

REPORT ON 2020 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITIES



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INTRODUCTION

The Indiana Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (INDVFRT) confirmed a total of 91 fatalities from 72 incidents that occurred between January 1 and December 31, 2020. It is imperative to establish from the beginning of this report that it is likely there were more deaths in Indiana due to intimate partner violence during 2020 than those 91 this multidisciplinary team has confirmed. One of the ongoing challenges regularly encountered by the INDVFRT is the lack of a reliable method or system for identifying and reporting deaths due to intimate partner violence. It must also be noted that the review period encompassed the initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions.

During this time, both the nature and perception of services available to survivors of intimate partner violence changed swiftly and radically. It was a common misconception that shelters and advocacy programs had closed or stopped providing services. It was also a common misconception that law enforcement

departments and prosecutors' offices were not intervening in domestic violence cases. Survivors, already subject to isolation and lack of support due to the actions of the partner causing them harm, were further isolated from the help and support available to them because of actions taken to protect the wider public health at a very dangerous time.

Ultimately, during the initial months of the pandemic, Indiana saw a 180% increase in deaths due to intimate partner violence. We went from averaging just over 47 deaths per year in the five years prior to 2020, to 91 in the calendar year of 2020. With these facts in mind, the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and the INDVFRT believe the number of actual deaths due to intimate partner violence is always higher than the number of reported deaths, but especially for this time period. However, the team only reviews and reports on fatalities where the circumstances can be confirmed through some official means.



180%

INDIANA SAW A **180% INCREASE**
IN DEATHS DUE TO INTIMATE
PARTNER VIOLENCE

DEFINITIONS

In generating this report, we use the terms “domestic violence” or “intimate partner violence” to characterize forms of abuse perpetrated within the context of a current or former romantic relationship. “Intimate partner violence” and “domestic violence” are used interchangeably. ICADV defines domestic violence as a pattern of coercive or abusive behavior in a relationship that is used to gain and/or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It includes emotional, psychological, economic, physical, or sexual actions or threats of action used to influence the thoughts, feelings, or actions of another person. This includes behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, or injure the target.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED FATALITY —

For the purposes of this report, the INDVFRT reviews those deaths occurring in the context of, resulting from, or motivated by violence in a relationship between current or former intimate partners.

DECEDENT —

Individual who died as a result of the incident.

INTIMATE PARTNER —

Individual currently or previously engaged in an intimate relationship with predominant aggressor/partner causing harm; this person is also often referred to as the survivor or victim in relation to abusive incidents.

MANNER OF FATAL INJURY —

Summarizes the primary cause of death for those who died as a result of intimate partner violence.

PERPETRATOR —

In the context of this report, this term refers to the person who caused the fatality or fatalities in question.

PREDOMINANT AGGRESSOR/ PARTNER CAUSING HARM —

The individual in the relationship who exercises power and control over their partner using coercive or abusive acts to elicit a change in behavior from the survivor/victim; also referred to as partner causing harm.

CHILD —

Individual under the age of 18 either biologically related to or under the care of the intimate partner and/or predominant aggressor.

SINGLE FATALITY —

Incident where one individual dies, either by suicide or by the actions of another person—in domestic violence-related fatalities, typically the partner causing harm.

MULTIPLE FATALITY —

Incident where more than one individual dies due to the actions of another person—in domestic violence-related fatalities, typically the partner causing harm.

SUICIDE —

Incident where the predominant aggressor or intimate partner takes their own life in the context of an abusive relationship.

HOMICIDE/SUICIDE —

Incident where a predominant aggressor/partner causing harm kills victim before dying by suicide.

MULTIPLE HOMICIDE/SUICIDE —

Incident where predominant aggressor/partner causing harm kills more than 1 person before dying by suicide.

BYSTANDER DEATH —

Incident involving the death of individual(s) other than the intimate partner occurring in the context of an intimate partner assault—such deaths during the period of this report include deaths of strangers, friends, family members, and intervening law enforcement.

NEW PARTNER DEATH —

Incident where the decedent either was, or was believed by the perpetrator to be, the new partner of the perpetrator's former intimate partner.

ICADV DEFINES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A PATTERN OF COERCIVE OR ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR IN A RELATIONSHIP THAT IS USED TO GAIN AND/OR MAINTAIN POWER AND CONTROL OVER AN INTIMATE PARTNER



METHODOLOGY

The Indiana Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (INDVFRT) was created by statute in 2017 and officially convened in November of 2019.

THE INDVFRT IS TASKED, PER HOUSE ENROLLED ACT 1516, WITH THREE PRIMARY DUTIES;

- 1.** identifying trends and fact patterns concerning deaths due to domestic violence in Indiana,
- 2.** using the data gathered in identifying trends and patterns to recommend strategies for the prevention of injuries to and deaths of domestic violence victims, and
- 3.** to advise and educate the general assembly, governor, and public on the status of domestic violence fatalities in Indiana.

Membership on the INDVFRT is guided by state statute and appointed by the office of Governor Holcomb based on recommendations from the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV). A complete list of INDVFRT members is included in the acknowledgments of this report. It includes both current members and previous members whose appointment terms ended. The focus for this review period is fatalities occurring from January 1 through December 31, 2020.

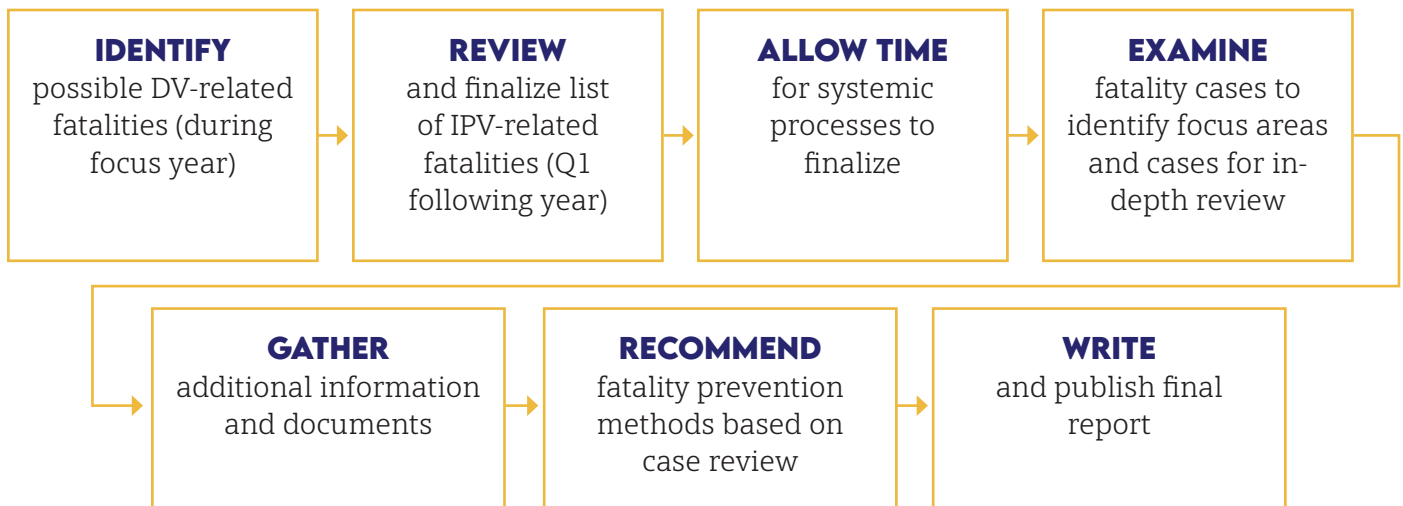
Deaths related to intimate partner violence occurring in 2020 were initially identified primarily through media research and stakeholder reports. ICADV utilizes a number of media search services, receiving regular notifications of all web-based reports that include keywords related to intimate partner or domestic violence. Additionally, community-based advocates working in domestic violence service provider agencies notify ICADV when deaths related to intimate partner violence are identified in their service areas. ICADV staff members

compile a list of these deaths annually and submit the draft list to service providers statewide for review, correction, and addition, if needed. The final list is reviewed and revised by ICADV staff and provided to the INDVFRT as an initial data-gathering tool.

Using that final list of domestic violence-related deaths, ICADV staff and INDVFRT members worked to collect official data sources to validate information about the dynamics and circumstances around each incident provided by media accounts. ICADV staff conducted internet searches for public records and solicited case information from key informants. Specific data sources used in the compilation of this report include coroner's verdicts, autopsy reports, law enforcement reports, court records, appellate records, community fatality review team records, and information provided by community domestic violence advocates.

Following comprehensive discussion focused on various trends and factors identified in the relationships and/or incidents, the INDVFRT selected certain incidents for in-depth review. Following case selection, additional information and documentation was collected to establish a robust record of each incident and the antecedent relationship for the team to examine and discuss. Case review was conducted with the sole intent to identify opportunities within the progression of circumstances that lead to the fatal incident where intervention may have changed the ultimate outcome. Discussion of those opportunities ultimately lead to the crafting of recommended actions at all levels of our public lives to prevent future fatalities. Based on the seven (7) cases from 2020 that were selected for in-depth review, the INDVFRT drafted a total of 19 recommended actions that cross multiple sectors of public response to intimate partner violence.

REPORT PROCESS



SUMMARY OF DATA

Looking broadly at the fatalities related to intimate partner violence during the calendar year 2020, the INDVIRT identified overarching similarities among the cases. These similarities can inform initial efforts to prevent future fatalities. The most glaring and consistent trend is that firearms are overwhelmingly the manner of death most often seen in intimate partner violence-related fatalities. In 2020, 72%, or 66 of 91 fatalities were due to firearms. These include both homicides and suicides; single and multiple fatality cases; the deaths of victims, partners causing harm, and bystanders. The Violence

Policy Center, a national nonprofit organization that researches trends in violence across the country, indicates that approximately 53% of intimate partner violence-related homicides across the country are committed with firearms. Indiana has consistently averaged 70-80% of our intimate partner violence-related fatalities due to firearms. Ours is 20% higher than the national average. More than any other broad trend, that is the most pervasive and most preventable. The included infographic provides a brief overview of other summarized data regarding the fatalities the INDVIRT identified and reviewed.

72% IN 2020, **72%**, OR 66 OF 91 FATALITIES WERE DUE TO FIREARMS

53% APPROXIMATELY **53%** OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE-RELATED HOMICIDES ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE COMMITTED WITH FIREARMS

20% INDIANA AVERAGES **20%** HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR FIREARM DEATHS DUE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITIES

JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2020

The Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Indiana Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team want to provide some brief insight into deaths related to intimate partner violence for the given time period. The authors acknowledge that this information represents only those deaths which are identified and known and that there are more losses that are not known to us. Particularly for the given time period, which includes the start of and height of the COVID-19 pandemic and public health crisis response that included lockdown and isolation measures to contain the spread of the virus, the authors strongly believe that the number of unidentified ipv-related fatalities is significant. We encourage the reader to use this information with compassion and empathy. Survivors of intimate partner violence continue to express that messaging around domestic violence death statistics can be triggering and harmful to their healing process. Statistically, fatal incidents are outliers; a tragic but small piece of the puzzle. When we discuss domestic violence only in the context of deadly incidents, we are minimizing the breadth and scope of non-lethal, non-physical forms of violence that survivors experience daily. Please view this graphic as one chapter of the full story.

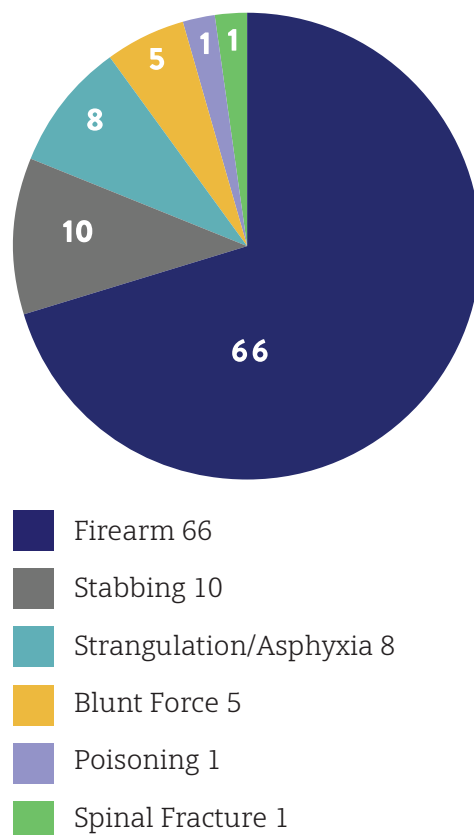
91 FATALITIES RESULTING FROM
72 INCIDENTS

GENDER OF DESCENDANT

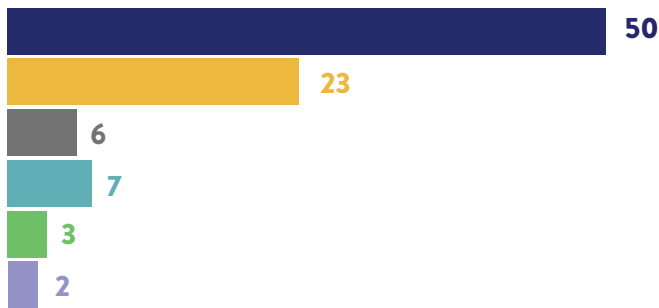


*Please note, the gender reported is based on publicly available sources and typically corresponds to the gender assigned at birth, not necessarily the gender identity each person may have been expressing at the time of their death.

MANNER OF FATAL INJURY



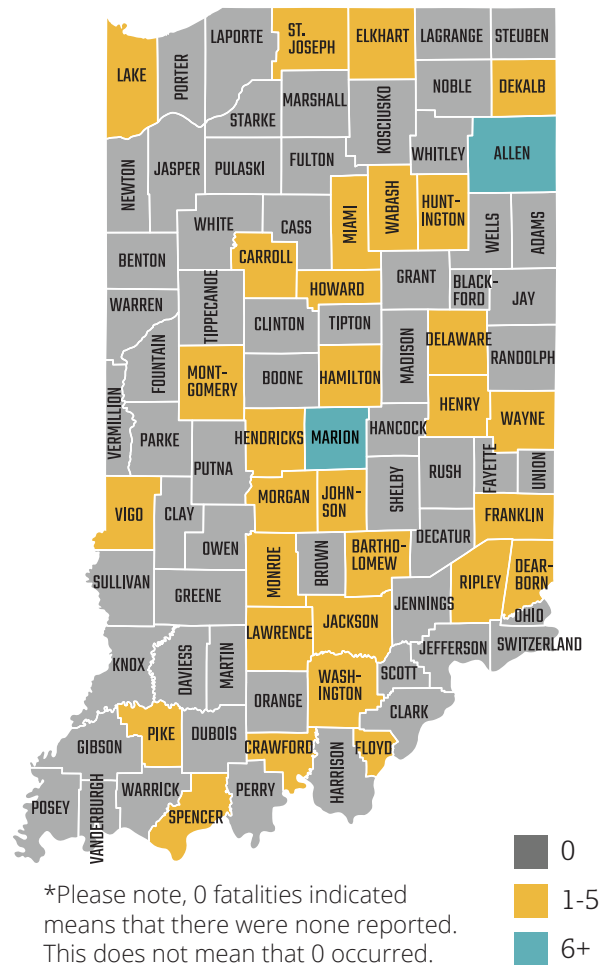
RELATIONSHIP TO PERPETRATOR



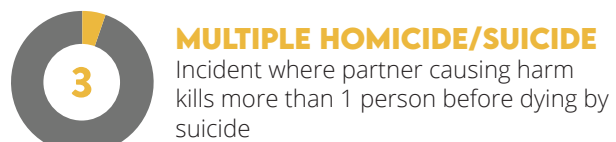
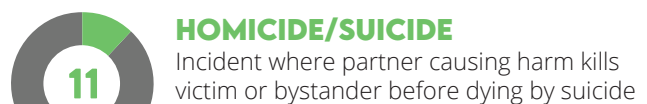
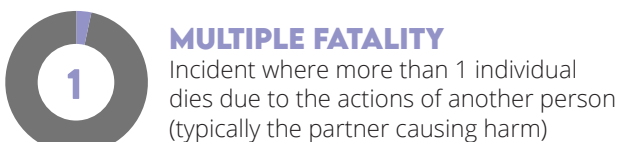
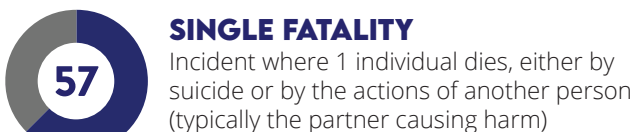
- Current Or Former Intimate Partner
- Self/Perpetrator
- Bystander
- Children
- Unknown/Undetermined
- New Partner (following separation)

*Unknown/Undetermined relationship to perpetrator indicates that, while the death occurred during the course of a confirmed incident of domestic violence, the authors could not find sufficient information to make an accurate determination of the decedent's relationship to any party and choose to err on the side of caution.

FATALITIES BY COUNTY



TYPE OF FATAL INCIDENT



RECOMMENDATIONS

During our 2023 review year, the INDVFRT not only reviewed broad data having to do with domestic violence-related fatalities, but also conducted in-depth reviews of specific cases that allowed us to examine particular factors that may have contributed to the death or deaths in those cases. Taking this holistic approach to attempting to understand how a relationship can end in the worst possible outcome allows the team to generate recommendations, written from our combined expertise, that could prevent future deaths related to intimate partner violence. When drafting and issuing these recommendations, we believe it is critical to uplift survivor-centered and trauma-informed approaches to addressing intimate partner violence. It is in creating community-level and systems-level change that we can provide safer and better options and outcomes for survivors of intimate partner violence. The recommendations below are categorized by the system or community in which the recommendation should be implemented or by which implementation should be led.

STATE LEGISLATURE

1. The Indiana legislature should provide additional appropriate funding to support staffing in designated domestic violence service programs to increase the collaborative on-scene service provision with hospitals/forensic exam programs and the Indiana Department of Child Services, among other possible partners.
2. The Indiana legislature should provide additional adequate funding to county prosecuting attorneys' offices to support the work of investigators specifically tasked with more complete investigation into the criminal history, status, disposition, and other risk factors involving those accused of or adjudicated as guilty of crimes of domestic violence.
3. The Indiana legislature should expand funding supporting the use of forensic exams to support conducting such exams in domestic violence assaults that do not include sexual assault.
4. The Indiana legislature should amend the statutes providing for civil Orders for Protection and criminal No Contact Orders to clarify and strengthen the speed and process of enforcement when those orders are violated.
5. The Indiana legislature should enact more effective statutes that address the epidemic of firearm violence in Indiana, particularly as it relates to access to firearms by those who pose an identified and adjudicated risk to their intimate partners.

STATE AGENCIES

1. The Indiana Department of Child Services should broaden the use of supportive service referrals, especially in informal adjustment and unsubstantiated cases, that would immediately connect survivors involved with Department of Child Services reports/interventions with direct survivor-centered and trauma-informed advocacy services.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE PROVIDERS

1. Domestic violence service providers should explore opportunities to collaborate with other crisis intervention and trauma support community agencies to offer increased support to the families and support systems of survivors of intimate partner violence.

WE BELIEVE IT IS CRITICAL TO UPLIFT SURVIVOR-CENTERED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

1. Indiana Probation Departments should develop a protocol for identifying and prioritizing program violations committed by high-risk domestic violence offenders that includes immediate and adequate consequences for violation.
2. Indiana law enforcement departments and probation agencies should identify ways to increase data-sharing regarding cases involving identified high-risk domestic violence offenders.
3. Indiana law enforcement agencies should emphasize already-mandated ongoing training for all officers focused on effective and appropriate crisis de-escalation and response to mental health and/or substance use incidents.
4. Indiana law enforcement agencies should emphasize already-mandated ongoing training for all officers on intimate partner and sexual violence, focused on trauma-informed intervention skills.
5. Indiana county criminal justice systems should implement a domestic violence high-risk team or other collaborative response model that can assist in identifying cases where extremely high-risk lethality factors are present, and provide collaborative response services and intervention in those cases.
6. Indiana court systems should regularly review the Protection Order Deskbook for information on best practices surrounding the handling of Orders for Protection.
7. Indiana court systems should review their policies and procedures regarding civil Orders of Protection to ensure there are no barriers to filing petitions, no impediments in the court process to ruling on ex parte orders, no obstacles to service of the order, and that Orders for Protection are treated as emergencies and are addressed as quickly as possible.

8. Indiana court systems, prosecutors' offices, and law enforcement agencies should explore and implement models of streamlined collaborative response to violations of civil Orders for Protection and criminal No Contact Orders.
9. Attorneys employed in county prosecutor offices should receive both foundational and ongoing training in domestic violence and trauma-informed legal services.
10. Indiana courts should adopt formalized firearm surrender protocols for all cases where an individual is adjudicated as barred from possessing a firearm in order to facilitate the safe removal of firearms from those individuals' possession.

HEALTH CARE

1. Hospitals with forensic exam programs should explore collaborative relationships with local domestic violence service providers to support an immediate direct connection to survivor-centered advocacy services for patients seeking forensic exams who indicate a relationship with the person who (allegedly) assaulted them.
2. Health care systems should provide greater support on all fronts — financial, administrative, resources etc. — to sustain the implementation and ongoing provision of forensic exams in all intimate partner and sexual violence cases.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the coordinating agency for the Indiana Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, ICADV expresses our profound gratitude both to past members of the INDVFRT whose terms have expired and also to our continuing and current members for their contributions to the research, case reviews, and drafting of this report.

CURRENT TEAM MEMBERS

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- **Amy Blackett**, JD – Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- **Kim Bohman** – Safe Passage, Inc
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- **Kelly L Owens** – Indiana Department of Child Services
- **Jamie Smith** – Indiana Department of Health – Division of Fatality Review & Prevention
- **Cory Whaley** – Lawrence Police Department

FORMER TEAM MEMBERS

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- **Melissa Haaff** – Hope's Voice
- **Terri Lee**, MPH – Indiana Department of Health – Office of Women's Health
- **Tiffany Woods** – Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THOSE AGENCIES INCLUDE

- Bartholomew County Coroner's Office
- Delaware County Coroner's Office
- Hamilton County Coroner's Office
- Huntington County Coroner's Office
- Lake County Coroner's Office
- Marion County Coroner's Office
- Vigo County Coroner's Office
- Columbus Police Dept
- Fishers Police Dept
- Huntington Police Dept
- Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Dept
- Muncie Police Dept
- South Bend Police Dept
- Terre Haute Police Dept
- Vigo Co Sheriff's Dept
- Indiana State Police Dept – Jasper Region
- Indiana Department of Child Services

ICADV also wishes to acknowledge the work of community-based fatality review teams throughout the state of Indiana. The dedication and collaboration of all team members is crucial to our ability as a community to end the trauma of intimate partner violence.

And, finally, a very heartfelt and profound thank you to ICADV Operations Coordinator Kelly Grey for her indispensable help at every stage of researching and creating the 2020 Indiana Domestic Violence Fatality Review Report. Without her intelligence, compassion, and three extra sets of hands, this report would not exist.

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