



2009 GEORGIA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW ANNUAL REPORT

An examination of the circumstances and consequences of domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities from 2004 to 2009, for the purpose of saving lives and holding abusers accountable

Georgia Commission on Family Violence
Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence



how to use this report

the basics

- ◆ *Easy Contents pages divided into Data (charts) and Narrative (essays) so you can easily locate the material you want*

pressed for time?

- ◆ *The Executive Summary provides a crisp overview of the report's major findings*
- ◆ *"Conclusions" at the end of each article encapsulate take-home messages*
- ◆ *"Key Points" in the Data section highlight some of the most significant aspects of each chart*

suggested reading for...

advocates

See Organizing Principle: Complexity on page 6, Secondary Traumatic Stress on page 9, Isolation on page 12, Implementing Change on page 30

concerned citizens

See Organizing Principle: Complexity on page 6, One Woman's Search for Support & Safety on page 10, Isolation on page 12, The Faith Response on page 15

faith leaders

See The Faith Response on page 15, What Faith Leaders Can Do to Build Relationships with Advocates on page 21, Showcasing Savannah-Chatham County on 32, State Level Example on page 35

family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers of victims or perpetrators

See Secondary Traumatic Stress on page 9, One Woman's Search for Support & Safety on page 10, Showcasing Savannah-Chatham County on page 32, Dedication on page 39

family violence intervention program (FVIP) staff

See Organizing Principle: Complexity on page 6, Secondary Traumatic Stress on page 9, Isolation on page 12

grantmakers

See Charts beginning on page 24, Implementing Change on page 30, State Level Example on page 35

grantwriters

See Charts beginning on page 24, Implementing Change on page 30, Showcasing Savannah-Chatham County on page 32

judicial professionals

See Organizing Principle: Complexity on page 6, One Woman's Search for Support & Safety on page 10, Isolation on page 12, Charts beginning on page 24, Implementing Change on page 30

law enforcement

See Organizing Principle: Complexity on page 6, Secondary Traumatic Stress on page 9, One Woman's Search for Support & Safety on page 10, Isolation on page 12, Dedication on page 39

medical staff

See Organizing Principle: Complexity on page 6, Secondary Traumatic Stress on page 9, Isolation on page 12, Implementing Change on page 30

charts answer questions about location, gender, income, employment, cause of death, witnesses, perpetrators' behaviors, prosecution outcome, and agencies involved

Data	
Chart 1: Domestic Violence Deaths in Georgia by County 2003-2008	24
<i>How Many Died from Domestic Violence In Each Georgia County by Year?</i>	
Chart 2: Gender, Employment, and Income 2004-2009	25
<i>What Was the Victims' Gender, Where Were They Employed, What Did They Earn, What Were Their Sources of Support?</i>	
Chart 3: Types of Incidents 2004-2009	25
<i>Was it Single Homicide or Were Others Killed/Hurt?</i>	
Chart 4: Cause of Death 2004-2009	26
<i>How Were the Victims Killed?</i>	
Chart 5: Who Else was Present, a Witness to, or Killed at the Fatality 2004-2009	26
<i>Who Else Was There When It Happened?</i>	
Chart 6: Perpetrators' History as Known by the Community 2004-2009	27
<i>Who Was Aware of Perpetrators' Behaviors?</i>	
Chart 7: Detail of Investigation and Prosecution Breakdown 2004-2009	28
<i>What Was the End Result of 911 Calls to Law Enforcement?</i>	
Chart 8: Agencies and Services Involved with Victims or Perpetrators in the Five Years Prior to the Fatalities 2004-2009	29
<i>Which Agencies and Services Interacted with Victims and/or Perpetrators?</i>	

About methodology: refer to prior reports for information about our methodology for reviewing cases

About previous reports: Copies of this report and all previously published reports can be downloaded online from the following websites:
www.gcfv.org
www.gcadv.org
www.fatalityreview.com

*essays frame problems, describe processes, reveal trends,
note system failures. offer practical guidance, examine
solutions, and disclose best practices*

Narrative	
Executive Summary	4
Organizing Principle: Complexity	6
Secondary Traumatic Stress	9
One Woman's Search for Support & Safety	10
Isolation: How Domestic Violence Becomes Fatal	12
The Faith Response	15
How Advocates Can Help Clergy When Faith & Domestic Violence Intersect	21
What Faith Leaders Can Do to Build Relationships with Domestic Violence Advocates	21
What Is a 'Domestic Violence Advocate' & How Do I Find One?	22
10 Things Your Congregation Can Do to Advance Women's Safety	23
Implementing Change	30
A Call to Action: What Fatality Review Teams Recommend	30
Local Example: Showcasing Savannah-Chatham County	32
State Level Example	35
Acknowledgements	36
Dedication	39

executive summary

Welcome to the 2009 Annual Report of Georgia's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project. At the completion of the Project's sixth year, participating communities across Georgia have conducted in-depth reviews of 78 cases of domestic violence fatalities and near fatal attacks. While these reviewed cases represent only a fraction of the more than 600 domestic violence deaths in Georgia during that same time period, both the local teams as well as the Project staff have learned a great deal from engaging in this focused research. This report exists to share those findings with you. In particular, the purpose of the report is four-fold:

- ◆ *To raise awareness and promote critical thinking about the problem of domestic violence as a means of fostering conversation and collaboration statewide.*
- ◆ *To give a voice to the victims and their loved ones, so that we may learn from their experiences as we seek to prevent future tragedies.*
- ◆ *To expose and explore the dangers created when individuals or systems engage, consciously or unconsciously, in victim-blaming. Understanding how a culture of victim-blaming can be fatal for victims of domestic violence is essential to promoting safety and justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators.*
- ◆ *To serve as a practical tool for all those who wish to eliminate this violence in Georgia. By providing current data and analysis, mapping trends, summarizing recent history, and exposing barriers to safety and survival, our intention is that this tool will inspire and drive changes in our systems and our culture.*

To accomplish these goals, we have worked to make this year's report easier than ever to read and use. The Table of Contents is your roadmap to the report, with each section clearly labeled so you can find what you're looking for quickly. While we encourage you to read the full report, because all of

its components are connected, each of the five major sections can also stand alone as a discrete and thorough exploration of an issue. The charts you will find in the "Data" section are marked this year by new, easier-to-understand headings. Note that each of these charts presents aggregate data compiled, unless otherwise noted, from all of the 78 cases reviewed since the Project's inception. You will also find, in several places throughout the report, visual elements (pages 10, 11, and 40) that illustrate the real lives behind the cases studied this year and the challenges faced by survivors of domestic violence as they seek safety. Finally, major narrative sections have marked "conclusion" paragraphs for quick review.

The theme of each year's report emerges from the cases reviewed in that year. As community members across Georgia gather to examine domestic violence fatalities (and near-fatalities), they seek to piece together the elements of the violent relationship, the missed opportunities for assistance and intervention, and the ways in which the community can work to close those gaps in the future. The information reviewed by these Fatality Review Teams may include formal documentation, such as homicide files from the prosecutor's office or the law enforcement agency, to informal yet rich data sources such as interviews with surviving family, friends, or clergy who knew the victim. Through this process, the lives and untimely deaths of those involved are revealed with complexity and richness. The nine cases reviewed this year highlighted the many ways in which each of these women worked to navigate a variety of systems in their attempts to get safe. Witnessing the numerous paths they traveled as they sought safety, and the variety of barriers that prevented that safety, a common theme emerged.

This year's report focuses on the sheer complexity of domestic violence. While illustrating and reflecting the complex realities of the lives that were lost, this report recognizes that there are no simple solutions.

The problem itself is never a simple one, for domestic violence occurs between intimate partners, whose lives are linked by their shared history, living space, children, finances, and other connections. As such, victims' responses to the violence in their relationship happen within the context of this interconnectedness. As they chart a course to safety, victims make many choices that may perplex or discourage those seeking to help them, including continuing contact or reconciling with an abusive partner, recanting in court, dismissing protective orders, or resorting to violence themselves. Too often, such choices are interpreted to mean that the victim must not be in real danger, or does not want to be safe. In fact, what appear on the surface to be poor decisions on the part of victims are actually strategies for mitigating the violence. The section entitled "Organizing Principle: Complexity" explains how looking at these choices in a broader context, i.e., taking into account the complexity of domestic violence, is crucial for improving our understanding of and response to the problem.

One of the most complex and easily misunderstood elements of an abusive relationship is isolation. A tactic used by perpetrators to reduce or eliminate the victim's contact with friends, family, and other sources of support, isolation is a very effective means of gaining and maintaining power and control over another person. In addition, sometimes the systems that exist to support victims may inadvertently increase this isolation; as, for example, when a victim's family and friends, out of fear and frustration, give her an ultimatum: that if she continues in the relationship, they will have no further contact with her. In the "Isolation" narrative, we explore the ways in which isolation, whether purposely inflicted by a perpetrator, or unintentionally inflicted by intervening systems, can result in increased danger for the victim.

Another aspect of the complicated reality of domestic violence is that neither victims nor perpetrators exist wholly within

the criminal justice system. While the criminal justice system may sometimes be involved in a case, it is not typically the focal point of either party's life. Instead, victims and perpetrators live, as we all do, in a variety of spheres: they go to work, raise children, participate in faith communities; pay bills, shop for groceries, and go to school. Most people experiencing abuse do not look to law enforcement or the courts first to address the violence. Instead, they turn to family, friends, employers, coworkers, neighbors, and their faith community. A major finding that has emerged since the beginning of the project is that, in the cases we reviewed, victims of domestic violence are more likely to disclose the abuse to someone in their faith community than they are to seek help from the police. This finding has been so consistent that during 2009, we launched a Faith Initiative through this Project to connect leaders from various faith traditions with information and resources about domestic violence. "The Faith Response" section explores the profound and vital role that faith leaders have in addressing domestic violence and provides concrete steps for making congregations places of safety rather than danger.

We hope that this report will inspire you to join or continue the work to end domestic violence in your community. It is intended that this report be an important tool in that work. Perhaps the most powerful way to honor those who lost their lives to domestic violence is to engage in the effort to end this tragedy. With this 2009 report, we challenge you to join us in that effort.

organizing principle: complexity

The Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project has reviewed 78 domestic violence-related fatalities and near fatalities in the last 6 years. Each tragic story of lives taken by abusive intimate partners is unique. However, the fatality review process has revealed common threads that weave their way through all of the cases. A primary thread with far-reaching implications for everyone involved in this work is the complex nature of domestic violence cases. These complexities are often not visible as cases move through the criminal legal and social service systems because they are viewed from the singular lens of each particular system. A failure to look at domestic violence in totality by taking into account both macro level and case complexities, rather than single incidents, can lead to missed opportunities for effective intervention. There are several ways in which this intrinsic complexity can confuse the helping systems and effectively mask the violence. **And, when the violence is masked, it is not addressed and the people experiencing the violence fall through the proverbial cracks in our systems.**

There are reasons why domestic violence cases are often viewed through a singular, narrow focus lens. Responders and helpers come to domestic violence work with pre-conceived notions about victimization and our communities have constructed a system for handling victims and violence based on these preconceptions. There is also inherent racism, classism, homophobia, and sexism within institutions that address domestic violence. Victims from marginalized communities face additional barriers to safety and resources. This includes people of color; women; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex (LGBTQQI) people; people with disabilities; refugees; immigrants; religious minorities; teens; older adults; and people who are poor. Many victims are re-victimized by the very systems put in place to protect them because of these dynamics and inherent biases.

This problem is further exacerbated because most victims do not fit the ideals around which the system was designed. Victims of domestic violence might well use drugs, resort to violence, continue contact with a perpetrator, recant, dismiss protective orders, decline to take out warrants, or reconcile with perpetrators. When victims engage in certain behaviors or make choices we do not understand society's sympathy for them has strict limits. This easily paves the way for victim blaming and labeling victims as 'non-compliant,' 'difficult,' or 'argumentative.' When the behaviors and choices of victims are viewed through a singular lens, they may not make sense. Conversely, when these behaviors are viewed within the context of a person's life they can begin to seem more coherent. If a victim's situation does not fit into the criminal justice system's particular constraints, it may not work for them and may instead militate against their safety and survival.

It is impossible to know why the victims in the reviewed cases made the choices they did, because their voices have been silenced. We must rely on the information left behind to piece together each story, but for obvious reasons, this method is flawed. Can we ever understand the reality of a victim's struggle without witnessing or experiencing it? What we can do, to understand the choices of battered women, is take a wide-angle approach to these cases to give context to victims' decisions and the complexities of their struggles.

Victims allowing contact

It is not unusual for a victim of domestic violence to continue to have contact with the perpetrator even after criminal legal and social service agencies have become involved. The fact that this issue is called into question so frequently speaks to its complexity. There are certainly situations where having contact with the abusive partner is safer for the victim; often these are valid attempts to mitigate or limit the violence.

While safety is the highest priority and perpetrators must be held accountable for their actions, an immediate halt to contact between a victim of domestic violence and the perpetrator may not always be a realistic expectation. There are a multitude of complex reasons for this. One key reason is that **domestic violence is a crime that occurs between people who are intimates. They share children, history, connections, finances, community. These are the connections that often lead to victims continuing to have contact with an abusive partner. This is confusing to the system** because professionals may misinterpret this behavior to mean that the victim is not afraid of the perpetrator. It can also lead to value judgments and false conclusions that the victim is making ‘poor choices.’

In one reviewed case, the court issued a Twelve Month Protective Order which stated that her boyfriend was not allowed to have contact with her “except regarding the minor child.” The order also stated there was to be “no court ordered visitation until father legitimates the child.” The open-ended language of the order facilitated her boyfriend’s ability to manipulate her. Several emails between the couple regarding finances and visitation were obtained after the murder suicide. These emails were peppered with her boyfriend’s attempts to pressure her to reconcile. She was separated from him and living in a battered women’s shelter. He asked her to reveal her location and telephone number and pushed her to meet with him. She finally agreed to meet with him so he could take their 6-year-old son for visitation. When they met, he got into her car to talk and their child was in the backseat. Their child watched them argue, then witnessed his father shoot his mother and turn the gun on himself.

Another victim’s ex-husband would become angry when he could not find her and she would not answer her phone. He would call repeatedly and leave nasty messages. If she still would not answer, he would begin calling

her family and friends to threaten and harass them. At this point, her strategy for limiting his violence was to meet with him and calm him down. Less than three months before her death, she called the police and filed a Temporary Protective Order (TPO) following an attack that occurred when she met with him. The police did not arrest him, citing a lack of probable cause. It was not clear if she was ever referred to an advocate who could have helped her understand the danger she was in and create a safety plan. The last time she met with him was when he shot her in the face, killing her. From a societal standpoint, this woman did all the ‘right things.’ She called the police, she filed a TPO, and she got a divorce; she left him. While our cultural expectation is that women should leave an abusive partner, the reality is that leaving, particularly in the absence of safety planning, can be extremely dangerous.

Nearly every victim in our reviewed cases was in the process of leaving the abusive relationship. Some actions were obvious indicators of leaving such as filing for a TPO, “breaking-up,” or moving out. Others were making moves towards gaining independence from the perpetrator, like finding a job, getting a new apartment, or continuing their education. For these victims, their very survival was at stake. Yet, in each case, leaving was not enough to keep them safe. Major cracks in our system must be addressed and repaired so that survivors are strongly supported while in the process of leaving and beyond.

Women using violence

Several reviewed cases involved victims who have been arrested for using violence in incidents prior to the homicide.

In most instances the victim used violence in self-defense, in retaliation for her partner's violence, or in an attempt to mitigate the violence she was experiencing. Once the arrest has been made, and the case begins moving through the criminal justice system, the true victim is labeled as a perpetrator and a multitude of problems are created.

One victim was arrested with visible injuries after she admitted to the police that she hit her boyfriend in the head with an ashtray. The day before she was arrested, the police were called to their house after her boyfriend repeatedly punched and kicked her. The police noted swelling on her face in their report but did not make an arrest as the perpetrator had fled the scene. Within this context, it becomes clear why she would have used violence the next day when he threatened to snap her neck. Her use of violence and willingness to admit to her use of violence led to her arrest. If the law enforcement officers had conducted a primary aggressor assessment and taken into account the acts of violence and visible injuries from the previous day, the outcome could have been different, possibly even increasing her safety.

Substance abuse

Alcohol and drug abuse were identified in many cases as a factor, not a cause, in the escalation of danger. The use of alcohol or drugs by either the victim or the perpetrator limits the options and resources available to the victim, increases the perpetrator's control and further compromises the victim's safety. When victims who are abusing substances interact with the system because of their substance abuse, the domestic violence is not routinely addressed. The same can be said for perpetrators of domestic violence who are also substance abusers. The systems get distracted or fixated on the substance abuse issues and miss the warning signs for increased danger.

In another reviewed case, the victim had a history of arrests for drug-related charges, such as possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia. Her abusive husband reportedly drank a 12-pack of beer daily. In addition to his substance abuse, he also struggled with mental illness and had multiple contacts with outpatient therapy providers. The violence he was using against his partner was never addressed, despite his regular contact with outpatient treatment centers. He was arrested and charged with a felony following an incident where she sustained a broken foot after he grabbed her by the neck and threw her to the ground. She told the police that they had been drinking beer during this incident. The felony charge was still pending at the time of the murder. This case illustrates how substance abuse issues were prevalent for both the victim and the perpetrator and so trumped the presence of domestic violence. This inhibited the system's ability to address the violence and led to increased danger for the victim.



What is required to fully address domestic violence is a more encompassing, wide-lens approach, one which anticipates and is prepared for the predictable complexities of these situations. To discount the tangled realities of victims' lives results in missed opportunities for intervention. It is not our role to blame victims but to support them and help them stay safe. We must work to alleviate institutional bias, dispel myths, and eliminate poor practices. Two prime, best practices are to build our cultural competencies and continue to listen to the voices of all survivors.

secondary traumatic stress (STS)

strategies to prevent it...

- ◆ *take breaks from the work*
- ◆ *utilize earned vacation and sick time*
- ◆ *make time for activities you enjoy*
- ◆ *seek a spiritual outlet*
- ◆ *de-brief with peers, supervisors*
- ◆ *talk with others about the work*
- ◆ *limit your load*
- ◆ *respect your own limitations*
- ◆ *be honest about your abilities and contributions*
- ◆ *exercise most days; serial ten minute walking breaks are feasible many days*
- ◆ *eat for nutritional value*

Domestic violence can be traumatic for those experiencing it and trauma affects their ability to deal with complexity. Knowing this helps responders, advocates, and service providers better understand victims' choices and actions. But trauma often has profound effects on those responding or helping victims, affecting *their* ability to deal with the complexities of domestic violence. Stories heard by responders are sad, emotional, and tragic and this emotionally taxing work is frequently performed with limited resources and time. The nature of this work can result in responders internalizing the feelings and symptoms of those they work with and developing trauma symptoms, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "secondary traumatic stress" (STS). Basically, people become traumatized by working with traumatized victims. **The presence of STS can compromise one's ability to respond to victims of domestic violence with compassion and empathy.**

Secondary traumatic stress can manifest itself cognitively, physically, emotionally, behaviorally, spiritually, and interpersonally. Some common reactions and signs of secondary traumatic stress are: changes in appetite and sleep, inability to concentrate, anxiety, depression, hair loss, change in personality, feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, feeling emotionally overwhelmed or numb, and having unrealistic expectations of self or others. Any responder can be at risk for experiencing secondary traumatic stress. Factors that can contribute to susceptibility include: level of trauma and exposure, lack of diversity in work load, lack of organizational support, past personal victimization, and the degree or quality of support received around that victimization.

Taking care of others can be difficult; neglecting ourselves can have a negative impact on our health and personal life. Secondary traumatic stress can hinder one's ability to sustain effectiveness in the work, affecting job longevity. **Prevention is a critical tactic in limiting secondary traumatic stress.**

If you find additional support is necessary, talk with your supervisor. Resources and support are also available via the Georgia Crisis and Access Line, toll free at 1-800-715-4225. More information can be found at: <http://www.mygcal.com/>

one woman's search for support & safety

*"Every time our family
would try to get together,
he would hurt her."*

**he coerced her
she was frightened**

he controlled her

she was courageous

*"What she was on paper
wasn't who she was as a
person. That last two years
doesn't define her."*

he isolated her

she was alone

he abused her

she was tenacious in her efforts to leave

*"He spiked her drink
with cocaine and got her
probation revoked."*

he manipulated her

she was resilient

he trapped her

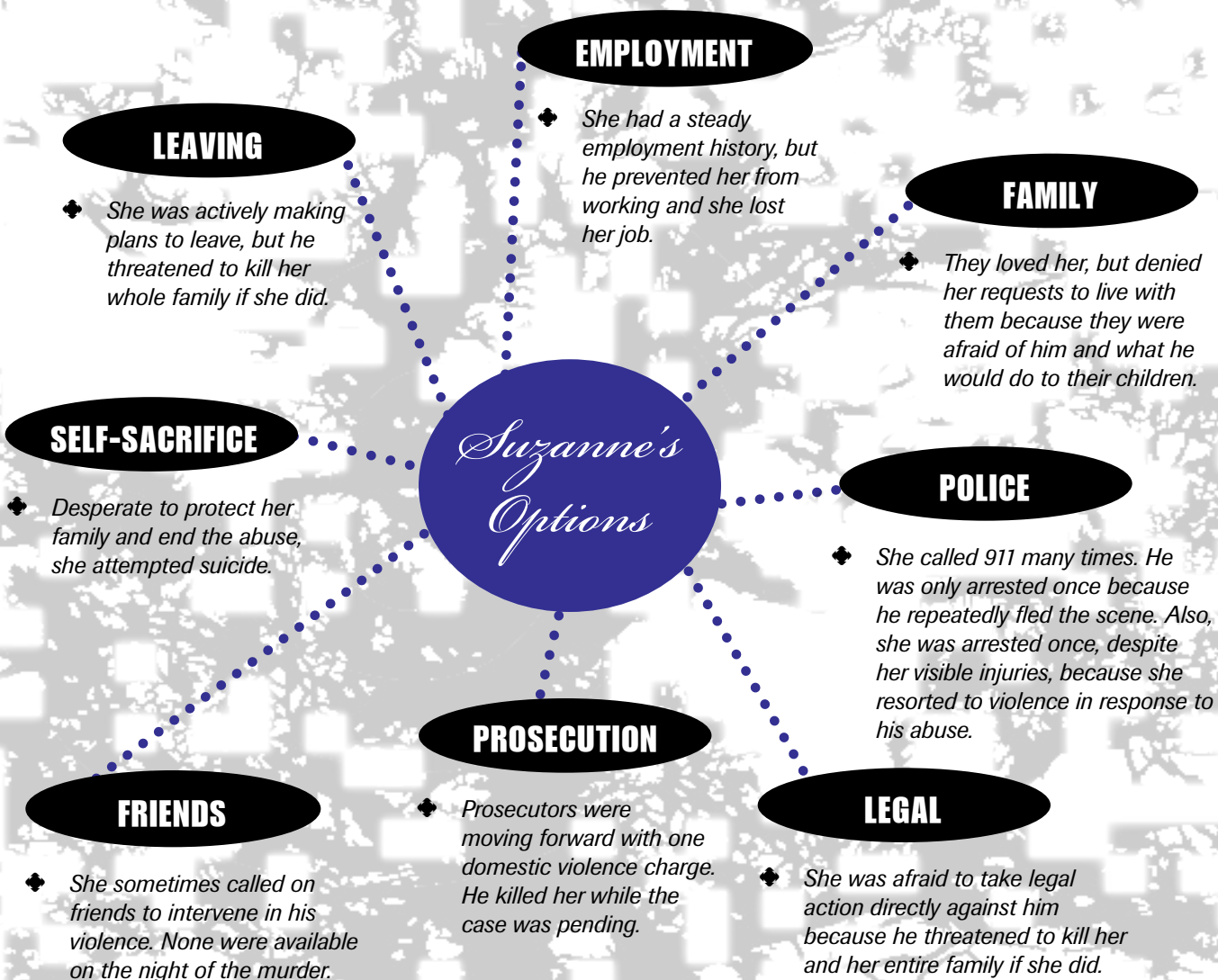
she was desperate to get out

*"She kept the family together.
She was the glue of our family."*

he killed her

A victim of domestic violence can take many of the actions our society expects or requires of her: call 911, reach out for help, involve authorities, contact a shelter, plan a move; yet all of these are no assurance of her ultimate survival. Suzanne's* repeated and moving efforts to save herself were thwarted by a boyfriend who cleverly manipulated the system and made threats so real and severe that her options for survival evaporated, one by one. As we consider Suzanne's efforts to seek help and safety, we must always remember that she was not just a case file, but a real person with hopes, fears, and dreams. She loved UGA

football and bowling with her grandchildren, and one of her daughters said that "she made the best cheesecake in the world." Her family loved her very much, and they miss her terribly. Her daughters want the community to know that Suzanne was so much more than "just some woman who lived with some man who beat her." A comprehensive look at the events and circumstances of one case demonstrates that, despite popular misconceptions to the contrary, **domestic violence deaths are far more complex than a victim having simply made "poor choices."**



* Pseudonym used.

isolation: how domestic violence becomes fatal

Domestic violence is about power and control; perpetrators employ coercion, intimidation, and/or violence to gain and maintain control over a household member or intimate partner. Isolation is a core element of the complex labyrinth of domestic violence. Often one of the earliest signs of domestic violence in a relationship, isolation is an effective method for gaining and keeping power and control. Without social contact and support, the victim is more easily manipulated. As contact with other people and support systems diminishes, the victim becomes more dependent on the perpetrator, and may come to see the perpetrator as her sole source of emotional support and practical help. He also becomes her only source of information about the relationship and the violence; there is no one to contradict anything he tells her. This calculated and forced dependency makes it harder for the victim to identify and weigh options or to find alternate ways to get her needs met. Here we're addressing the process and significance of insidious isolation, how it masks and escalates the victim's danger. **When victims who have been isolated interact with formal systems and resources in place to help them, like law enforcement, clergy, hotlines, and even domestic violence organizations, the effects of isolation can result in increased danger.**

Isolation of a domestic violence victim may include controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, and where she goes; functionally restricting her involvement with anything outside of the relationship. At the heart of this is the perpetrator manipulating both the support systems and the victim's perceptions, intimidating and degrading her; effectively reducing or eliminating her contact with social support and helping systems. **As a victim's isolation increases, often so does her level of mortal danger.**

When we discuss isolation, it is not just perpetrators who isolate their victims. Systems, family, and friends are also a source of isolation. ***Below is a small sampling of how these resources can unintentionally isolate a victim, leaving her vulnerable, confused, and alone.***

Law Enforcement

When law enforcement arrests a victim for fighting off her attacker, she immediately becomes more isolated. She no longer has access to victim advocates within the criminal justice system because within that system she is labeled a "perpetrator." Additionally, when the victim is arrested, she has a powerful incentive to never again call for help from law enforcement, thus reinforcing the perpetrator's control and increasing her isolation and her attendant level of mortal danger. A victim who has been isolated, controlled, and alienated from support systems is often no longer an effective self-advocate, and can instead be mistaken for a perpetrator. When law enforcement is not attuned to the complex effects of systematic isolation, officers may misread the situation and arrest both the victim and the perpetrator or the victim alone.

What can law enforcement do to address the critical impact of their first response so that interactions with victims during domestic violence result in outcomes that ensure victim safety?

Proper investigation of a domestic violence crime should reveal who is the primary aggressor and result in only the perpetrator being arrested. At this point, the victim can receive the proper help from advocates and the criminal justice system.

Faith Leaders, Clergy, and Congregations

When we think about systems and resources, we often overlook the role of religious organizations in survivor's lives. There

have been many instances when clergy have reprimanded a woman for leaving an abusive husband, coercing her into quick forgiveness and reconciliation before the perpetrator has actually changed his behavior. Sadly, the first response many women have heard from clergy, after revealing the abuse suffered at home, is “What did you do to provoke him?” Safety must trump other congregational concerns, and victim-blaming is especially damaging to victims already weakened and hurt by systematic isolation. Women who are battered should never have to choose between safety and the support of their congregations.

How can clergy make their places of worship safe so that survivors never feel they must leave their congregations in order to get safe?

How can congregations be made into places of safety and support for victims?

What are needed are anti-isolation strategies, like helping survivors connect with other women in the congregation for support and friendship. Collaboration with domestic violence advocates who know the intricacies of how isolation can affect a victim of domestic violence is crucial; they can offer proper support from their organization. See page 23 to review the “10 Things Your Congregation Can Do.”

Family and Friends

Family and friends are frequent targets of perpetrators’ isolating behaviors. The perpetrator may limit or terminate the victim’s interactions with family and friends through manipulation and jealousy tactics. Common behaviors employed by perpetrators may be listening on the other end of the phone or “overtalking” in their victim’s other ear while she is already in conversation on the phone. Perpetrators have been known to beat their victims

before a planned meeting with family and/or friends to ensure that the victim will cancel over embarrassment at visible injuries. But in an effort to help, family and friends themselves can sometimes become sources of isolation as well, threatening to “cut her off” unless she leaves the perpetrator, silencing her complaints, threatening to report her to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), or issuing punitive ultimatums that they believe will force her to make the choices they see as best for her. Sadly, she may be risking her life to even contact family and friends, as perpetrators frequently threaten harm should the victim do just that. If those family and friends try to force her to do what they believe is best, the net result is increased isolation.

How can family and friends offer continual help and support without delivering ultimatums?

It is painful for family and friends to watch someone they care about suffering in a situation that is hurtful and dangerous. Sometimes an ultimatum seems like the easiest solution: “If she doesn’t do this, then I have tried everything and can walk away with a clean conscience.” But it is of the utmost importance that the door not be shut on a victim of domestic violence; she must be able to reach out as she needs. Supportive words and actions are invaluable to a victim of domestic violence. Letting her know that her choices are supported and confirming an understanding of why she does what she does can mean the difference between life and death for the victim. This is one black and white area in domestic violence: she either knows there will be people to turn to when the time is right to leave or she knows that backs are turned and she has no exit. In order to remain healthy and available, it is critical for friends and family to have emotional support as they help their loved ones who are in very dangerous situations. Some domestic violence organizations offer support



isolation:

how domestic violence becomes fatal (continued)

for family and friends, ranging from support over the phone to in-person support groups and individual counseling.

Domestic Violence Organizations

Domestic violence organizations themselves may sometimes increase the isolation of those they serve as they disconnect women in their shelters from other support systems via their confidentiality and other policies. Policies that do not allow women to contact loved ones while in a shelter increase their isolation. These policies are in place to protect survivors but they sometimes produce unintended consequences, generating barriers between survivors and natural support systems. While many people think domestic violence organizations provide only shelter, most offer much more in the way of services. Most have legal advocacy, support groups, counseling, and other programs that can be accessed without having to enter a shelter. The narrow marketing of domestic violence ‘shelters’ may also add to isolation if a victim believes she can only access services if sheltered.

Can domestic violence organizations uphold their philosophical beliefs in confidentiality without further isolating the survivors they serve? Can they also find ways to market themselves as ‘more than just a shelter’?

From this movement’s beginnings, domestic violence organizations have clung tightly to the tenet of victim safety through confidentiality. Organizations need to consider the isolation the victim is already experiencing and make efforts (with her permission) to reconnect her with her lost support systems. They can maintain the confidentiality of the physical shelter while allowing friends and family to visit in safe, non-compromising places. These reconstructions and interactions can help a survivor of domestic violence remember her real history and build her confidence and hope.

How is it possible for our systems to adequately address victim safety and the isolation suffered by underserved populations given our lack of effective resources addressing language and culture?

Our helping systems should make every effort to meet a victim where she is, inform her of her rights, and advocate on her behalf to be sure that adequate interpreters and other resources are at her disposal. All administrative and clinical staff need cross-cultural training. Further, organizations need to develop a culture of acceptance and respect for difference and to continue the development of cultural awareness, understanding, and resources. This should include the hiring of culturally diverse, unbiased employees and seeking guidance from the diverse communities they are serving.



Survivors of domestic violence continue to struggle with isolation generated within their relationships and helping systems; we must create safer places in order for survivors to come forward. Adequate and caring responses from law enforcement, clergy, family and friends, judiciary, medical practitioners, domestic violence organizations, and other systems are critical to increasing safety for women.

Victims' lives are complex and dangerous. They experience coercion, oppression, and victim blaming by the perpetrator and sometimes from the very systems designed to protect them. Victims, survivors, and surviving family members consistently turn to their faith communities for support and safety, whether they disclose the abuse or not. Unfortunately, while there are positive examples of faith communities in Georgia responding to domestic violence, many clergy and lay leaders are unprepared, untrained, and unable to provide safe and effective guidance and resources.

In the 9 Georgia cases we reviewed this year, 7 victims self-identified as Christian. The faith background of the other two is unknown. Four of the murder victims actively attended church, but only one told her faith leader* about the abuse. In addition, three of the victims had previously attended church, but had withdrawn from their congregations in the period before they were killed. This may have been due to the perpetrators' successful efforts to isolate them; certainly the accumulated toll of violence and abuse was a factor. In all cases except one, it seems the nature and extent of the abuse were invisible to clergy and fellow congregants.** However, our research showed that even when the victim revealed the abuse to her faith leader, i.e., the abuse became visible, the victim did not receive the resources she needed to be safe. Also, 3 of the 9 homicide perpetrators had active connections with a church community when they killed their partners. This suggests the critical importance of faith communities in earlier intervention and homicide prevention.

Our research from 2004 to 2009 establishes faith communities as active agents in the lives of many people involved in domestic

* In this essay, we frequently use the terms faith leaders, clergy and congregations in an attempt to use language that makes sense to as large an interfaith audience as possible. While these terms apply to many faith traditions, we acknowledge that they do not apply to all. For example, some Buddhists groups may not have clergy.

“We have found that when rabbis and other faith leaders speak out, they can make a big difference in assisting those suffering from abuse. It is imperative that our synagogues become sanctuaries of peace — that rabbis speak from the pulpit about abuse, that Jewish community leaders and educators create communities where survivors of abuse know that they are not alone.”

-Wendy Lipshutz
Shalom Bayit of Jewish Family & Career Services

violence fatalities, so it is important to identify faith community responses to domestic violence that are safe and effective. It is also essential to learn what's currently not working, and what can be done to better prepare faith communities to protect survivors in their congregations. Where it is safe to do so, communities need to require change from perpetrators. While a victim's life and choices may be nuanced and dangerous, we know one thing: **it is profoundly important for faith leaders and domestic violence advocates to cultivate mutual trust and collaboration so that they can respond more effectively to victims' complex needs.**

This section exposes some compelling and startling information about what faith communities know and sometimes do not know about domestic violence. While examining these findings, remember the complexities of

** Our findings and assumptions here are based on the evidence we had access to, primarily law enforcement and legal records, interviews with family and friends, and the knowledge of review team members. This information is only partial and there may have been more contact with faith leaders and congregants than we are aware of. Family and friends may not necessarily know about victims' full involvement with their faith communities. We did not conduct family or friend interviews in two of the nine cases.

survivors' experiences and the obstacles they face both from the perpetrator and from the community. In some cases, one of these obstacles to safety is well-intentioned support from faith leaders.

Finding #1:

The Complexity of Invisibility

Based on the evidence available to fatality review teams, only one homicide victim in the 9 cases we reviewed this year chose to talk with her clergy about the abuse she was suffering. It seems that no other victims revealed the abuse to faith leaders. As one mother said, her daughter and the perpetrator gave a "false picture" of happiness at church; the violence remained hidden. Such invisibility of abuse may support the belief by some faith leaders that abuse is not happening in their congregations. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to be true. According to the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) in 2006 almost 1 in 3 women suffer physical abuse in their adult lifetime. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006.) The actual prevalence of abuse is likely to be much higher as this statistic does not include emotional or sexual abuse, or stalking. Abuse survivors are present in congregations, but they are choosing not to disclose the abuse

"The faith community must give permission for the harsh realities of domestic violence to be spoken in sacred space."

-Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter
Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence

they are suffering to clergy or fellow congregants in the majority of cases. This finding is supported by both our Fatality Reviews and independent research (Neergaard et al., "Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence: Effects

"As clergy, we need to get to know a domestic violence advocate, put her number in our cell phones, and call for support and advice whenever we address abuse in the communities we serve."

-Rev. Sara Hayden
Tri-Presbytery New Church
Development Commission

of Confiding in Religious Leaders," Pastoral Psychology 55, no. 6 [July 2007]: 783).

Why are so many survivors reluctant to disclose violence and abuse to faith leaders?

As discussed, survivors' lives can be convoluted, and there are many reasons why a survivor might not choose to disclose abuse to anyone, especially if the survivor would be in more danger from the perpetrator if she does so. Survivors likely consider many factors when deciding whether to disclose abuse to their faith communities. Is the perpetrator a leader in the congregation, and, if so, will the survivor be less likely to be believed? Will the congregational leaders use religious texts to support the perpetrator's position, or recommend steps that may place the victim at greater risk, such as couples' counseling? The fear of the consequences of disclosure is well founded.

Research indicates that abused women who seek help from untrained clergy typically find themselves in a worse situation than before (Skiff et al., "Engaging the Clergy in Addressing the Impact of Partner Violence in their Faith Communities," Journal of Spirituality In Mental Health 10, no. 2 [2008]: 104). The survivor may fear that the faith congregation will ostracize her or the perpetrator, or she may fear that the perpetrator will force the family to leave the congregation if the abuse becomes known. The perpetrator is likely to have isolated the survivor from many other supports already, so the prospect of being separated from her congregation may be terrifying to the survivor, as that isolation would put her in more danger. Notably, survivors (or perpetrators who) are members of oppressed populations may be reluctant to disclose abuse out of fear of additional abuse (or violence) they may experience as a result of their status. For example, a gay or lesbian victim (or perpetrator) who discloses

abuse to faith leaders who are not supportive of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex (LGBTQQI) communities may face additional ostracism or barriers to safety. An undocumented immigrant who is experiencing abuse may fear that disclosure to faith leaders may bring DFCS or law enforcement involvement leading to deportation. So, myriad factors militate against disclosure for many survivors. The reality is that abuse is often present in congregations, but remains hidden from clergy and faith leaders.

While the abuse may be invisible to clergy and faith leaders, some survivors describe being under constant scrutiny by the perpetrator. While the abuse they are suffering may be invisible to their faith community, their own lives are being monitored closely and controlled. Living under constant surveillance by the perpetrator may necessitate that the survivor not talk about the abuse to others. The

“As a former domestic violence prosecutor and a current public interest civil attorney, I have had numerous cases where survivors dismissed their legal actions and their safety plans because their faith leaders advised against ending the relationships. Abusers seem to get the support in the courtroom, even when the abuse itself has occurred in the church parking lot. Survivors should not have to choose between their faith and their safety.”

-Jenni Stolarski
Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation

“As advocates we need to respect a survivor’s faith and build on it as a source of strength.”

-Jasmine Williams Miller
Partnership Against Domestic Violence

perpetrator’s surveillance forces the victim to keep the abuse hidden. Members of oppressed groups sometimes describe their lives as being monitored closely by law enforcement agencies and other systems. At other times, they describe their invisibility within the wider social setting. Survivors who are members of oppressed groups may feel that their lives are being doubly scrutinized, both by the perpetrator and by the larger community.*

How frequently do congregations take proactive steps that invite survivors to ask for help? Are there resources available in congregations for survivors who choose not to reveal the abuse? In the 9 Georgia cases we studied this year, we found no indication in legal documents or interviews with family and friends that faith leaders took steps to invite congregants to talk about domestic violence. From our interviews with family and friends, it seems domestic violence was not talked about from the pulpit or in smaller study groups. We found no evidence that domestic violence brochures or hotline numbers were posted anywhere, or that domestic violence information was available in the church libraries or in church bulletins. A homicide victim’s sister reported that the victim did not disclose the abuse she was suffering to anyone at church, but “no one was talking about it [domestic violence]...it was like they [the clergy and fellow congregants] didn’t want to know about it.”

* Thanks to Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter for her insights on this topic. See the following article for a more nuanced conversation about the intersection of visibility and invisibility with abuse and oppression: “Numbering the Hairs of Our Heads: Male Social Control and the All-Seeing Male God” by Anne Marie Hunter, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Fall 1992, Volume 8, Number 2, pp. 7-26.

“I believe that violence will end in Muslim homes when Muslim men take greater responsibility for their actions and start to hold other men accountable and Muslim men really follow the Sunnah, the traditions and customs of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and learn how he treated his wives and children with love and honor.”

-Shyam Sriram
Muslim Men Against Domestic Violence

Outside research supports this finding: clergy rarely ask about or discuss abuse with congregants – either individually or from the pulpit (Skiff et al., “Engaging the Clergy,” 102). According to Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter of Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence, “Many clergy believe that domestic violence is not happening in their community because they never hear about it. In reality, if survivors are not talking about their experiences, it is usually because faith leaders have not created an atmosphere in which it is safe to disclose.”

It is critical that faith leaders take steps to send the proactive message that domestic violence is wrong, that no one should be abused, and that there are resources available for congregants who would like to disclose abuse they are suffering (or perpetrating). See “10 Things Your Congregation Can Do” on page 23 for specific steps to take. By talking about domestic violence and condemning it, faith leaders can send the signal to survivors that they are not alone and that it is safe to disclose the abuse if and when they choose to.

**Finding #2:
Visibility Does Not Equal Sanctuary**

Less frequently, the abuse becomes manifest, or partly so. Sometimes the survivor takes courageous steps to reveal the violence

in her life. She makes the violence known. Or, sometimes, the perpetrator discloses his abuse, or his abuse becomes known through actions of the criminal legal system. Even when the abuse is visible, faith leaders still may not realize the danger that the survivor is in and they may not place primary importance on her safety. What are some of the reasons that faith leaders do not always recognize the danger and make safety the priority? As mentioned earlier, domestic violence is complex and nuanced. Faith leaders hear from their congregants about many life changes and struggles on a regular basis, including marital conflicts, pending divorces, job losses, and suicidal thoughts. In addition, firearms may be so common among congregants that the presence of firearms in situations where there is abuse may not raise red flags. It takes training and insight to tease out controlling patterns and indicators of danger and to distinguish between abuse and general conflict. Most clergy simply have not had access to this kind of training and information about lethality indicators. Without training, well-intentioned clergy may not realize that what the survivor discloses about the abuse is likely to be only the tip of the iceberg. She or he may not recognize lethality indicators and may decide that the survivor is simply describing “marital conflict,” when in fact the survivor is in real danger. Even when abuse becomes more apparent, some clergy may not see it as their role to “choose sides,” especially when both parties are members of their congregation.

Clergy may be loath to offend the survivor or the perpetrator by inquiring about abuse, and she or he may also be afraid of retaliation by the perpetrator, especially if that perpetrator is held in high regard by the congregation. Finally, clergy are not immune to the effects of living in a patriarchal society. In this context, men are valued over women and there is a cultural habit of discounting and downplaying women’s reports of struggles in their lives. Some clergy simply do not believe survivors’ reports of violence. All of these factors can lead to faith leaders failing to both recognize danger and prioritize survivors’ safety.

It is vital for members of the faith community to respond to abuse by prioritizing the safety of the survivor. What does it mean: “to prioritize a survivor’s safety?” A working relationship between faith leaders and domestic violence advocates is a critical step. However, that relationship is only a step, not an end point. No matter how well informed and intended, a faith leader and an advocate cannot create safety for a survivor without the survivor’s leadership and direction. There is no externally imposed formula for her safety that the determined perpetrator cannot undermine. **True safety must be designed and determined by the survivor. The survivor is the expert in her own situation.** She may need information about her options and support, but clergy (and advocates) cannot simply tell the survivor what to do, for this replicates the perpetrator’s coercive tactics. The best practice is for the advocate and the survivor to create a plan that works for her. An advocate can assist a survivor to explore the questions that would help her determine what she needs and become more fully aware of her options for safety. As advocates help survivors work through this process, faith leaders can provide spiritual support and deconstruct any misreading of sacred texts that perpetrators use to justify abuse. Then, along the way, as the survivor makes choices, the faith leader and the advocate can ask her what she needs from them, and support her spiritually and materially in any way that makes sense to her. Also, when possible to do so safely, faith leaders can play

“A survivor is not only having a physical crisis, she is having a spiritual crisis as well. She needs someone to help her make sense of her situation through the lens of her faith.”

-FaithTrust Institute

an important role in working with others to hold perpetrators accountable and give them options for change and growth. This accountability work should only be done in close consultation with the advocate and the survivor after they have done considerable safety planning.

Tragically, one woman’s story from a review this year poignantly illustrates how abuse can become visible to clergy while safety still eludes the victim. In this case, Ann*, a devout Catholic, had been married to Bob* for 26 years. Bob did not attend church, but Ann rarely missed services. The parish priest, Rev. John, came to know Ann well when she approached him as she contemplated divorce. Ann struggled with the idea of divorce, but she was desperate for relief from abuse. During their conversations over a period of months, Ann disclosed important aspects of her relationship with Bob. Specifically, Rev. John learned that:

1. Bob was being physically and verbally abusive towards Ann, and the abuse was escalating;
2. Bob had threatened both homicide and suicide;
3. Bob had firearms;
4. Bob was possessive and had falsely accused Ann of infidelity;
5. Bob was stalking Ann;
6. Bob was abusing drugs and alcohol; and,
7. Ann had taken steps to separate, eventually filed for divorce, and had Bob removed from the house.

In response to Ann’s disclosures, Rev. John did not do or say any of the dangerous things that advocates fear. He did not tell her to pray harder or to go home and be a better wife. He did not oppose separation, and, while he did not openly support divorce, he supported Ann. In addition, Rev. John asked her if she was safe. According to Rev. John, she said that she was.

* All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

When she told him this, he relaxed and, despite the lethality indicators above, said he had “no premonitions” of the violence to come.

Pivotaly, Rev. John had no pre-existing relationship with an advocate, and no domestic violence information on hand to give Ann.

To the best of our knowledge, it did not occur to him to call a domestic violence organization for advice, or to refer Ann to an advocate. An advocate might have helped him think through questions that he could have asked Ann beyond “Are you safe?” so she could explore her options and think critically about the situation. Also, if he had known an advocate on a personal level, he might have been comfortable saying, “I know that you say that you’re safe, but I’m still concerned about your safety. I’m wondering if you’d be willing to call my friend at the domestic violence organization to do some safety planning and talk through your options?”

One morning, Ann called Rev. John and asked if she could meet with him. In their discussion, they talked about the ongoing abuse and her agonizing decision to divorce Bob. Ann then went into confession with Rev. John. When they came out, Rev. John said that he had never seen Ann so at peace with herself and God. He felt sure that she had decided at last to divorce Bob and she knew that God still loved her. Spiritually, her separation from Bob was now complete and she was at peace. That night, Bob killed Ann and then himself in front of their teenage daughter.

Rev. John was overwhelmed and stricken with grief. He agreed to meet with interviewers (one researcher and one advocate) in the hope of helping to keep this from happening to anyone else. Even upon reflection and with hindsight, Rev. John still did not see the feasibility of calling an advocate for advice, or suggesting to Ann that she call an advocate. “What more could I have done?” he asked. “I still can’t think of what else I could have done. The authorities were already involved [in the divorce process]. What else could I do?”



CONCLUSION

Steps towards a solution

One effective action that can help increase safety for domestic violence survivors is generating robust working relationships between faith leaders and advocates. When domestic violence and faith intersect, this alliance works as a powerful partnership for women’s safety and justice. Why is this relationship so important? And what are the elements of that relationship? Opposite are several key ways in which advocates can assist faith leaders.

Need more information on Georgia congregations that are addressing domestic violence in inspired ways?

Please contact GCFV or GCADV if you would like more information about congregations in Georgia that are already responding to domestic violence in innovative ways. Also, if your congregation is proactively addressing domestic violence, please let us know. We are working to identify innovative faith responses around the state.

“We should never ask a woman to choose between her faith and her safety. For a woman of faith, it’s an impossible choice.”

-FaithTrust Institute

How Advocates Can Help Clergy When Faith & Domestic Violence Intersect

1. Advocates can help faith leaders think critically about questions they can ask the survivor that would facilitate her process of pursuing safety (whether she chooses to leave the relationship or not).
 2. Advocates can provide consultation to clergy to avoid potentially harmful faith responses, for example, pressure to engage in couples counseling, or other responses that could further undermine the survivor's safety, breach her confidentiality, or isolate her from support.
 3. Advocates can provide the survivor with free services such as safety planning, lethality assessment, support groups, legal advocacy, and connection to other resources.
 4. Advocates can consult with the survivor and then help faith leaders think through whether it would be safe to confront the perpetrator and, if so, how that might be done in a way that prioritizes the survivor's safety.
2. Meet with the advocate and other members of the domestic violence organization for cross-training. Learn about the dynamics of abuse and available resources for survivors and perpetrators. Also, offer the organization information about your faith tradition, its statements about abuse, and any protocols for how you currently respond to domestic violence in your congregation.
 3. Put the domestic violence organization's name and number in your cell phone, both their 24-hour hotline number and their general number. When you become concerned about abuse or controlling behaviors in your congregation, call the organization for consultation about how to respond.
 4. Once this relationship and cross-training are in place, do things in your congregation that invite disclosure of abuse and send the signals that this is a safe place for survivors (or perpetrators) to approach you privately for help. One easy step: Review *10 Things Your Congregation Can Do* on page 23 and implement changes appropriate for your congregation.

What Faith Leaders Can Do to Build Relationships with Domestic Violence Advocates

1. Reach out to a domestic violence organization and build a relationship with an advocate who will respect a survivor's faith as a source of strength for her. Develop a mutual trust. Call the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) at 404-209-0280 for help in identifying local and culturally-competent advocates.

For more information and resources about faith and abuse, including free sample sermons and bulletin inserts, please contact the FaithTrust Institute.
www.faithtrustinstitute.org
Telephone 206-634-1903

What Is a 'Domestic Violence Advocate' & How Do I Find One?

For the purpose of our discussion here, a domestic violence advocate is a person who works directly with domestic violence survivors and helps them achieve safety, self-determination, and justice. This advocate usually works in a domestic violence organization that can provide free 24-hour safety planning, legal advocacy, support groups, and in some cases, emergency housing. Most frequently, advocates are accessible through DHS-certified domestic violence organizations (commonly called “shelters”) that are located throughout the state. In addition, highly skilled advocates may also be available in other agencies and culturally specific organizations such as Raksha, Caminar Latino, Tapestri, Shalom Bayit of JF&CS, United 4 Safety, and some organizations that are not certified by DHS. If you would like more information about advocates and their role, or if you would like assistance in connecting with an advocate in your area, please call the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) at 404-209-0280. For 24-hour help, call 1-800-33 HAVEN (1-800-334-2836), Georgia’s Domestic Violence Hotline.

10 things your congregation can do to advance women's safety

Make Your Congregation A Safer Place for Those Experiencing Domestic Violence

1. Put up posters with 1-800-33 HAVEN (1-800-334-2836), Georgia's Domestic Violence Hotline number, throughout your building. Print state and national hotline numbers in every program and/or newsletter.
2. Stock your library with culturally/religiously specific domestic violence information.
3. Get to know your community's domestic violence resources and create a resource referral network. Refer, refer, refer.
4. Let members of your congregation know that domestic violence is an issue in your community through sermons, newsletter articles, programming, etc.
5. Let your congregants know that this is a safe place to discuss these issues.
6. Include domestic violence resources in pre-marital counseling.
7. Present information and resources on healthy relationships to teens.
8. Present age-appropriate anti-bullying information to children.
9. Partner with Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence to conduct a used cell phone drive to support survivors of abuse.
10. Contact the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (404-657-3412) or the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (404-209-0280) for training, ideas, and resources.

Adapted from Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence, Boston, MA.
Tel: 617-654-1820, web: www.interfaithpartners.org

chart 1

How Many Died from Domestic Violence in Each Georgia County by Year?

Chart 1: Domestic Violence Deaths in Georgia by County 2003-2008

County of Fatality	total annual deaths						County of Fatality	total annual deaths						County of Fatality	total annual deaths					
	'08	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03		'08	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03		'08	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03
Appling			4				Elbert				1		1	Montgomery						1
Baldwin		1	3	3			Fannin	1	2		1		1	Muscogee	8	5	1	9		3
Barrow				1	1	1	Fayette		3	1		4	Newton	2	4	3		1	3	
Bartow		1		2		4	Floyd	2	1	1	1	2	1	Oconee					1	
Ben Hill		2			2	1	Forsyth	3		2			4	Oglethorpe						1
Berrien		1					Franklin						1	Paulding					2	1
Bibb		6	2	6	4	1	Fulton	3	10	4	7	15	10	Peach	2					
Bleckley	1			2			Gilmer				1			Pickens		1		1		
Brantley	1				1		Glascock				1			Pierce	1					
Bulloch			1				Glynn	1	2	1			2	Polk		2			2	1
Burke	3				1	2	Gordon		1	1		4	Richmond	4	4	1	2	6	4	
Butts		2				1	Grady		1				1	Rockdale		1		3	4	
Calhoun		1				3	Gwinnett	6	7	12	12	12	6	Schley		1				
Camden				1	1	1	Habersham						1	Screven			1			
Carroll		1	2		1	1	Hall		3	2		2	Seminole			1				
Catoosa		1					Hancock					1	Spalding	1	3					
Chatham	4	2	3	8	2	6	Haralson						4	Tattnall					2	1
Cherokee	4	3		4	1	1	Harris				2	1	Telfair	2		1	3			
Clarke	2	1	2	2		3	Henry	1		4	3	1	3	Thomas		2			1	
Clayton	5	7	11	10	3	3	Houston	7		1	2		1	Tift	1	5		1		
Cobb	4	5	11	8	3	6	Jackson	1		6	1	2	Towns					2		
Coffee		1		1			Jeff Davis	1						Troup	1	1				1
Colquitt		1		3		3	Jefferson			2			2	Twiggs					1	
Columbia	1			2		1	Jenkins		1	1				Union	2					
Cook		1	2				Lamar	1			2			Upson					1	2
Coweta	3	2			1		Laurens	2		1	1	2	2	Walker		1		2		
Crisp		1		1		2	Lee	1	2					Walton	1				2	
Dawson				1			Liberty			6			4	Ware		1		1		
Decatur	1						Lowndes				9	1		Warren		1				
DeKalb	13	7	8	3	5	17	Lumpkin					1		Washington	2			1		1
Dodge			1				Macon	1			1			Wayne	2	3				4
Dooley					1		Madison						2	Webster						1
Dougherty	1	2	1		2	1	McDuffie	2				2	1	Wheeler	1					1
Douglas	2				1	1	Meriwether	1						White	2				1	2
Effingham			1				Monroe			1				Whitfield				1	3	2
														Worth	2	1				
														Undisclosed						3
YEAR	'08	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03							'08	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03		
TOTAL DEATHS	113	118	106	127	110	137							113	118	106	127	110	137		

Statistics compiled by the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence from its news clipping service and from reporting domestic violence agencies statewide. This count represents all the domestic violence-related deaths known to us at the time of this report. Statistics include primary victims, secondary victims and alleged perpetrators. **Of the 113 deaths in 2008, 67 were primary victims, 18 were secondary victims, and 28 were alleged perpetrators.** Most alleged perpetrators who died committed suicide after killing or attempting to kill the victim(s). Deaths of alleged perpetrators are included to show the full scope of loss of life due to domestic violence.

This chart only includes counties in which a domestic violence homicide was known to have occurred between 2003 and 2008.

What Was the Victims' Gender, Where Were They Employed, What Did They Earn, What Were Their Sources of Support?

Chart 2: Gender, Employment, and Income 2004-2009

CHARACTERISTIC	Victim		Perpetrator	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gender				
Female*	72	97%	2	3%
Male	2	3%	72	97%
Employment Status				
Employed	54	73%	45	60%
Employed full-time	38	51%	32	43%
Employed part-time	5	7%	4	5%
Employed, unsure if full-time or part-time	6	8%	5	7%
Self-employed	3	4%	4	5%
Employed part-time and student	2	3%	0	0%
Unemployed	7	9%	11	15%
Retired	2	3%	1	1%
Disabled	2	3%	2	3%
Unemployed student	1	1%	1	1%
Unknown	8	11%	14	19%
Sources of Financial Support				
Personal wages	52	70%	43	58%
No personal income, reliant on perpetrator for financial support	3	4%	0	0%
SSI / SSDI	2	3%	1	1%
Personal wages and family support	2	3%	0	0%
Family support	1	1%	1	1%
Family support, WIC, and Food Stamps	1	1%	1	1%
No income, unknown source of support	1	1%	2	3%
Personal wages and Food Stamps	1	1%	1	1%
Personal wages and alimony	1	1%	0	0%
Widow's pay	1	1%	0	0
Drug dealing or other illegal income	0	0%	4	5%
No personal income, reliant on victim for financial support	0	0%	7	9%
Retirement pension	0	0%	1	1%
Unknown	9	12%	13	18%

*Note: One female perpetrator killed a male partner; one killed a female partner. One male perpetrator killed a male partner. All remaining homicides were men killing women.

Chart 2 Key Points:

- ✦ In line with national statistics, the overwhelming number of homicide victims in reviewed cases were women; the overwhelming number of perpetrators were men.
- ✦ Note that the majority of perpetrators and victims were employed, suggesting that employers and coworkers have a role to play in ending the violence.

Was it Single Homicide or Were Others Killed/Hurt?

Chart 3: Types of Incidents 2004-2009

TYPES OF INCIDENTS	Aggregate % for 2004-2009
Single Victim	53%
Homicide + Suicide	22%
Homicide + Attempted Suicide	7%
Homicide + Suicide + Attempted Homicide of Others	4%
Multiple Homicide + Suicide	4%
Multiple Homicide	4%
Homicide + Attempted Homicide of Others	3%
Homicide + Suicide + Others Wounded	1%
Multiple Homicide + Attempted Homicide of Others + Others Wounded	1%
Victim Suicide	1%
Incidents Involving Perpetrator Suicide or Attempted Suicide	
	38%
Incidents Involving Homicide of Others, Attempted Homicide of Others, or Others Wounded	
	17%

Chart 3 Key Points:

- ✦ In 38% of the cases reviewed, the perpetrator attempted or completed suicide in addition to killing or attempting to kill one or more persons. This finding indicates a significant correlation between domestic violence perpetrators' suicidal thoughts or threats and their danger to others.
- ✦ In 17% of the cases reviewed, the perpetrator killed, attempted to kill, or injured someone other than the primary victim. Perpetrators do not limit their violence to their intimate partner. Often, other people close to the primary victim are targeted either because they are with the primary victim at the time of the attack or because the perpetrator intends to cause additional anguish to the primary victim by harming her friends or loved ones.

charts 4, 5

How Were the Victims Killed?

Chart 4: Cause of Death 2004-2009

CAUSE OF DEATH	Aggregate % for 2004-2009
Gunshot	55%
Stab wounds / Stab wounds and lacerations	24%
Strangulation	11%
Blunt or sharp force trauma	7%
Asphyxiation due to smoke inhalation	1%
Multiple traumatic injuries	1%

Chart 4 Key Point:

- Firearms continue to be the leading cause of death for victims in reviewed cases, greater than all other methods combined, indicating the urgent need to use all legal means possible to remove firearms from the hands of perpetrators.

Who Else Was There When It Happened?

Chart 5: Who Else Was Present, a Witness to, or Killed at the Fatality 2004-2009

	Present		Witnessed		Killed	
	% of total 2004-2009 cases	Actual number of people	% of total 2004-2009 cases	Actual number of people	% of total 2004-2009 cases	Actual number of people
TOTAL	86%	167	46%	137	7%	7
Children	42%	57	18%	41	4%	3
Family members	19%	21	7%	13	1%	3
Friends	5%	5	4%	4	0%	0
New intimate partners	3%	2	1%	1	1%	1
Coworkers	3%	3	1%	3	0%	0
Acquaintances or neighbors	7%	8	7%	5	0%	0
Strangers	8%	71	8%	70	0%	0

Chart 5:

For the purpose of this chart, individuals labeled as “present” are those who were in the same area where the homicide occurred but did not hear or see the homicide. Those individuals who did have a sensory experience of the homicide have been determined to have “witnessed” the homicide.

Key Points:

- Contrary to popular understandings of domestic violence as a “private” issue, it is often the case that people other than the victim and the perpetrator are present at, witness to, or killed during a domestic violence homicide. The violence often spills over to affect family, friends, and bystanders. 2004-2009 data indicate that in 86% of cases someone was present at the scene of the fatality. 46% of the time someone witnessed the homicide. In 7% of cases, someone other than the primary victim was killed.
- In 18% of cases, children witnessed the homicide. This finding suggests that there is a critical need to assist children in dealing with the traumatic effects of witnessing the homicide of a loved one.

Who Was Aware of Perpetrators' Behaviors?

Chart 6: Perpetrators' History as Known by the Community 2004-2009

PERPETRATORS' BEHAVIORS	Percentage of cases where this factor was present	WHO WAS AWARE?					
		Family and friends	Law enforcement	Criminal courts	Civil courts	Service providers	
Violent or criminal behavior	History of DV against victim	89%	73%	62%	23%	23%	29%
	Threats to kill primary victim	61%	62%	42%	18%	27%	18%
	Violent criminal history	54%	45%	88%	38%	10%	25%
	Stalking	43%	59%	34%	9%	6%	13%
	Threats to harm victim with weapon	39%	55%	38%	17%	7%	17%
	Child abuse perpetrator*	31%	40%	53%	27%	33%	40%
	History of DV against others*	29%	57%	64%	43%	14%	7%
	Inflicted serious injury on victim*	27%	100%	54%	46%	0%	38%
	Sexual abuse perpetrator	24%	50%	39%	6%	22%	11%
	Strangulation	22%	44%	50%	31%	6%	19%
	Threats to kill children, family, and/or friends*	20%	70%	60%	30%	20%	10%
	Harmed victim with weapon*	14%	71%	71%	57%	0%	43%
Hostage taking*	8%	75%	50%	50%	25%	50%	
Controlling behavior	Monitoring and controlling	57%	76%	14%	0%	10%	14%
	Isolation of victim*	33%	88%	0%	0%	6%	6%
	Ownership of victim*	24%	100%	8%	0%	8%	17%
Mental health issues and substance abuse	Alcohol and drug abuse	54%	68%	58%	23%	13%	28%
	Suicide threats and attempts	39%	55%	31%	7%	7%	31%
	Depression*	29%	71%	29%	14%	14%	64%

*Note: Asterisks indicate only 2005-2009 data. There were a total of 49 cases during those years, so the denominator changes in the calculation of the percentage.

Chart 6:

Information for this chart was gathered primarily through available protective order petitions, police reports, prosecutor files, homicide investigations, and interviews with family and friends. Project Coordinators then categorized these behaviors based on commonly used guidelines for lethality indicators. Conclusions about who knew what information were based on the source of the information.

Here is an example of how this chart may be read: **"In cases where monitoring and controlling behaviors were present, family and friends knew about this in 76% of those cases."**

Key Points:

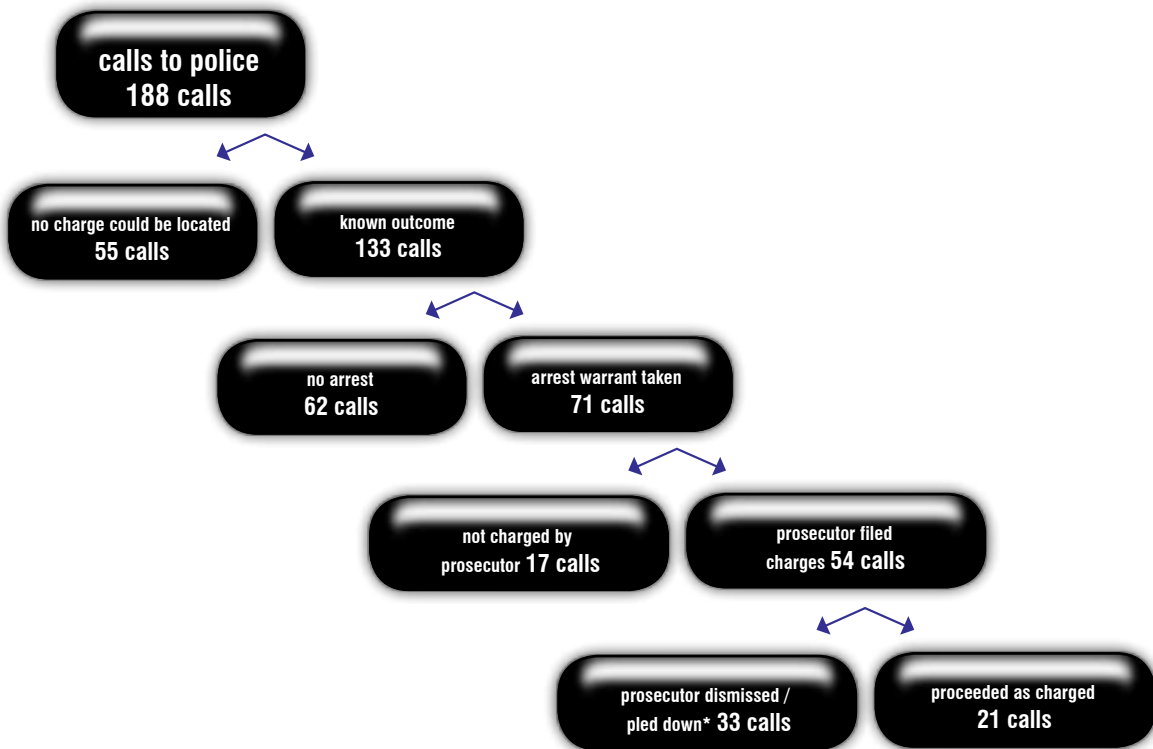
- ✦ These numbers reveal that family and friends of the victim generally know the most information about the relationship.
- ✦ In cases where the perpetrator had inflicted serious injury on the victim, family and friends were aware of this fact 100% of the time, yet law enforcement was only aware of this fact 54% of the time. These numbers remind us that law enforcement often has limited information about the relationship and reinforces how knowledgeable friends and family are about the abuse.

- ✦ In 89% of the cases, the perpetrator had a history of some domestic violence against the victim prior to the homicide. This suggests that a good indicator of future and possibly lethal violence is the presence of past violence. This history was not always known to the criminal justice system.
- ✦ In only 27% of the cases did the perpetrator inflict serious injury on the victim in an incident prior to the homicide. This suggests that while serious or visible injury is a predictor of future and possibly lethal violence, it will not always be present in cases where victims are later killed.

chart 7

What Was the End Result of 911 Calls to Law Enforcement?

Chart 7: Detail of Investigation and Prosecution Breakdown 2004-2009



* Note: The “dismissed/pled down” category includes cases that were dismissed because the victim was killed prior to the case proceeding to prosecution.

Chart 7 Key Points:

- ✦ A review of the case histories reveals that calling law enforcement does not always result in increased safety, justice, or perpetrator accountability. In those cases where law enforcement was called and the outcome is known, only 41% were charged by the prosecutor, and 61% of those were subsequently either dismissed or pled down.
- ✦ When law enforcement was called to the scene, 62% of the time no arrest warrant was taken or no evidence of a charge could be located. This percentage includes cases where the law enforcement officer did not take a warrant because the perpetrator had left the scene. It also includes cases where the perpetrator remained on the scene and the officer advised the victim to take the warrant herself. **These practices send a message to the victim that the crime committed against her is not being taken seriously by the criminal justice system. Additionally, they send the message to perpetrators that the criminal justice system will not hold them accountable for their behavior.**

Which Agencies and Services Interacted with Victims and/or Perpetrators?

Chart 8 Key Points:

- ✦ Law enforcement had the most contact with both victims and perpetrators prior to the homicide. Continued law enforcement training on the dynamics of domestic violence and how/where to refer domestic violence victims for services is needed.
- ✦ Only 19% of domestic violence homicide victims were in contact with the domestic violence shelter or safehouse in the five years prior to their death. Domestic violence agencies need to take proactive steps to ensure that their full range of services are known, accessible, culturally relevant, and inviting to domestic violence victims.
- ✦ A significant number of perpetrators and victims interacted with a religious community, church, temple, or mosque in the five years prior to the homicide.

Chart 8: Agencies and Services Involved with Victims or Perpetrators in the Five Years Prior to the Fatalities 2004-2009

AGENCY / SERVICE / PROGRAM		VICTIMS		PERPETRATORS	
		Number	% total cases	Number	% total cases
Justice System Agencies	Law enforcement	58	78%	62	84%
	County prosecutor	29	39%	36	49%
	Superior court	25	34%	29	39%
	Magistrate court	23	31%	29	39%
	State court	17	23%	15	20%
	Civil divorce court	17	23%	16	22%
	Protection order advocacy program	13	18%	1	1%
	Court-based legal advocacy	13	18%	2	3%
	Probation	7	9%	26	35%
	Municipal court	5	7%	9	12%
	Legal aid	4	5%	0	0%
	Parole	1	1%	8	11%
	City prosecutor	1	1%	5	7%
Social Service Agencies	Child protective services (DFCS)	8	11%	8	11%
	Child care services	4	5%	2	3%
	TANF or Food Stamps	3	4%	2	3%
	Homeless shelter	2	3%	1	1%
	WIC	2	3%	0	0%
Health Care Agencies	Hospital care	15	20%	14	19%
	Emergency medical service (EMS)	13	18%	6	8%
	Private physician	13	18%	12	16%
	Emergency medical care	13	18%	6	8%
	Mental health provider	8	11%	17	23%
	Medicaid	3	4%	0	0%
	Substance abuse program	2	3%	4	5%
	PeachCare	1	1%	0	0%
Family Violence Agencies	Domestic violence shelter/safe house	14	19%	0	0%
	Community-based advocacy	13	18%	4	5%
	Family violence intervention program (FVIP)	1	1%	10	14%
	Sexual assault program	1	1%	0	0%
Miscellaneous Agencies	Religious community, church, temple, or mosque	22	30%	13	18%
	Immigrant resettlement	2	3%	1	1%
	English as a Second Language (ESL) program	1	1%	0	0%
	Anger management	0	0%	5	7%

implementing change: a call to action

what fatality review teams recommend

What can communities do to stop this tragic loss of life? In all cases, the perpetrators bear sole responsibility for their choice to kill. However, **most cases do contain multiple missed opportunities for intervention;** opportunities missed by both the criminal legal system and by the wider community, including family, friends, coworkers, faith leaders, and others. These missed chances could have led to increased perpetrator accountability and victim safety.

Over the last 6 years Fatality Review Teams have made findings and recommendations with implications both on the community and state levels. For a full list of these recommendations, please see the 2007 and 2008 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Annual reports available for download at: www.fatalityreview.com.

The following findings were made by Teams in 2009 and are specific to their local communities and the cases they reviewed. Some recommendations have been reported in previous years yet bear repeating again because they continue to present significantly in newly reviewed cases. **These recommendations for change, like those made in previous years, are applicable to many communities in Georgia and should be considered a call to action.** Making changes in these key areas is essential to reduce danger for future victims of violence.

1. Supervised Visitation Centers: Visitation and exchanges involving children can pose great risks for violence and even death. In one case reviewed this year, a victim was killed in front of her child during such an exchange. Supervised visitation centers are viewed as one of the most valuable ways to keep victims of domestic violence and their children safe after divorce or separation. Start-up grants through the Office on Violence Against Women's Safe Havens program are available. DeKalb County, Georgia, successfully established a visitation and exchange program through the Safe Havens

initiative. Additional information is available at <http://www.niasvisitation.org>

2. Increase Domestic Violence Screening by Probation/Parole Officers: Several perpetrators were on supervised probation or parole when they killed their partners. More specific screening questions regarding domestic violence are needed even when the offender is not being supervised for a domestic violence-related charge and there is no documented history of domestic violence. Standardized assessment tools used by probation/parole officers should ask more specific questions that might reveal domestic violence. Intensive supervised probation (more frequent contact, more collateral contacts, etc.) should be provided to offenders who are assessed to be particularly dangerous. Needed are officers who specialize in domestic violence along with additional domestic violence training for all officers.

3. Remove Systemic Barriers to Law Enforcement Taking Out Warrants: Both this year and in previous years, we have observed a pattern in which law enforcement officers do not take out warrants against the perpetrators even when probable cause exists. This often occurs when the perpetrator has left the scene, but can also take place when the perpetrator remains on scene; law enforcement may still instruct the victim to take out the warrant herself. In past reports, we've suggested additional training for law enforcement officers regarding the need to take out warrants themselves in domestic violence situations. But there are also systemic barriers that might dissuade officers from taking out warrants. For example, in at least one community, officers who make domestic violence arrests must come to court on their days off, with no pay. Some law enforcement leadership may fear disapproval from the community when their domestic violence crime statistics rise (at least temporarily) as a result of increased

warrants and arrests. Communities must work collaboratively with law enforcement to identify and remove obstacles that could hinder officers from taking out arrest warrants or making appropriate arrests.

4. Red Flag Multiple Calls to Same House:

Law enforcement should “red flag” houses where there are multiple 911 calls. In one case reviewed this year, police responded multiple times to one home. After a time, the police seemed to discount the danger that the woman was in because she had not left the relationship nor had she taken out a warrant herself, despite their repeated suggestions. Law enforcement must realize that multiple calls from one residence indicate that the victim is in increased danger, not decreased danger. Because the victim does not respond in a compliant manner, (i.e. taking out a warrant, getting a Temporary Protective Order, leaving the relationship, etc.) does not mean that the victim is “safe” – nor does it mean that the victim has forsaken the right to protection by law enforcement.

5. Make Ongoing Training on Domestic Violence Available to Medical Personnel and Healthcare Professionals:

Several victims in reviewed cases turned to emergency rooms and other health care professionals multiple times for treatment. Primary care physicians, emergency rooms, hospitals, prenatal clinics, and other health care providers should receive ongoing training on domestic violence. Specifically, they should routinely screen for domestic violence and offer information, resources, and safety planning to all patients. GCFV has just issued a revised best-practice protocol for medical personnel in Georgia, available at <http://gcfv.org/protocols.shtml>.

6. Complete Additional Screening on Alcohol and Drug Treatment: Alcohol and drug abuse were identified in many cases as a factor, not a cause, in the escalation of violence. Several perpetrators in reviewed

cases received treatment for substance abuse, but the provider did not screen for domestic violence. Chemical dependency treatment providers should routinely screen patients for abusive and controlling behaviors against their partners and make appropriate referrals. Domestic violence programs and chemical dependency treatment programs should build relationships to facilitate cross training and the sharing of resource materials.

7. Prevent Separation Violence: All of the victims in reviewed cases were taking steps to separate from their abusive partner.

Some were taking obvious steps to end the relationship, like moving into a domestic violence shelter, filing for a divorce or annulment, or obtaining a Temporary Protective Order. Others were taking less overt steps that signaled moves towards independence such as letting family members know of their intention to end the relationship.

◆ Domestic violence advocates and other helping professionals should talk with victims about increased danger at the time of separation from a perpetrator and **continue to regularly discuss safety planning before, during, and after separation.**

- **Increased Danger and Court Actions:** In some cases, perpetrators killed their victim immediately prior to civil or criminal court proceedings where they were to be held accountable for prior acts of violence. Killings occurred just before scheduled court dates for criminal prosecution, annulment proceedings, and Temporary Protective Order hearings. Warning signs for danger may seem more obvious in criminal proceedings, but the courts must recognize that civil processes leading to separation can certainly escalate danger in domestic violence cases.

implementing change: local example

Showcasing Savannah-Chatham County

Our intention is that this Fatality Review Report will inspire and drive changes in our systems and culture. Our work does not end once we've completed fatality reviews and written a report. We are compelled to act on what we've learned and motivate other communities to tailor effective projects to fit their local needs.

In 2009, we found that one community, Savannah, is already implementing three of the promising practices we highlighted in 2008's report (available at www.fatalityreview.com). First, they've implemented a Lethality Assessment Program and, second, sustained outreach to the faith community. Third, Savannah's domestic violence task force (the Family Violence Council) has taken extraordinary measures to reach out to family and friends (another key focus of last year's report) through a successful public service announcement campaign. We applaud Savannah's work and acknowledge that this work has been supported and led by a robust domestic violence task force, a vibrant Fatality Review Team, and exceptional leadership from elected officials. This team includes the District Attorney's Office and Superior Court Judge James Bass, a current member and past chair of GCFV, and others.

Below, several Chatham County leaders describe these initiatives in their own words. We hope that these accounts will inspire other communities to take action based on what Chatham County has learned through its fatality review process.

Lethality Assessment Program in Savannah

By Sgt. Robert Gavin, Special Victims Unit
Savannah-Chatham Metro Police

In Savannah, we became very concerned about our domestic homicide rate. We found that we were averaging four or five domestic related homicides each year. We wanted to try to take proactive steps to lower these

numbers. Early in 2009, Savannah-Chatham Metro Police applied for a grant to take part in the Domestic Violence Lethality Assessment Program for First Responders, a program created by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence.

A requirement of the grant application was a strong partnership between police and the local domestic violence organization – SAFE Shelter. SAFE Shelter's director, Ms. Cheryl Branch, was excited to work with us on this program, and in March 2009, we were selected as a pilot site. A core group of leaders went through a training course on the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP), and then we trained the entire 600+ members of the police department and all SAFE Shelter employees on how the program works.

The goal of this program is to help first responders facilitate connections between domestic violence victims and SAFE Shelter advocates, so that victims understand their options and can use domestic violence services if and when they choose. National research has found that only 4% of domestic violence homicide victims were actually in touch with advocates and shelters before they were killed. We wanted to increase the likelihood that victims would be in contact with SAFE Shelter.

LAP stresses three main actions:

1. When responding to an Intimate Partner Domestic Violence call, officers complete a lethality screen with the victim. If there are indicators of lethality, the officer tells the victim that people in their situation have been the victims of domestic homicides.
2. The officer while at the scene places a phone call to SAFE Shelter's hotline. The

officer tells the hotline advocate what lethality indicators are present and gives the worker the victim's name.

3. The officer then offers the phone to the victim, inviting them to speak with the hotline worker if they choose. The hotline advocate briefly speaks with the victim and tells him/her about the services available, including confidential counseling, safety planning, emergency shelter, and legal advocacy. The advocate either sets up service for them on the spot (emergency shelter) or schedules a meeting, transportation to services, or just a time and safe number at which to call them back to talk.

The screening and hotline call add about two minutes fifty seconds to the average police response, but we feel that this extra time is worth it.

Savannah-Chatham Metro Police and SAFE Shelter have only completed six months using this program, so results will show more in 2010, but what we have seen right away is a great increase in the rate at which victims are utilizing services. In the first 90 days of the program, officers conducted 127 lethality screens. Out of those situations, 37 victims got on the phone with SAFE Shelter advocates and 21 of those actually went to SAFE Shelter later for follow-up services. Out of all the communities throughout the country taking part in this grant, Savannah's SAFE Shelter had the most victims utilizing services as a result of this program. That is undoubtedly a success.

As a LAP grant recipient, we are asked to spread this program to other agencies throughout the region, so we have offered this training for free to any agencies that want to take a pro-active stance against domestic violence.

Engaging the Faith Community

By Helen P. Bradley, Director, Chatham Co. Victim-Witness Assistance Program, Office of District Attorney Larry Chisolm

Years ago, I was standing in the back of a conference room as five victims talked about how crime affected them and their families. Four out of five said their faith community had been very important to them during the difficult days and months after the crime. I knew right then that we needed to collaborate with faith leaders to provide the best response to crime victims. Research reveals that during a trauma, victims are five times more likely to seek the aid of clergy than any other professional. Clergy are people they know and trust.

Some victims find support and solace from their faith communities; others say the response was hurtful when the perpetrator is supported but not the victim. And still others say the response was non-existent.

For fifteen years, our Victim-Witness Assistance Program and Family Violence Council have sponsored a seminar for faith leaders. This year, the half-day seminar featured Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune of the FaithTrust Institute, an attorney, and an insurance representative who discussed liability issues. Since we have been sponsoring a faith seminar for so long, we have developed relationships over time with clergy. These relationships have allowed us to increase participation over time – over 80 clergy and faith leaders attended the seminar this year.

During the conference, we had both a book and resource fair along with information from many service agencies. Additionally, we provided a resource manual with information about all types of crime, appropriate responses, and available resources.

Although we change the focus of the faith seminar each year, we always include a victim impact panel. This year, a survivor of domestic violence was one who shared her

Showcasing Savannah-Chatham County

powerful story. Although her crime had been all over the local news, her faith community had avoided her. With collaboration and education, I am hopeful that her experience never happens to anyone else.

“What Children Hear, Hurts. For a Lifetime” Public Awareness Campaign

Compiled from a Press Release by Kris Rice on behalf of the Family Violence Council

“What children hear, HURTS. For a lifetime” was the theme of an ambitious public relations campaign undertaken by the Savannah-Chatham Family Violence Council to educate parents, family, and friends about the devastating effects of domestic violence on children. The campaign launched the last two weeks of April and included professionally produced public service announcements, print and bus ads, and billboards. Also, brochures providing information on the effects of family violence on victims and children and including tear-off safety plans for kids were distributed to schools, community centers, doctors’ offices, houses of worship, and victim service agencies. Ads and brochures (in both English and Spanish) directed those who needed help or information to the Family Violence Council’s new website, www.familyviolencecouncil.org.

The Family Violence Council is chaired by Jennifer Guyer, Assistant District Attorney. The Family Violence Council sought help for the outreach campaign from the Junior League of Savannah, which enthusiastically agreed to support the project.

Judge James Bass notes: “After years of hard and dedicated work in our own fields, the Savannah-Chatham community has come together to truly serve victims of domestic violence. We have found that it is necessary to break down the silos in which we so often work to provide competent services. Often-times, experts of domestic violence recognize the isolation a victim may be experiencing and how harmful that is to her; yet, for many years, service providers and the criminal justice system have been working in isolation from each other. I am so proud of our community’s work and am excited about what we can accomplish in the future.”

Please contact GCFV or GCADV if you would like more information about these initiatives. Also, if your community is effecting changes based on what you have learned in fatality review, please contact us; we intend to spotlight other innovative communities in our 2010 report.

implementing change: state level example

December 2, 2009

Interfaith summit on domestic violence explores how clergy can work to support victims, end violence

by Sue Boardman, M.Div., D.Min., Special to Presbyterian News Service, PC(USA), reprinted with permission.

ATLANTA. Faith leaders gathered in Atlanta, GA, on Tuesday, November 17, for a Summit on Domestic Violence to equip religious leaders with skills necessary to respond effectively to issues of domestic violence. The Summit was organized by the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) and the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV) after their Fatality Review Project research uncovered strong connections between faith communities and victims in fatal and near-fatal incidents of domestic violence.

More than 50 faith leaders came to the summit; male and female; black, white, Latino, and Asian; young and older; Roman Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i. Experts from Seattle's FaithTrust Institute provided leadership. "More women go to their clergy person than to law enforcement officers to make first reports of domestic violence," said Rabbi Mark Dratch. "People define their lives in terms of their faith community. We have the opportunity and a biblical mandate to give help, or we are perpetuating abuse."

The Rev. Sharon Ellis Davis, Ph.D., a United Church of Christ pastor who teaches at McCormick Theological Seminary, spoke about the pressure many victims perceive from religious leaders to remain in an abusive marriage. She explained that, on average, women leave abusive partners seven times before they finally leave or are killed by their abuser. "The most danger a victim faces is at the time of leaving," she said. "In 75 percent of all domestic violence fatalities, the woman was actively leaving the relationship." *Broken Vows*, a video produced by the FaithTrust Institute, presented the stories of six battered women of different faiths whose religious teachings were misused in their own lives to perpetuate abuse. "If there is arguing, fighting, and hitting in the family," said a Jesuit priest in the video, "we can expect it in the streets. If we want to stop it in the streets, we have to stop it at home."

Summit participants joined in an exercise in which Jewish, Muslim, and Christian scriptures were examined for the ways in which they could either be used as roadblocks to confronting violence in the family or as resources for victims of violence. Jessica Davenport, a young domestic violence vic-

tims' advocate and active member of a faith community, raised the question of the extent to which religious leaders have a responsibility to critique oppressive teachings that seem to permit domestic violence. Yolanda Davis, a recently ordained pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal church, said, "It might not be that we're so afraid to challenge the reading of scripture as it is that we're afraid to challenge power in church leaders who may be abusers themselves." "Our job," said Ellis Davis, "is the deconstruction of roadblocks and the reconstruction of resources." Quoting from *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment* (Joy Bussert, 1986) she went on, "We need ... to begin articulating a faith that will provide women with resources for strength rather than resources for endurance. We must articulate a theology of empowerment rather than a theology of passive endurance."

FaithTrust's Rabbi Julie Schwartz advocated speaking about domestic violence from pulpits and in the prayers of the people as a crucial first step for faith communities. "We need theological clarity that domestic violence has nothing to do with religion," she said. "It's all about power and control. You can't use your religion to say violence is OK." Schwartz offered three other goals for intervention in family violence by religious leaders.

1. First, provide safety for victims and children. Go with them to court. Honor protective orders. Know how to refer victims to domestic violence programs and trained community advocates, rather than to traditional couples' counseling.
2. Second, insist on accountability for the perpetrator. Support fulfillment of legal consequences of violence. Have clear guidelines for perpetrators who wish to remain in the faith community. Support the abuser in seeking specialized perpetrators' intervention programs to help change violent behavior and offer safety for the perpetrator as well as the victim, through establishing appropriate boundaries.
3. Third, assist in the restoration of the relationship, if appropriate, or provide for the mourning of the lost relationship through prayers, rituals, and pastoral care.

Co-coordinator Greg Loughlin said that when they'd begun planning the summit, they wondered where the faith community had gone with regard to domestic violence. "We thought stuff wasn't going on. Instead, there's wonderful stuff. People are doing the work. You are doing the work," he said. "What we need are connections between those people and momentum for the future."

According to FaithTrust founder the Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, "There can be no healing without justice and justice requires courage."

acknowledgements

The Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV) and the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) are grateful to the many individuals who continue to make Georgia's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project possible.

Fatality Review Project Staff

Greg Loughlin, Co-Coordinator, Fatality Review Project, GCFV

Taylor Thompson Tabb, Co-Coordinator, Fatality Review Project, GCADV

Dr. Kirsten Rambo, Executive Director, GCFV

Jan Christiansen, Associate Director, GCADV

Nancy Dickinson, Editor, Creative Director

The Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence

is a state coalition of about 53 organizations and individuals responding to domestic violence in Georgia. GCADV operates Georgia's 24-hour toll-free domestic violence hotline (1-800-33-HAVEN) and provides education, consultation, training, technical assistance, and dissemination of research and information. GCADV also promotes best practices and resources for survivors and their children through a number of initiatives, including the Fatality Review Project, a Transitional Housing project, and a Legal Assistance project. Finally, GCADV advocates for improvements in systems responding to survivors and offenders through public policy and legislative advocacy. Please visit www.gcadv.org or call 404-209-0280 for more information.

The Georgia Commission on Family Violence is a Commission under the Governor's Office, administratively attached to the Department of Corrections. The Commission was legislatively formed to assist in the development of domestic violence task forces in judicial circuits and to monitor legislation impacting families experiencing domestic violence. GCFV is the certifying body for Family Violence Intervention Programs (FVIPs) in Georgia. GCFV provides training and technical assistance to FVIPs and task forces and hosts an annual statewide conference on domestic violence. Please visit www.gcfv.org or call 404-657-3412 for more information.

Special Thanks

A special acknowledgement goes to the **family members and friends** of homicide victims who were willing to share with us the struggles their loved ones faced.

Shelley Senterfitt, Attorney at Law, provided legal research and counsel for the project.

We are especially grateful to **Allison Smith**, Economic Justice Coordinator, GCADV, who again conducted data analysis for the project, allowing us to provide aggregate data for this report.

Our special appreciation goes to the **Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence** for their ongoing guidance and technical assistance. Our efforts have benefited greatly from the groundbreaking work done by Washington review teams, under the leadership of their Coalition staff.

Our special thanks to **Debbie Lillard**, Mosaic Counseling, Inc., who provided the project with trauma expertise.

Financial Support

The Georgia Fatality Review Project was funded by the **Criminal Justice Coordinating Council** through **Violence Against Women Act** funds. We are grateful for the grant which allowed our state to join many others around the country in conducting fatality reviews.

In-kind donations of time and skill in the editing, design, production, and printing of this annual report were provided by **Canterbury Press LLC**, Atlanta, GA., and **Nancy Dickinson**, Alpharetta, GA

Review Teams

We acknowledge the commitment of the Fatality Review participants from around the state who devoted their time, energy, and expertise to work towards creating safer communities. Several of the communities that participated in the project this year have been participating for the last five years. This presented a challenge for some in identifying a case for review since they had exhausted their eligible pool. Teams unable to identify a case for review instead focused their efforts on implementing past recommendations.

While the fatality review findings contained in this report emerge directly from Fatality Review Teams, the recommendations and analysis contained here are the product of deliberations and discussions by Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Georgia Commission on Family Violence staff. Information in this report does not necessarily represent the opinions of individual Fatality Review Team members.

Atlanta Judicial Circuit

Casey Anctil, Judicial Correction Services
Laura Barton, Partnership Against Domestic Violence
Det. Summer Benton, Atlanta Police Department
Officer Dawn Bray, Fulton County Criminal Warrant Division
Robin Brooks, Tangu, Inc.
Deborah Espy, District Attorney's Office
Lisa H. Geer, Families First
Becky Gorlin, Judicial Correction Services
Alice Johnson, Fulton County Board of Commissioners, Chairman's Office
Sgt. L. Laces, Atlanta Police Department
Wendy Lipshutz, Shalom Bayit of Jewish Family & Career Services
Lt. K. Meadows, Atlanta Police Department
Tamica Means, A Means for Change
Sheri Miller, Odyssey Family Counseling Center
Jodi Mount, Atlanta Legal Aid Society
Sgt. Deirdre Orange, Fulton County Marshal's Office
Danna Philmon, Judicial Correction Services
Amanda Planchard, Solicitor-General's Office, *Chair*
Shalandra Robertson, State Corrections and Parole
 Lindsey Siegel, Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation
Karria Simmons, Partnership Against Domestic Violence
Dr. Michele Stauffenberg, Fulton County Medical Examiner
Jenni Stolarski, Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation

Bell-Forsyth Judicial Circuit

Leslie Abernathy, Solicitor-General
Brooke Atkinson, Forsyth County Sheriff's Office
Shalon Coffey, Family Haven
Leslie Dinkins, FCDVTF
Michael Dudgeon, Board of Education
Dawn Echols, New Leaf Counseling
Tennile Elliot, FCCAC
Kanya Glymph, New Leaf Counseling
Lance Gowens, Attorney at Law
Kathy Hedden, Family Haven
Mark Hoffman, Forsyth County Sheriff's Office
Meredith Hooks, VAFCSO
Robert Hoyt, Attorney at Law
Erica Hudgins, Juvenile Court
Judge J. Rusty Jackson, Juvenile Court
Dianna Lambert, Community Volunteer, *Chair*
Liz Lewallen, Family Haven
Kelly Lumms, Victim Witness Advocate
Roxanne Massey, Juvenile Court
Randall Meincke, Attorney at Law
Laura Nichols, North Georgia Counseling
Christa O'Neal, Georgia Probation Management
Gary Pennell, North Georgia Counseling
Christina Rayneri, Georgia Legal Services Program
Beth Savage, Victim Witness Advocate
Kenneth Schatten, Attorney at Law
Kristin Schofield, Georgia Probation Management
Jennifer See, Forsyth County Sheriff's Office
Jean Shiry, Attorney at Law

Jed Silver, Attorney at Law
Rosetta Smith, VAFCSO
Kent Sudman, Attorney at Law
Susan Sweeney, Northside Hospital
Starlett Tinch, Hope at the Well
Karin White, Forsyth County Schools
Linda Whittle, Family Haven

Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit

Kyle Bair, Sexual Assault Support Center
Linda Bass, Muscogee County Schools
Lt. Pamela Brown, Sheriff's Office
Mildred Cook, District Attorney's Office
Det. A.E. Davis, Columbus Police Department
Kaseema Duffey, Muscogee County Schools
Rhonda Dunlap, Solicitor-General's Office
Valencia Evans, Hope Harbour
Rev. Gerald Goodman, St. Mary's Rd. United Methodist Church
Mattie Hall, Urban League
Shelly Hall, District Attorney's Office
Sally Haskins, Georgia Legal Services
Diane Hett, Hope Harbour
Sherry Jackson, District Attorney's Office
Judge Frank Jordan, Superior Court
Lauren Kubik, The Medical Center
Mary Leverett, Hope Harbour, *Chair*
Pam Maney, Discovery Toys
Candice Person, Hope Harbour
Agnes Shelton, Delta Life Development Foundation
Rachel Snipes, The Family Center
Sayers Wilson, The Medical Center

Conasauga Judicial Circuit

Lynne Cabe, Dalton State College
Lt. Derrick Callahan, Whitfield County Sheriff's Office
Lt. Nancy Chadwick, Whitfield County Sheriff's Office
Scott Czerneski, Whitfield County 911
Rev. Tyler Downing, Dalton First Presbyterian Church
Laura Head, District Attorney's Office, *Co-Chair*
Sue Jordan, Northwest Georgia Family Crisis Center, Inc., *Chair*
Carla Kelley, Whitfield County 911
Jessica Martin, Dalton State College
Kermit McManus, District Attorney
Rev. Susan Reggin, Cohutta First Presbyterian
Rev. Elizabeth Roles, St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Jim Sneary, The RESOLV Project

Eastern Judicial Circuit

Wanda Andrews, Georgia Legal Services
Judge James Bass, Superior Court, Chatham County
Olaseni Bello, District Attorney's Office
Nikeya Blake, Pride Integrated Services
Molly Dilbeck, Georgia Legal Services
Monica Garcia, Georgia Legal Services
Jennifer P. Guyer, District Attorney's Office
Marta Greenhoe Kaufman, Latin American Services Organization
Isabel Pauley, District Attorney's Office
Frank Pennington II, District Attorney's Office
Officer Hiram Rivera, Jr., Savannah-Chatham Metro Police Department
Rose Grant-Robinson, SAFE Shelter Outreach
Yukeyveaya Wright, District Attorney's Office, *Chair*

Gwinnett Judicial Circuit

Judge George Hutchinson, Chief Magistrate
Jennifer Hope, Atlanta Family Counseling Center
Sgt. Tracy Lee, Gwinnett County Sheriff's Department
Julie Mauney, Community Volunteer, *Chair*
Julie Potts, Solicitor-General's Office
Brian Ray, District Attorney's Office
Frances Smith, Partnership Against Domestic Violence
Jeanette Soto, Partnership Against Domestic Violence
Lynda Waggoner, Community Volunteer, *Co-Chair*

Piedmont Judicial Circuit

Inv. Mike Adams, Arcade Police Department
Karla Branch, District Attorney's Office
Judge Billy Chandler, Magistrate Court
Char Garrett, Peace Place, *Chair*
Chief Jeremy Howell, Hoschton Police Department
Sgt. Ronnie Kilburn, Braselton Police Department

Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit

Antuan Acker, Decatur Police Department
Judge Beryl A. Anderson, Magistrate Court
Erica Barnes, DFCS
Kevin Batye, State Court Probation
Lt. Kim Billups, Sheriff's Department
Lt. Cheryl Elliott, Emory Police Department
Kim Frndak, Women's Resource Center
Deborah Johnson, Atlanta Legal Aid Society
Detective Manuel Maldonado, DeKalb County Police Department
Carrie McCurdy, Solicitor-General's Office
Betsy Ramsey, Solicitor-General's Office
Mercedes Roman, Road to Recovery
Ingrid Skidmore, District Attorney's Office

Fatality Review is difficult work, both for the review teams and for project staff. We want to acknowledge that the project staff could not have successfully conducted our work and completed this report without support, analysis, and feedback from our colleagues. Special thanks to our coworkers for assistance on this project:

GCFV

Maggie Beck-Coon, Research Analyst
Jameelah Ferrell, Office Manager
Jennifer Thomas, Statewide Task Force Coordinator
Amarinthia Torres, FVIP Coordinator

GCADV

Christy Cardina, Director of Training
Penny Goldberg-Rosenfield, Finance Manager
Shenna Johnson, LAV Project Coordinator
Nicole Lesser, Executive Director
Allison Smith, Economic Justice Coordinator
Susan Swain, Communications Coordinator

We have made true progress this year implementing fatality review findings related to the faith community; we plan to continue this effort in 2010. We intend to take lessons learned as we mobilized resources for the faith initiative and apply them to other areas of need, particularly within the criminal legal system. Progress this year was largely due to the following ad hoc team of advocates and faith leaders who advised us and pushed our initiative forward. Thank you; we look forward to building on what we have accomplished together.

Aparna Bhattacharyya, Raksha
Lynda Goodwyn, Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church
Rev. Sara Hayden, Tri-Presbytery New Church Development Commission
Rev. Conitras Houston, Sixth Episcopal District, AME
Wendy Lipshutz, Shalom Bayit of Jewish Family & Career Services
Dr. Julia Perilla, Caminar Latino
Karria Simmons, Partnership Against Domestic Violence
Kevin Spears, Consultant, KRSpears, LLC
Shyam Sriram, Muslim Men Against Domestic Violence
Jan Swanson, Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta

We would also like to thank the **Rev. Dr. Aleese Moore-Orbih** of FaithTrust Institute (www.faithtrustinstitute.org), **Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter** and **Alyson Morse Katzman** of Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence (www.interfaithpartners.org), and **Dick Bathrick**, Consultant, for generously sharing their expertise, insights, and experience with us.

in honor of...

This report is dedicated to all those who lost their lives to domestic violence and to their family members, friends, and surviving children who must go on without them. Listed here are the names and brief stories of victims whose cases were reviewed in 2009.

Pamela, 52, mother of two. Killed after an intense history of domestic violence by her boyfriend of two years. His abuse caused her to lose her job as an apartment manager, and he isolated her from family by injuring her before scheduled family gatherings. He used the legal system to further isolate her; persuading police to arrest her for domestic violence, he then got her probation revoked by drugging her before a drug test. Pamela was in the process of breaking up with him and looking for another place to live when she went missing. She was later discovered deceased; he confessed to her murder.

Frances, 49, mother and grandmother; and her mother Ada, 73. Both were stabbed to death by France's husband in the presence of their three-year-old granddaughter. He had recently learned that she was moving to another apartment and she told him he could not go with her. There was a pending felony case stemming from an incident where he had choked her and thrown her to the ground, breaking her foot.

Nancy, 48, mother of four, pharmacist. Shot to death by her husband 3 weeks after filing for divorce; he then killed himself. The murder and the suicide were witnessed by their adult daughter.

Cynthia, 44, mother of one, physician's medical claims department supervisor. Shot to death by her husband whom she wished to divorce. He then killed himself. They were both discovered in the home by their teenage daughter.

Kimberlee, 30, mother of four and factory worker. Stabbed to death by her husband. This happened the morning he was due to appear in court for terroristic threat charges for his recent threat to kill her and the children. She had told her mother that she wanted to end the marriage.

Annette, 45, mother and grandmother. Shot to death by her ex-husband four months after their divorce was finalized. He had convinced her to dismiss the Temporary Protective Order (TPO) that she filed prior to filing for divorce.

Clara, 22, worked in the hospitality industry. Shot to death by her ex-boyfriend two weeks after she had broken up with him and moved out. He attempted suicide but survived. He was a convicted felon and a registered sex offender.

Sherika, 25, student and employed by a temp agency. Shot in the head by her estranged husband who then killed himself. They were married only three months and she had filed for annulment.

Angel, 29, mother of two, employed by DFCS. After a long history of documented abuse, Angel had broken up with her boyfriend and moved into a domestic violence shelter. He shot her to death and then killed himself when they met to exchange their son; the six-year-old witnessed the killings.



REGARDING GENDER LANGUAGE IN THIS REPORT

The majority of domestic violence homicides in Georgia are men killing women in heterosexual relationships. However, it is important to acknowledge that domestic violence exists in same-sex relationships at roughly the same rates as in heterosexual, and lives are lost in those cases as well. Also, some men are battered by women, although this is an extremely small percentage of cases. All of the cases studied this year by the Project involved men killing women. Thus, while the language in the report reflects this reality, it should not be construed to suggest that all victims are female, and all perpetrators are male.

CLARIFICATION REGARDING DATA IN THIS REPORT

Rounding: In this report, the sum of individual data fields may not total 100% due to rounding.

Total cases reviewed: The Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project began in 2004. Since its inception, we have reviewed 78 total cases. This total of 78 includes 74 fatality cases in which the primary victim was killed and four near-fatalities in which the primary victim survived the attack.

Chart 1 refers to all known domestic violence deaths in Georgia, whether reviewed by the Project or not. All other charts include only data collected from the 74 fatality cases reviewed by the Project. Data from the near fatality reviews is not included in the charts.

Chart 1 begins in 2003. All other charts begin in 2004, the first year of the Project. Also, Chart 1 ends in 2008; all others end in 2009.

Chart 1 counts all deaths, where each primary victim, secondary victim, and perpetrator is counted individually. All other charts count cases, where each case is counted as one unit even if the case included multiple deaths.



