

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, MARYLAND
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW TEAM (DVFRT)

2004-2008 CUMULATIVE REPORT

Part I. Executive Summary

Background

In October, 2003, the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) received a grant from the State of Maryland/Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention which had received funding from the federal Office on Violence Against Women in order to organize and develop a local pilot Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT). Anne Arundel County, Maryland, was chosen to pilot the project based on the active role of the Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council. Anne Arundel County State's Attorney Frank Weathersbee was contacted by the MNADV and asked to sponsor the pilot project and provide leadership for the creation of the first such team in Maryland. The team is proud to say we are entering our fifth year of reviews, and are expanding our reviews to include domestic violence related suicides, as well as select felony domestic violence cases where there is a potentially high risk of lethality and also cases that highlight common domestic violence issues and concerns.

Purpose of Fatality Review

Domestic Violence fatalities rob life from victims as well as inflict a profound loss to the surviving family and friends. Far too often domestic violence fatalities can be avoided with proper attention and intervention from a host of government agencies, private programs and health care professionals. With the concentrated efforts of the participating agencies, we hope to provide a framework in which to substantially decrease these numbers in years to come.

Purpose of Document

This multi-year report of the Anne Arundel County DVRT is meant to report the progress of the team having completed five years of reviews. The overall goal of the team is to identify areas in which those individuals and agencies that interact with victims of DV can improve, refine and increase the level of service in order to prevent DV fatalities.

As stated in the first annual report, there may be no measure of the effectiveness of the team. The resulting improvement by all agencies and service providers to DV victims, however, will be cause enough to justify our efforts, and possibly prevent needless deaths.

Team Mission Statement

The mission of the Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team is to reduce the incidence of domestic violence, to prevent the occurrence of domestic violence fatalities, and to improve the quality of life for victims of domestic violence and their families. The team will pursue its mission by committing itself to find antecedent causes of domestic violence fatalities, by seeking to improve the coordinated community response to domestic violence, by holding abusers accountable for their actions, by recommending improvements in the criminal justice systems and civil systems that serve victims of abuse, by educating county institutions and citizens in the manner they should view domestic abuse, and by seeking to ensure compliance with its recommendations. In carrying out its mission of heightened community response, the Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team hopes to free victims of domestic abuse and their families from the cycle of violence and empower them to pursue their lives without the burden of abuse.

Part 2. Team Composition, Growth and Changes

Participating Agencies

- Anne Arundel County Office of the State's Attorney
- Anne Arundel County Police Department
- Anne Arundel County Sheriff's Office
- Annapolis Police Department
- Maryland State Police
- Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services
- Anne Arundel County Department of Health
- Anne Arundel Medical Center
- North Arundel Hospital
- Division of Parole and Probation
- YWCA Domestic Violence Program and Sexual Assault Crisis Center
- Anne Arundel County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

Part 3. Scope of Reviews

The DVFRT reviews any adult fatality, whether a homicide, suicide or combination of homicide(s) and suicide, or attempted murder, with an indication of domestic violence as a contributing factor involving the victim (s), the perpetrator, or third parties. Occasional select serious first degree assaults will be reviewed if they contain pertinent lethality indicators that demonstrate patterns or issues relevant to the DVFRT's work in addressing and preventing domestic violence homicides.

For the purpose of reviews, domestic violence is defined as emotional or physical abuse perpetrated by a person against another person with whom the perpetrator has or has had an intimate relationship or with whom the perpetrator resides or has resided.

Child fatalities may be considered for review by the team if the Case Screening Committee determines the review by the legislatively mandated Child Fatality Review Committee does not consider domestic violence factors in the case.

Reviews will be limited to adjudicated criminal cases, even though the appellate and/or post convictions may not have been initiated. In the cases involving suicide, any law enforcement investigation must be closed.

Part 4. 2004-2007 Statistics/Comparisons of Cases Reviewed

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Murder	5	6	4	3	1
Murder/Suicide	2	3	2	1	0
Suicide	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Attempted Murder	N/A	N/A	4	0	0
Totals	7	9	10	4	2

(statistics above do not include first degree assault cases reviewed)

Ave. Age of Male Perpetrator	41.5	44.6	49.3	25.7	42.5
Ave. Age of Female perpetrator	57 (one)	35 (one)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ave Age of M decedent (homicide)	63.5	52.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ave Age of F decedent (homicide)	45.2	43.8	50.3	32.3	35
Ave Age of M suicide	39.5	55.6	61	N/A	32
Ave Age of F suicide	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sex of Perpetrator: Male	80%	85%	100%	100%	100%
Sex of Perpetrator: Female	20%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Sex of decedents (homicide)					
Male	17%	29%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Female	83%	71%	100%	100%	100%
Location of offense:					
Shared Home	60%	71%	40%	0%	75%
Female's Home	40%	N/A	40%	100%	25%
Weapons:					
Firearms	80%	57.1%	50%	25%	25%

Sharp Instrument	20%	14.3%	40%	0%	25%
Strangulation	0%	14.3%	0%	50%	0%
Other	0%	14.3%	10%	25%	0%
Relationship					
Husband/Wife	20%	71%	20%	0%	60%
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	40%	14.5%	70%	75%	20%
Husband/Wife estranged	40%	0%	10%	25%	20%
History					
Previous Police Contact	40%	29%	20%	50%	50%
Protective/Peace orders	20%	0%	10%	25%	50%
No Service Provider Contact	60%	100%	90%	100%	50%

Part 5. Findings and Recommendations

The Anne Arundel County DVFRT was created to review domestic violence homicides by assessing and analyzing individual cases in order to prevent future domestic homicides. In our attempt to achieve this goal, the team agreed that we should work to provide more effective responses to domestic violence situations, holding participating agencies responsible without attaching the stigma of blame.

With these goals in mind, specific systemic shortfalls were identified based on the cases reviewed:

Finding: Analysis of the cases reveals that there are a disturbing number of military personnel returning from overseas conflict who are experiencing episodes of domestic violence. At least one of these episodes resulted in a tragic fatality. The phenomenon of “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” is being cited as a factor in the root cause behind the violence. In addition, first responders on the team report they are receiving more reports of abuse from military spouses, although frequently the cases are not criminally prosecuted. The Team is concerned that additional episodes of violence, which always have the potential of becoming fatal, will become more prevalent unless the trend is addressed.

Recommendation:

The DVFRT will ask Frank Weathersbee, in conjunction with Anne Arundel County Police Chief James Teare, to alert high level commanders in Maryland at various military installations as to the growing trend in

order to highlight concern. In addition, Anne Arundel Medical Center has provided a list of Anne Arundel County treatment providers that specialize in treatment of the disorder of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is the Team's hope that contact with high level commanders via important law enforcement agencies will raise awareness sufficient to provide impetus to accelerate referrals so that treatment occurs prior to additional outbreaks of domestic violence.

Finding: Multiple front line providers are seeing that the current economic conditions are affecting more than ever the situational circumstances of domestic violence victims. While the victim's financial state has always been a relevant factor in the level of victim cooperativeness and desire to access the legal system, recent hard times have victims weighing their interest in seeking help versus the reality of a difficult economy. Victims are worrying about the Defendants making bail and being able to pay for a lawyer, at a time when safety planning and intervention are critical. In addition, when front line providers make referrals for victims, the victims are very concerned with the potential cost, even in situations where the fees might be pro-rated or waived. Victims are dropping out of programs, or, not completing them for reasons directly attributable to financial instability. Ironically, the specific urgency of financial considerations brought on by the national deteriorating economy has not yet manifested itself in a tangible way visible in the Board's case analysis, probably because the case review does not occur until well after the cases have been closed by law enforcement agencies.

Recommendation:

It is the Board's intention to be proactive, and not merely reactive, to address emerging trends that affect front line service providers and their ability to address immediate safety concerns. Inaction or a lack of concern to current issues faced by victims could well affect the success of intervention that could prevent a fatality. It was brought to the attention of the Board that the YWCA was currently in the process of sponsoring specific initiatives designed to help women improve their financial circumstances and ultimately empower them to be less dependent on others. It was decided, after consultation with the YWCA, that the Board will collaborate with the front line providers to make a referral to the financial improvement programs currently sponsored by the YWCA. If the financial issues are being addressed, victims facing danger from domestic violence might be free to address the more pressing issue of staying safe.

Respectfully submitted,

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Violence Fatality Review Team