

PREVENTABLE

A Review of Domestic Fatalities in Pinellas County, Florida

2011 Fatality Review Team Annual Report,

A committee of the Pinellas County

Domestic Violence Task Force

Published May 2012

For more information, please visit

www.dvtf.org



Dedicated to Those Committed to Peace in Our Community

The moment people devote themselves to safety and prevention, they become heroes. This report is dedicated to those who have chosen prevention as the optimal priority for a peaceful community.

*Two officers believed the horrid epidemic of intimate partner violence was preventable and they would do all they could to end it in our community. They patrolled the street everyday putting their life on the line so that there would be fewer victims in the morgue and more survivors ready to speak out! A man in their jurisdiction stabbed his wife and disfigured her face. There was a warrant for his arrest and a team of law enforcement went looking for him. These two courageous officers responded to the team's call for back up. In January of 2011, **Sergeant Tom Baitinger**, 48 years old, and **Officer Jeffrey Yaslowitz**, 39 years old, were shot and killed by the suspect. They sacrificed their lives to remove the abuser from the streets.*

*A role model for any young man, as no doubt his colleagues and family would attest to, **Officer David Crawford**, 46 years old, worked relentlessly to prevent animal abuse and intimate partner violence. He spent years working with and donating to CASA, talking to young men on the streets, and looking for ways to prevent domestic homicide. After 25 years of dedicating his life to our community and the cessation of intimate partner violence, in February of 2011, Officer Crawford was shot and killed while on duty. He left a legacy of commitment to creating a safe and peaceful community.*

When we make strides to end intimate partner violence – we honor their names.

When we use this report to prevent intimate partner violence – we help continue their lifelong work.

When we do something ourselves to prevent intimate partner violence and make our community better – we pick up the torch they left behind, and become heroes ourselves.

What Will You Do?

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In Honor of the....

2011 Domestic Homicide Victims

Because these cases occurred in 2011, they will not be reviewed by the Fatality Review Team until they are finalized within the criminal justice system. Information listed here was taken from local newspapers.

A 59 year old woman from Indian Rocks Beach whose "outwardly happy" marriage ended with her body decomposing for weeks in the bath tub. He was a legal assistant, described as a great guy; nobody expected anything like this from him. Neighbors said he would help you if you needed anything. She looked toward the future and relished nature. She loved her Labradors and horses. Her nose was pinched, her mouth was covered, and a 20 year relationship died with her last breath.

A 22 year old daughter, sister, friend and coworker from Clearwater shot by her former boyfriend before he killed himself. She was a college student who was charitable, kind; a volunteer in her community who loved to get others involved. She took the right steps; she moved out, she told her family and friends. She said that there had not been physical violence and did not feel he would harm her, but reported that he would throw things at her and he had anger issues. He was set to be deployed with the US Army but instead he shot her and then killed himself. He took her from her family and friends. Now they are left trying to honor her memory by sharing her story with the hope that no one else becomes a fatality.

A 21 year old son, friend and coworker from unincorporated St. Petersburg was held captive and suffered cruel acts of violence before being killed by his former boyfriend. He came to the United States as a teenager, finished high school, became a Certified Nursing Assistant and worked in a nursing home. He was a good, moral, kind hearted young man with a great work ethic.

A 24 year old daughter and recovering addict from Clearwater was stabbed by her boyfriend and buried in his back yard. He was a sex offender who was described by a local assistant state attorney as "one of the scariest individuals that we've had in this county". She was described as an amazing person, gorgeous and loyal. She had moved here to start a new life, instead a man described as a "sexual monster" took her life and left her in his back yard to decompose.

A 43 year old Real Estate Agent from Belleair went missing after reporting trouble with her husband. A 35 year old Pinellas County police cadet went missing after telling a friend she and her boyfriend were having "domestic issues." Both women would be described by loved ones as warm, loving, generous and friendly. Shortly after the Belleair woman went missing, her husband left town and stopped talking to the police...so did the boyfriend of the police cadet. The Belleair woman was found murdered 12 years later...the police cadet remains missing.

According to the FBI (2010), there are more than 65,000 missing adults throughout the United States classified as either endangered or "involuntary". These stories often elicit more questions than answers and in many cases foul play at the hands of a partner is the only thing that seems reasonable.

No one has to die at the hands of another...

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Executive Summary

Mission:

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

The Pinellas County Fatality Review Team is a subcommittee 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.

The Pinellas County Fatality Review Team (FRT) reviewed 103 cases during the last twelve years. In 2011, we reviewed seven of those cases. All cases have been finalized in the criminal justice system prior to a review. Therefore, the seven reviewed last year did not occur in 2011. This report discusses our findings, the most prevalent trends/factors identified, recommended actions for prevention, and includes a tear off sheet as a quick reference. Year to year we continue to see similar trends.

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 domestic partner homicides.
2. To raise awareness of the prevalence and devastation of domestic partner homicides and near fatalities.
3. To serve as a practical tool for those who are in a position to try to prevent domestic partner homicides and near fatalities in our community.

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

Because we understand there are numerous facets to a case, it is important to note that we are limited by the information provided by FRT members and their access to that information.

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 statutes define “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.

Our hope is that EACH and EVERY member of our community recognizes that they have a role in preventing IPV homicides and near fatalities. It is not the responsibility of the criminal justice system alone. We all have a part. This is reflected in our recommended actions for prevention.

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**Ask yourself: Was there anything I could have done to prevent the situation?
If the answer is yes, do something now and become a better person for it. ~Dave Pelzer**



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NOTE: This page can be torn off and used as a quick reference to help you recognize potentially lethal cases of intimate partner violence and provide a list of community resources to share with others.

Definition: To keep from happening, to impede; to counter in advance.



#1 TREND:

No Contact with DV Center

In 89% (92) of cases, there was no contact with a domestic violence (DV) center.

Why aren't domestic homicide victims accessing domestic violence center services? This is challenging to determine, but families of victims report that the reasons are varied. Some indicate that without physical abuse, a shelter is not warranted. Family members also state a belief that the issue should be addressed within the family. Others report not knowing about center services and/or how to access them. Stigma still exists related to identifying oneself as a person who needs a shelter when in reality it may be the one place that can prevent a domestic partner homicide.

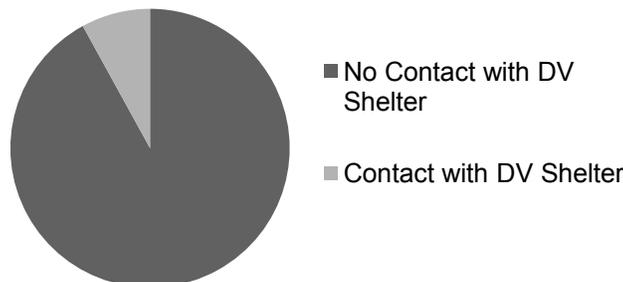
It is the community's responsibility to educate that intimate partner violence includes all forms of abuse not just physical violence. Additionally, it is important to inform the community that a domestic violence center's goal is to keep healthy families intact and that they are a valuable resource for building stronger families.

On a single day in the State of Florida, 3,166 victims sought services and 687 hotline calls were answered according to a 2011 study conducted by the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

In 2011, Pinellas County's two domestic violence centers answered 11,799 hotline calls; 448 adult victims of intimate partner violence and 282 children were sheltered; 1456 people were assisted in filing injunctions for protection. These are just some of the life saving services that victims can access at the local domestic violence center.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION:

1. If victims have contact with a domestic violence center, the lethality level is lowered. As funding cuts continue, we need to stress the importance of funding for domestic violence centers.
2. Every individual in the community needs education on intimate partner violence to share the information so victims know where they can get help.
3. Encourage Pinellas County residents to contact a local domestic violence center to learn about intimate partner violence and how to prevent domestic partner homicide.
4. Create a climate in Pinellas County that eliminates the stigma of accessing a domestic violence center/shelter and instead embraces it as a potentially life saving action.



Picking up the phone and calling a domestic violence center could save a life.



#2 TREND:

No Batterer Intervention Program Referral

In 89% (92) of cases reviewed, there was no record of the batterer ever being ordered to, or voluntarily attending, a Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP).

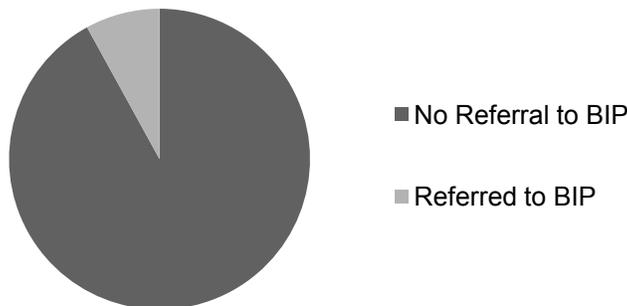
Why are Batterers Intervention Programs (BIP) not being utilized to their full potential? Access to BIP can originate from court orders, referrals, or voluntary participation, but in Pinellas County BIP utilization has steadily decreased over the last 11 years. In 6 of the 7 cases reviewed in 2011 there were domestic violence arrests, but no BIP ordered. Of the 103 cases reviewed over the past 12 years, 45 of the perpetrators were arrested for a domestic violence crime prior to the homicide or near fatality and only 11 were ordered to BIP; therefore less than 25% of perpetrators with court contact were actually presented with services focused on accountability and behavior change.

BIP is a 26 week program where batterers are required to examine their behavior and belief system(s) by focusing on accountability, education and healthy conflict resolution skills. Individuals who are arrested for committing a domestic violence (DV) crime and those who have an injunction for protection against them are prime candidates for BIP. This is supported by Florida statutes which mandate BIP in certain injunction cases and as a sentencing resolution for most misdemeanor DV crimes or felony DV probation cases.

Prevention begins with intervention. In addition to referral from the court system, as a community we all bear the responsibility for referring abusers to BIP. Batterer Intervention Programs are open and available to all residents of Pinellas County.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION:

1. Child protection workers, mental health professionals, substance abuse professionals, clergy, employers, neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family can and must refer abusers to BIP.
2. Include information about BIP and how to make a referral in ALL community education about intimate partner violence.
3. Domestic Violence Task Force and area domestic violence centers provide ongoing opportunities for the community to learn how to be better bystanders.
4. All judges must incorporate BIP referrals in appropriate injunction for protection cases.



Batterer Intervention Program provides an opportunity for intervention that could be life saving.

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#3 TREND: Majority of Perpetrators are Male

In 88% (91) of cases, there was a male perpetrator and female victim.

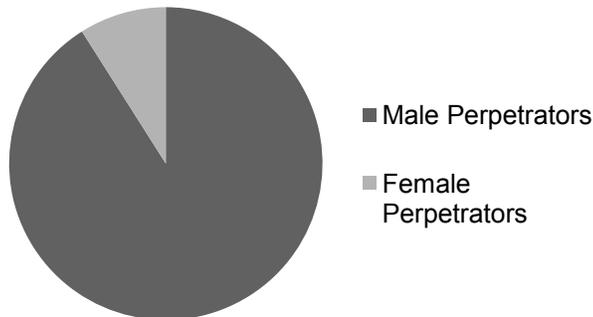
Why does our community tolerate men killing women? Women continue to be the victims of violence perpetrated by men in the majority of cases reviewed. A national study indicates that females are killed by intimate partners at twice the rate of males (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Evidence indicates that violence against women is a learned response and is rewarded by feelings of power and control. Without effective early intervention, many more children have the potential to either become violent perpetrators or victims of violence at the hands of their future partners. An additional concern is what is modeled in our main stream media, with images, news stories, films, and TV shows glorifying violence. This creates an environment where violence against women is normalized, and can lead us to conclude that children are being taught to not only accept violence against women, but to admire and imitate it.

To challenge the desensitization of children to violence, Pinellas County must do more than raise awareness to the problem, we must demand more action.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION:

1. As a community we must take an active role in creating an environment of equality in all of our interactions and connections.
2. Increase collaborations with agencies to provide programs for children that teach non-violent reactions to stress. This can be accomplished by continuing and enhancing programs such as the Peacemakers for preschoolers.
3. Throughout Pinellas County, from preschool to high school, in both public and private schools, provide violence prevention and equality awareness training for children and parents.



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It's never too early to teach equality but it can be too late.



#4 Trend: No Injunction for Protection was Filed

In 85% (88) of cases, no injunction for protection was filed.

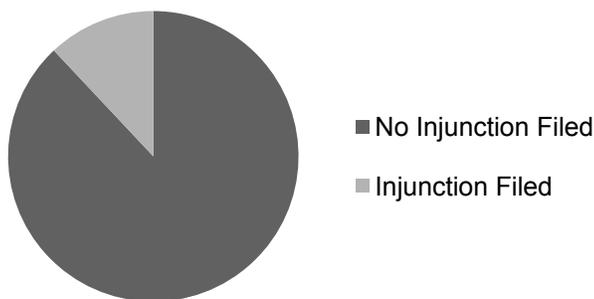
Why aren't more domestic homicide victims requesting domestic violence injunctions for protection? Many Pinellas county residents maintain misconceptions about domestic violence injunctions for protection: who is eligible to apply, how enforceable they are, and whether they are truly an option.

Domestic violence injunctions for protection can be a protective measure against intimate partner homicide. In addition, the injunction process opens the door to available services for victims. Injunctions increase the likelihood that perpetrators will be arrested and held accountable for their actions if they defy the order. Some perpetrators will be deterred by the threat of arrest.

Injunctions can also empower a victim to reclaim personal power and help them to create a network of support. Sometimes, there is safety in numbers and the awareness of an injunction can enable the community to assist in the victim's safety.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION:

1. Domestic Violence Task Force and domestic violence centers make a concerted effort to educate the community about the availability of domestic violence injunctions for protection.
2. Encourage bystanders, friends, family, coworkers, employers, medical professionals, social service workers, clergy, etc. to let victims of intimate partner violence know about injunctions and refer to a domestic violence center to discuss safety planning related to domestic violence injunctions for protection.
3. Domestic violence centers increase their number of trained volunteers to provide full staffing of injunction rooms at the Clerk's Office to assist with petitioning for domestic violence injunctions for protections.



Injunctions for protection connect victims with the system and send strong messages to abusers.



#5 Trend: Abuse of Substances Was a Contributing Factor

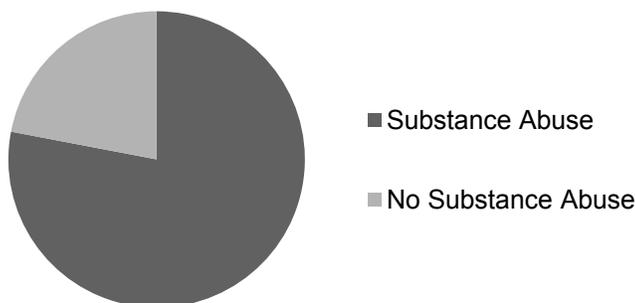
In 76% (78) of cases, substance use was a factor.

What is the connection between substance use and domestic homicide? According to the Florida Department of Children and Families, approximately 25-50% of men who commit acts of intimate partner violence (IPV) also had substance abuse problems. Our review of domestic partner homicides found that substance use was a factor in over 75% of cases. Substance use includes the over use of prescription drugs like Xanax, Oxycodone and Roxicodone as well as other drugs like marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine and, most prevalently, alcohol.

The use of drugs and alcohol has been found to increase the risk for and severity of intimate partner violence. It is important to understand 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, judgment, and lessen inhibitions which could potentially reduce fear of consequences. For some, alcohol (and drugs) provides an illusion of power which further drives the "violent dynamic": the abuser uses the substance like a fuel to gain control. Additionally, 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 FOR PREVENTION:

1. Substance abuse treatment professionals should increase their education about intimate partner violence (IPV), 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 intimate partner violence incidents.
3. Community agencies provide training for substance abuse treatment programs and self help groups to include screening and safe interventions for perpetrators and victims as well as substance abuse risk factors.



Substance abuse is preventable and treatable; it does not have to be a factor in intimate partner violence.

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#6 Trend: The Perpetrator had a Prior Criminal History

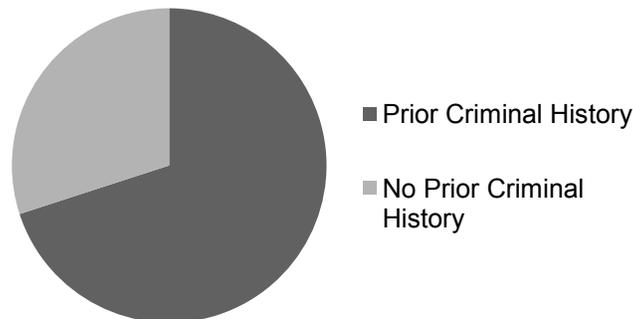
In 68% (70) of cases reviewed, the perpetrator had a criminal history.

What is the connection between criminal history and domestic partner homicide? Most criminal justice professionals deem the main predictor of future criminal behavior to be past criminal behavior. This would hold true for domestic partner homicide. The majority of perpetrators in these cases had a prior criminal history and a significant number; 44% (45 cases) had been arrested for a domestic violence crime.

Several researchers have identified prior criminal history as a risk indicator for domestic lethality (Jacqueline Campbell, Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships, 2003 and Neil Websdale, Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews: From a Culture of Blame to a Culture of Safety, 1999). Therefore, it is imperative that the criminal justice system and community at large recognize that an abuser with any prior arrests (especially if charges are of a violent nature) should be considered high risk to potential victims.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION:

1. Include information on the criminal history factor in ALL community education about intimate partner violence. (domestic violence centers, law enforcement, medical, social service, child protection, dental, clergy, etc)
2. Teach children that another individual's criminal record is likely to place them at risk of future violence. Begin dialogue with children to explain that partners with a criminal past can be dangerous; potentially deadly.
3. Make concerted efforts to educate the general public about the criminal history factor and how to access Pinellas County public records.
4. The Courts must consider all criminal history not just domestic violence related when determining bond, whether to grant injunctions (if information is presented by a victim), and sentencing.



Taking criminal history seriously can prevent domestic homicide.

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#7 TREND: Others Knew

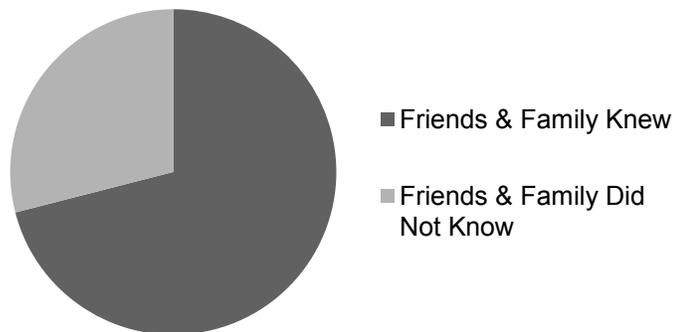
In 69% (71) of cases reviewed, friends, family, coworkers, and/or neighbors knew about intimate partner violence prior to the homicide or near fatality.

Why do the people who know the victim best not help them? Is it lack of knowledge, fear, or merely complacency and desensitization? An alarming number of people close to the victim or perpetrator knew about precursors to violence in the relationship prior to the domestic partners homicide or near fatality.

Unfortunately, intimate partner violence is still viewed as a “family issue.” Reluctance of bystanders to “get involved” is another problem. These friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors (all of us) can be empowered to help victims if given the tools and direction on what can be done to help prevent domestic partners homicide.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION:

1. Every agency must begin disseminating public education about effective interventions by friends, family, and coworkers.
2. This information can be provided at town hall meetings, city/county commission meetings, public forums, and community trainings.
3. Distribute information to nontraditional locations such as pharmacies, hair salons, bus stations, grocery stores, places of worship, and recreation centers.
4. As a community we must learn to be better neighbors and speak up.



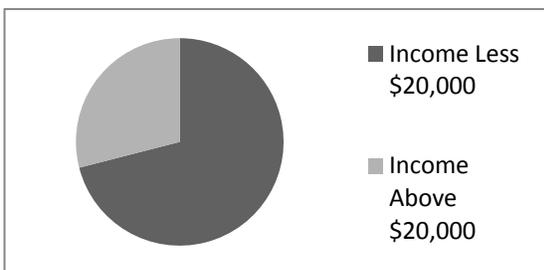
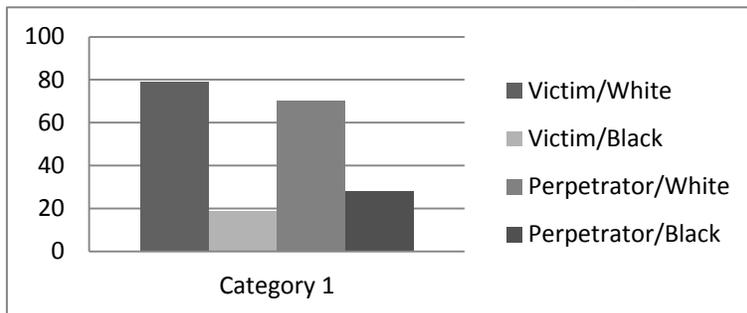
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It is not “her problem” it is OUR problem.



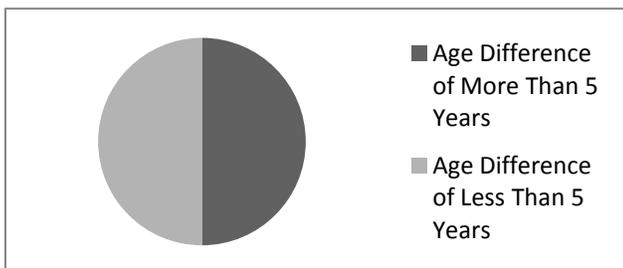
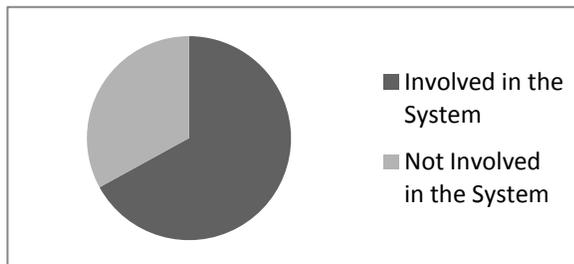
Other Important Factors

Race: While the majority of victims and perpetrators were white, 79% and 70% respectively, the black population is disproportionately impacted based on Pinellas demographics. This trend is reflected on a national level. The 2010 census indicated the Pinellas black population was 10.34% while our review found 19% of the victims and 28% of the perpetrators were black.



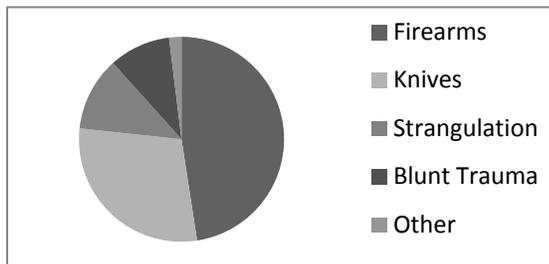
Socioeconomic Status: While intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs across socioeconomic lines, in Pinellas we see a higher incidence (69% of cases) of domestic partner homicide among individuals with incomes less than \$20,000

System Involvement: Our team began tracking System Involvement in 2004. Since then, 39 of 58 cases or 67% had system involvement of some kind.



Age Difference: In 50% of the cases, there was an age difference of six or more years between the victim and perpetrator. The national rate for age difference of six or more years between intimate partners is 25%.

Method: Firearms continue to be the most utilized weapon (49 or 47% of the cases), followed by knives (30 or 29% of the cases), strangulation (12 or 12%), blunt trauma (10 or 10%), and other (2 or 2%).

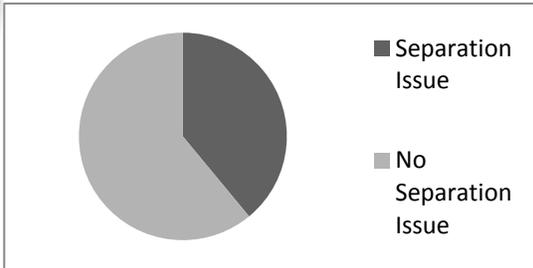


You can't change what has happened to you but you can change what you will do next....



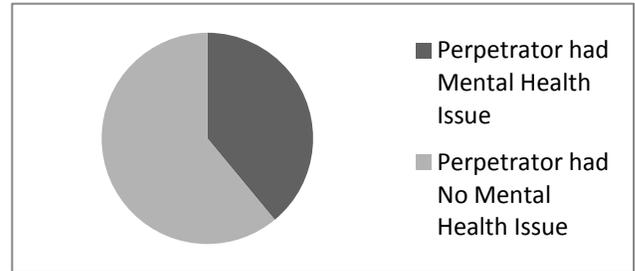


Other Important Factors



Couple was Separating: Separation issues were a factor in 39% of the cases. A separation issue includes cases where separation was discussed, the parties were physically in process of separating, or divorce was filed.

Mental Health of Perpetrator: We began tracking mental health issues of the perpetrator in 2009. Since that time, 33% of the cases involved a perpetrator identified as having some form of mental health issue. (Please note: mental health issues are NOT a reason for the violence. Mental health includes a continuum from low level depression to bipolar to schizophrenia.)



A Special Thanks...

The Pinellas County Fatality Review Team would like to thank the following individuals for making this report possible:

Suncoast Center, Inc. for providing a meeting space; the report subcommittee- Chad Herman-Delta Program of The Haven of RCS, Courtney Hendrickson-The Haven of RCS, Cathy Stallings-Area Agency on Aging, and Jennifer Young, MS, RMHCI-Counseling for Your SELF; and the detectives from area law enforcement agencies who presented cases to the team.

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

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

"That's all nonviolence is...organized love." ~ Joan Baez

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Pinellas County Trends

The following RISK factors were found in the 103 cases reviewed

#1 No Contact with a Domestic Violence Center

"She didn't think it was domestic violence because there wasn't physical abuse."

In 89% (92) of cases reviewed, there was no contact with a domestic violence (DV) center.

#2 No Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP) Referral

"He was released on his own recognizance, unsupervised, with no conditions to attend a BIP; soon after he stabbed her."

In 89% (92) of cases reviewed, there was no record of the batterer ever being ordered to, or voluntarily attending, a Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP).

#3 Majority of Perpetrators are Male

"Unbeknownst to her, he had a history of abusing women that dated back to his teen years."

In 88.3% (91) of cases reviewed, there was a male perpetrator and female victim.

#4 No Injunction for Protection was Filed

"She sought domestic violence injunctions against him 3 times."

In 85% (88) of cases reviewed, no injunction had been requested.

#5 Abuse of Substance was Contributing Factor

"He seemed perpetually drunk and hostile."

In 76% (78) of cases reviewed, substance use was a factor.

#6 The Perpetrator had a Prior Criminal History

"According to local records, it was his 35th arrest in the county since 2005."

In 68% (70) of cases reviewed, the perpetrator had a criminal history.

#7 Others Knew

"I knew it was a matter of time. He always said he was going to kill her first..."

In 69% of cases reviewed friends, family, coworkers, and/or neighbors knew about intimate partner violence (IPV) prior to the homicide or near fatality.

National Trends Indicating Potential for Violence

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.

Weapon Threats-prior threat with a firearm or other weapon

Threats to Kill-prior threat to kill victim or themselves

Strangulation-prior attempt to strangle

Sex-forced sex by perpetrator

Firearm Ownership-firearm in the home

Jealousy-extreme jealousy, possessiveness, control of everyday activities

Prior Violence-prior domestic violence history in the relationship

Separation Issues-currently separating or discussing separation

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"Prevention is better than cure." ~Desiderius Erasmus Adagia



Pinellas County Resources

Pinellas County has many agencies ready to provide education, support and to take an active role in preventing intimate partner violence.

For more information regarding shelter services, support groups, safety planning and general information about intimate partner violence, Pinellas County has two domestic violence centers:

South of Ulmerton Road
CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse)
895-4912
www.casa-stpete.org

North of Ulmerton Road
The Haven of RCS
727-442-4128
www.rcspinellas.org/haven

For information and support for seniors who are being impacted by crime and intimate partner violence, please contact:

Senior Victim Advocate Program
Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas, Inc.
727-570-9696 ext. 259
www.agingcarefl.org

For information and assistance with substance abuse treatment, please contact:

Operation PAR
www.operationpar.org
1-888-727-6398

For assistance regarding mental health issues and support, please contact:

Suncoast Center for Mental Health
(727) 388-1220
www.suncoastcenter.org

Directions for Mental Health
www.healthehurt.com

Gulfcoast Jewish Family and Community Services
727-479-1800
www.gulfcoastjewishfamilyandcommunityservices.org

Personal Enrichment Through Mental Health Services (PEHMS)
24 hour mental health assistance line: 727-541-4628
24 hour suicide hotline: 727-791-3131

To request a speaker at your child's school, Pinellas County has two programs with staff who can come and speak about intimate partner violence, its effect on children and provide education to students on how to prevent abuse:

South of Ulmerton Road
Peacemakers Program
<http://www.casa-stpete.org/peacemakers.htm>
727-895-4912

North of Ulmerton Road
Peacemakers Program
727-441-2029 ext. 220

Delta Program
Chad Herman, DELTA Coordinator
727-418-0959

Injunctions for protection can be filed at one of three court buildings in Pinellas County, based on the address of the victim. You may also call them at 727-464-7000 or visit their website at www.pinellasclerk.org

Civil Court Records
315 Court Street, Room 170
Clearwater, FL 33756

Criminal Justice Center
14250 49th Street North
Clearwater, FL 33762

St. Petersburg Branch Office
545 First Avenue North, Room 101
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

To search criminal history records free of charge, Pinellas County has two ways to access information:

Pinellas County Sheriff's Department-Jail Intake
<http://pcsoweb.com/InmateBooking/>

Pinellas County Clerk of Court
www.pinellasclerk.org

For information about Batterer's Intervention Programs contact The Haven, CASA or your local Victim Advocate associated with your law enforcement agency.