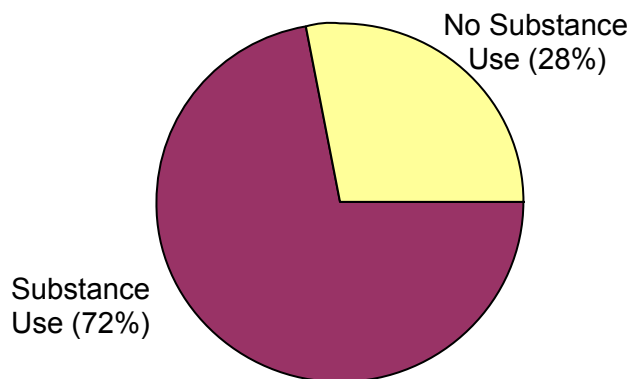
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**FACT:** In 72% (69) of the cases reviewed, substance use was involved either for the victim, perpetrator or both.

**Discussion:** Substance use includes the use of alcoholic beverages, drugs (legal and illegal), and any substance that causes impaired judgment. Substance use is not considered a cause of intimate partner violence (IPV), but is significantly related to the increased risk, severity and even lethality of IPV. It is important to acknowledge that substance use/abuse problems can increase the likelihood of an abuser misinterpreting and/or distorting the actions of a partner. Substance use can also impair a person's decision making and lessen inhibitions that might normally stop someone from more dangerous violence. Furthermore, use of substances by a victim can impede the ability to recognize cues to potential violence and the ability to defend oneself or flee when violence does occur.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **Substance abuse treatment professionals** should increase their education about intimate partner violence, including screening and safe interventions for perpetrators and victims.
2. **CASA, The Haven of RCS, and other service providers** should increase the education of their staff and participants about the substance abuse risk factors that can increase the severity of IPV incidents.



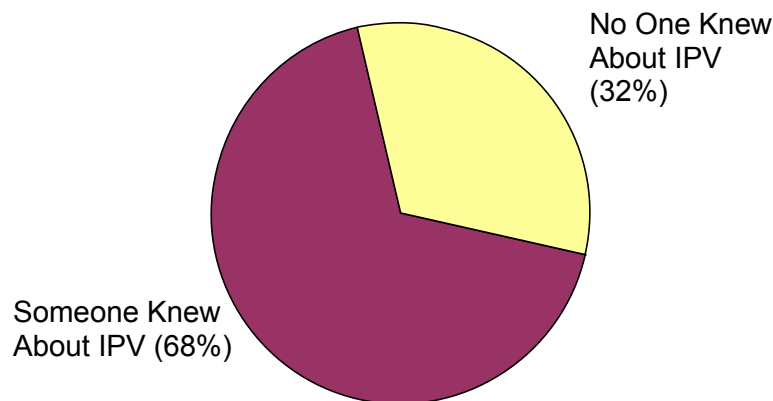
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**FACT:** In 68% (65) of the cases reviewed, friends, family, coworkers, or neighbors knew about intimate partner violence (IPV) prior to the homicide or near fatality.

**Discussion:** People close to the victim or perpetrator knew about violence in the relationship prior to the homicide or near fatality in a significant number of cases. When interviewed after a homicide, often those who knew about the violence expressed either shock that it had gone that far, frustration that their (or others') interventions had not worked, or dismay that they had not known how to help. Most people know about domestic violence shelters, 911, and "restraining orders," but may not know how to effectively help someone. Many friends or family members do not know how to broach the subject. Some may not understand the complexities of IPV cases and some do not believe the existing interventions are useful. Since domestic violence has historically been seen as a private family matter, some do not see it as their role to intervene. In some circumstances, if advice is even given, it can be ineffective, wrong or even dangerous. When so many cases reveal that someone knew there was violence in the relationship, the community must find ways to increase education about effective interventions.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **The Domestic Violence Task Force** should create and disseminate public education about effective interventions by friends, family, and coworkers. This should include information about services for victims and batterers, and especially be distributed in non-traditional locations such as grocery stores, pharmacies, salons, liquor stores/bars, places of worship, and medical settings.



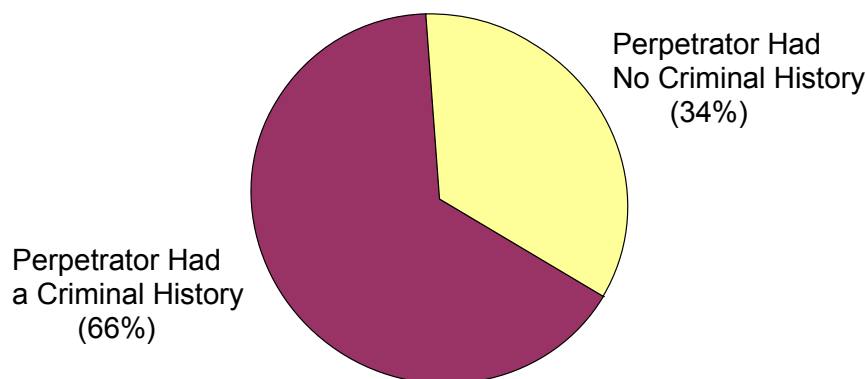
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**FACT:** In 66% (63) of the cases, the perpetrator had a criminal history. In 41% (39) of the cases, the perpetrator had been arrested for an intimate partner violence (IPV) crime.

**Discussion:** Most criminal justice professionals deem the best predictor of future violence is past violence; therefore, it is reasonable to consider that the best predictor of future criminal activity is a past history of criminal behavior. This theory has shown to be true in our review of cases over the past 11 years. The majority of perpetrators in these cases had a prior criminal history and a significant number had been arrested for a domestic violence (DV) crime, making them high risk for reoffending. National research indicates “If the abuser has just one prior arrest on his criminal record for any crime, not just DV, he is more likely to reabuse than if he has no prior arrest” (Klein, 2008). In addition, several researchers report criminal history to be a risk indicator for lethality (Campbell, 2003; Websdale, 1999; Johnson, 1999). As such, it is important that the criminal justice system and community at large recognize heightened risk and respond appropriately. Specialized units or designated personnel are desirable in every entity that deals with IPV-related issues, because they can focus on and track IPV offenders, get needed services to victims, and pay special attention to repeat offenders. In the case where a batterer is a repeat offender, regardless of the nature of the previous crime(s), that person should be considered an increased risk to their partner and, thereby, to the community.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **The Courts** should increase bond requirements and monitoring of those suspected of a DV crime if they also have a criminal history of any kind.
2. **The Courts** should increase sanctions against those convicted of a DV crime if they also have a criminal history of any kind.



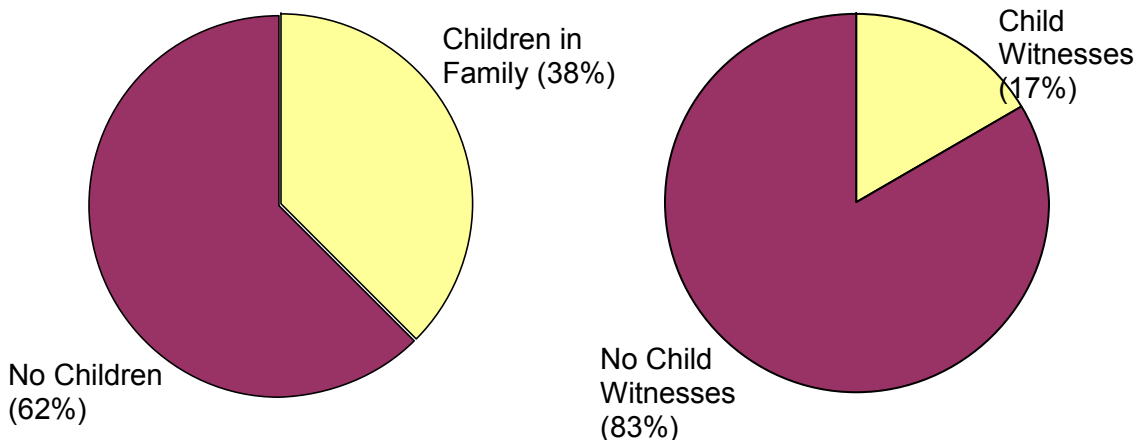
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**FACT:** In 38% (36) of the cases reviewed, children under age 18 lived in the home.

**Discussion:** Studies indicate children in homes with intimate partner violence (IPV) are at a higher risk for child abuse, behavioral problems, altered brain development, early sexual involvement, substance use, truancy, food addictions, running away, and perpetuating the cycle of violence in their own intimate relationships. Of the 36 cases whose households included children, 16 of the homicides were witnessed by those children. Further, national research indicates that male abusers are more likely to kill if the children in the household are not biologically theirs. The team began tracking this in 2007. Of the 26 cases reviewed since 2007, 50% (13) had children in the home and 62% (8) of those were non-biological children of the perpetrator. Children, especially young children, are vulnerable to trauma when it occurs in their presence or in their home, so this should always be given additional attention. The presence of children in a violent home significantly alters the dynamics of the situation and should affect the interventions. Victims with children are sometimes more reluctant to contact law enforcement out of fear of losing their children. Conversely, some victims are more likely to seek safety for their children than they might for themselves. Locally, the child protection system works to better understand the dynamics of IPV and find more creative ways to keep the children together with the protective parent. Pinellas County piloted the national Safe Start initiative which has enhanced available services locally for children exposed to violence. Caring for and assisting children who lose a parent to violence, especially those who witnessed it, is important to the future of a community and must always be taken into consideration.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. **All providers of children's services** should learn to recognize when children are impacted by IPV and what the resources are for referrals.
2. **CASA, The Haven of RCS, BIP providers and others working with families** should always include education for batterers and victims about the impact of exposure to violence on their children.
3. **Child welfare staff, family courts and dependency courts** should continue and enhance activities that hold batterers accountable for exposing children to their violence and support the non-offending parent to increase their safety and the safety of their children.



## Pinellas County Trends

The following **RISK** factors were found in the 96 cases reviewed

**No contact with DV Center-** In 96% of the cases, there was no contact with a domestic violence center.

**No BIP-** In 91% of the cases, there was no record of the batterer ever being ordered to, or voluntarily attending, a batterer's intervention program.

**Majority Male Perpetrators/Female Victims-** In 86% of cases, there was a male perpetrator and a female victim.

**No Injunction-** In 86% of the cases, no injunction for protection had been granted.

**Substance Use-** In 72% of the cases, substance use was involved either for the victim, perpetrator or both.

**Others Knew of Violence-** In 68% of the cases, friends, family, coworkers, or neighbors knew about intimate partner violence (IPV) prior to the homicide or near fatality.

**Criminal History-** In 66% of the cases, the perpetrator had a prior criminal history. In 41% of the cases, the perpetrator had been arrested for an intimate partner violence (IPV) crime.

### **The reviewed cases also reveal:**

- An overrepresentation of black victims and perpetrators.
- A higher incidence of victims and perpetrators with incomes less than \$10,000 per year.
- A higher incidence of victims and perpetrators in the age range of 25-45 years.
- In 50% of the cases (double the national rate), there was an age gap of six years or more
- In 49% of the cases, a firearm was used.

## National Trends

Local and national studies consistently demonstrate that the danger level for the victim is heightened when any of these indicators is present and, as such, enhanced efforts must be made to increase victim safety in these situations. However, we must keep in mind that any domestic violence victim can be killed by an abuser, and any abuser can become a murderer.

**Weapon Threats** - Prior threat with a firearm or other weapon (20.2 times more likely to kill).

**Threats to Kill** - Prior threat to kill victim or themselves (14.9 times more likely to kill).

**Strangulation** - Prior attempt to strangle (9.9 times more likely to kill).

**Sex** - Forced sex by perpetrator (7.6 times more likely to kill).

**Firearm Ownership** - Firearm in the home (6.1 times more likely to kill).

**Jealousy** - Extreme jealousy, possessiveness, control of everyday activities (5 times more likely to kill).

**Prior Violence** - Prior domestic violence history in relationship.

**Separation issues** – Currently separating or discussing separation.

**Substance use** – Substance use by perpetrator.

**Past Criminal History** - Criminal history for perpetrator.

**Unemployment** - Perpetrator's lack of employment.

**Children** - Child in home and perpetrator is not biological father.

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

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