

## **Frederick County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team 2008 Annual Report**

On February 7, 2008, the Frederick County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team held the first team meeting. During the meeting, the proposed team protocol was discussed and approved. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all partnering agencies committing full participation and consistent representation to Review Team meetings. As a result of that community commitment, five domestic violence fatality cases were reviewed in 2008. Based on these five case reviews, the following concerns and suggested recommendations were identified.

**2008 Frederick County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team  
Participating Agencies**

- **State's Attorney for Frederick County**
- **Frederick County Sheriff's Office**
- **Frederick Police Department**
- **Maryland State Police**
- **Frederick Memorial Hospital**
- **Frederick County Health Department**
- **Department of Parole and Probation**
- **Heartly House**
- **Frederick County Department of Social Services**
- **Catoctin Counseling**

**Mission Statement**

**The mission of the Frederick County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team is to prevent domestic related deaths and to humanize those who have died. To achieve its mission, the team will review a person's life and death and make recommendations to improve the community's response to domestic violence.**

**Frederick County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team  
2008 Fatality Review Statistics**

Average age of male perpetrator	43
Average age of female perpetrator	N/A
Average of male decedent (homicide)	9.5
Average age of female decedent (homicide)	28
Average age of male suicide	49
Average age of female suicide	N/A
Sex of perpetrator	100% Male
Sex of decedents (without suicide included)	71% Female 29% Male
Sex of decedents (including suicide rates)	55% Male 45% Female
Location of Offense	60% Shared home 20% Perpetrator's home 20% Public location
Weapons used	50% Firearm 40% Blunt object
Relationship	20% Husband/Wife 20% Boyfriend/Girlfriend 40% Husband/Wife Estranged 20% were suicides
History	50% Previous contact with police 20% Protective/Peace Orders (active at time) 20% No known service provider contact

## FREDERICK COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW TEAM

### 2008 RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. **Fatality Risk during Separation/Divorce**

**Concern:** The process of separation or divorce is emotionally charged and especially dangerous when there have been previous incidents of domestic abuse. Issues of child custody, financial strain, questions of infidelity, along with possible addiction or mental health diagnoses may contribute to a dangerous situation becoming a fatal situation. Couples involved in ending a relationship may not be aware of risk factors associated with this process.

**Recommendations:**

1. Family law attorneys need specific education and training to increase their sensitivity and understanding of the high risk of fatality present during the legal process of separation and divorce. As attorneys become educated they, in turn, can educate their clients regarding the risks.
2. The DVFRT can further investigate resources that might currently be in place that provide support and education to these couples. Additionally, the team can develop a program that can be offered to Frederick County residents that would provide information such as risk factors and indicators associated with lethality, safety planning, indicators of decompensation, community resources, and self care.

#### 2 **Ongoing Child Support Cases**

**Concern:** After a person has left an abusive relationship, ongoing child support cases can be used as a tactic of abuse. Perpetrators of abuse can use the court system as a means of continued and frequent contact with the victim; as a way of draining the victim's finances through attorney and court fees, and as an attempt to disrupt the victim's employment with missed work for court appearances.

**Recommendations:** Family law attorneys need to be trained in how to refer clients to the Frederick County States Attorneys office, Child Support Division. Attorneys should recognize that child support issues can be used as a continuation of abuse.

### 3. **Generational Domestic Abuse**

**Concern:** The majority of cases reviewed, (4 of 5), included minor children as family members. Children witnessing domestic abuse are at increased risk to be involved in abusive relationships as adults. Law enforcement agencies are responding to households where intimate partner violence is occurring between couples from different generations. Follow up services are not always offered to surviving children.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continued efforts to educate families and the Frederick community about domestic abuse and the generational cycle. Education efforts should be focused on schools, churches/worship centers and businesses.
2. Department of Social Services Child Protective Services should be notified by law enforcement of all fatalities whose families include minor children. The child protective worker should provide linkages to community resources and referrals to resources outside of Frederick, if the child has relocated.

### 4 **Emergency Petition Follow Up**

**Concern:** Due to privacy laws there is limited sharing of information surrounding emergency petitions (EPs) among community professionals and first responders. Follow up services could be offered if the local hospital can secure valid release of information forms from the patient. Local law enforcement agencies represented on this team are especially concerned about service calls for domestic incidents and possible return of weapons when there has been a recent EP. The Division of Parole and Probation does not find out about EPs unless the person chooses to tell them.

**Recommendations:**

1. Create a system that would allow very limited information about EPs to be accessed by law enforcement agencies and parole and probation agents.
2. FMH will attempt to secure release of information forms from EP patients to link them to community mental health and substance abuse programs.