

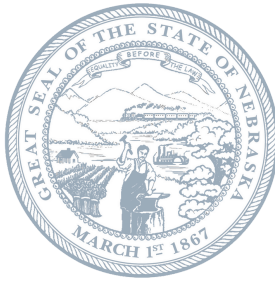
# **Nebraska Domestic Abuse Death Review Team**

*2024 Annual Report*

Nebraska Attorney General's Office

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Domestic abuse, especially abuse that leads to death, is a terrible wrong. Fighting domestic abuse, giving voice to victims, and helping to prevent future abuse is one of the most worthwhile goals of our community.

We are proud to play a positive role in the fight against domestic violence, and the work of our office's Domestic Abuse Review Team is meant to achieve two primary functions. The first is to provide a voice for victims by learning their stories. And the second is to fight to reduce the incidence of abuse moving forward.

Our Coordinator gathers information from the family and friends of the victim to help identify trends and patterns in domestic violence deaths. Our multi-faceted Team, which includes law enforcement, nurses, advocates, and mental health providers, helps review this information. This work funnels into the report before you, is designed to help inform policy-makers on solutions.

On behalf of our entire Team, I express my deep gratitude to those families of victims who have helped us in this work. We know that the participation of remaining family members can be deeply difficult. Revisiting a sorrowful loss and remembering and sharing responsively with our Team can be painful and emotionally difficult.

Thank you for your interest in this important fight.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Hilgers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mike Hilgers  
Nebraska Attorney General

# Introduction

In 2020 and 2021, Hailey Christensen and Brooke Koch were murdered by their partners in Nebraska. In the wake of their deaths, their families advocated for the passage of LB1009, which created the Domestic Abuse Death Review Act. Family members testified before the Judiciary Committee of the Nebraska Legislature and collaborated with Senator Tom Brandt, the Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, the Women's Fund of Omaha, and the Nebraska Attorney General's Office. The Act went into effect on July 21, 2022.

This year's Report from the Nebraska Domestic Abuse Death Review Team (DADRT) highlights work undertaken from July 21, 2022 to July 1, 2024. The Team represents one part of the State's efforts to address domestic abuse and improve the safety and lives of Nebraska residents.

## **DADRT Mission:**

Comprised of a diverse group of professionals and survivors, we examine all domestic abuse deaths statewide. By examining the causes and contributing factors to these deaths, the Team will provide recommendations for public, private, community, and system improvements to enhance victim safety and prevent future domestic abuse fatalities.

## **DADRT Vision:**

The Team envisions safe communities where public and private agencies, institutions, and systems work collaboratively to support survivors and ultimately reduce domestic abuse fatalities.

## **DADRT Guiding Principles:**

- The Team focuses its work on honoring victims, families, and communities impacted by domestic violence.
- Reviews are conducted with respect, integrity, sensitivity, and compassion.
- The Team values survivor-led leadership.
- The Team refrains from making accusations of blame or fault-finding.

# DADRT Timeline

<b>July 24, 2020</b>	Hailey Christensen was murdered by her partner in Norfolk, Nebraska.
<b>April 6, 2021</b>	Brooke Koch was murdered by her former partner in Blue Springs, Nebraska.
<b>Jan-Dec 2022</b>	Family members of Brooke and Hailey collaborated with Senator Tom Brandt, the Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, the Women's Fund of Omaha, and the Nebraska Attorney General's Office to pass the Domestic Abuse Death Review Act.
<b>July 21, 2022</b>	The Domestic Abuse Death Review Act established the DADRT.
<b>Aug-Sept 2022</b>	DADRT Coordinator was hired, team members recruited, and partnership began with the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative.
<b>Oct 25-26, 2022</b>	Nebraska Attorney General's Office hosted <i>Domestic Violence Fatality Review Training</i> .
<b>Nov 2022-Jan 2023</b>	DADRT created procedures for privacy, information sharing, record procurement, case tracking process, mission and vision, and review process. The Team gathered records for finalized cases. Coordinator traveled to observe the Montana Fatality Review Team.
<b>March 29, 2023</b>	First DADRT Comprehensive Review was conducted.
<b>Feb 2024</b>	Case data was compiled for ongoing statistics.
<b>Mar 25-26, 2024</b>	Second DADRT Comprehensive Review was conducted.
<b>May 2024</b>	DADRT began collaboration with the Nebraska Violent Death Reporting System team (NVDRS) in order to identify victim suicides.

# Case Selection and Review Process

## Domestic Violence Fatalities Defined

The DADRT examines deaths that occur as a result of domestic violence. The Team may review deaths of the following four categories:

Current or  
former  
intimate  
partners

Third party to  
current/former  
intimate  
partner

Family or  
household  
members

Agency members  
responding to  
domestic  
violence

## Background

The DADRT collaborates and conducts a multidisciplinary analysis of the victims' experiences, perpetrator behaviors, and general circumstances surrounding domestic abuse deaths. Through the review process, the Team identifies contributing factors related to the decedents, perpetrators, and systems responsible for supporting, assisting, and protecting victims from domestic abuse. The collaborative efforts of the review process provide an opportunity to improve the State's response to address the needs of domestic violence victims. Domestic abuse cases are reviewed only after the criminal case has been finalized or a perpetrator's death occurs.

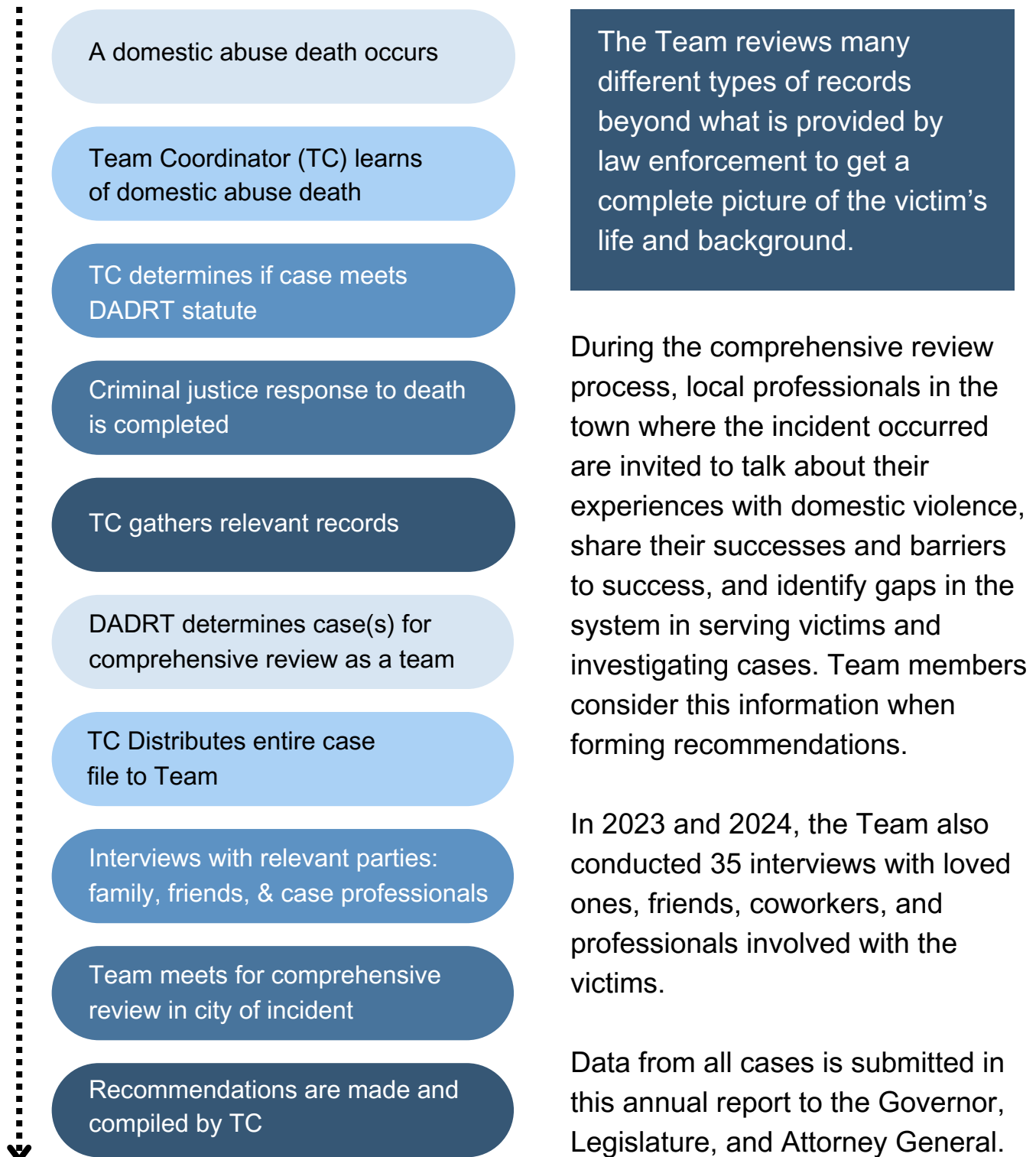
Each year, the Team conducts at least two comprehensive reviews and tracks records for all domestic abuse deaths in Nebraska. As more data is gathered, the Team will continue to gain insights to provide recommendations.

## Voices for Victims

*Throughout this report, the Team has included comments made by loved ones of victims during interviews conducted in the past two years. We hope that by including these statements, we can better convey the devastating loss domestic violence deaths cause.*

# Case Selection and Comprehensive Review

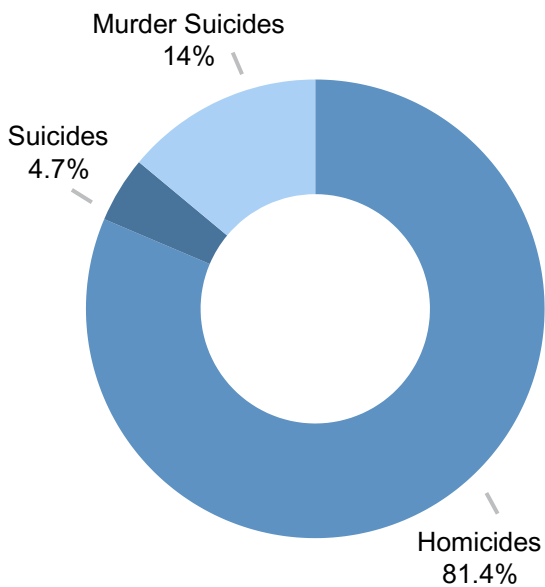
Most identified cases take over two years to finalize through the court system. After finalization, gathering relevant records for review takes at least six months, depending on the nature of the case.



# Nebraska Statistics

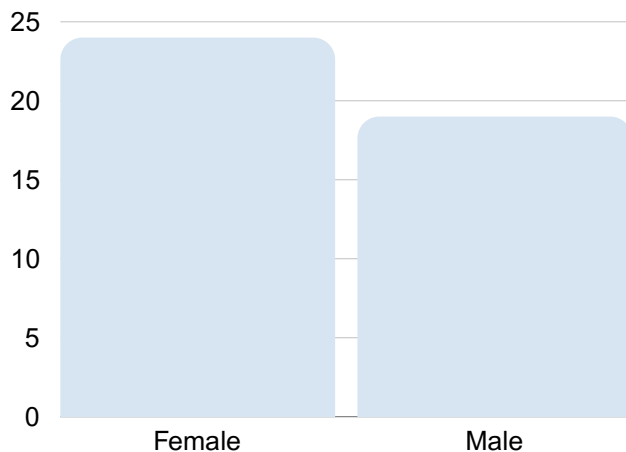
Confidentiality of victims of domestic violence remains at the forefront of the DADRT's focus. Providing detailed statistical information in this Report would identify victims and their families. Therefore, data is limited to July 21, 2022 - July 1, 2024.

## 43 Total Domestic Violence Deaths from July 21, 2022 to July 1, 2024

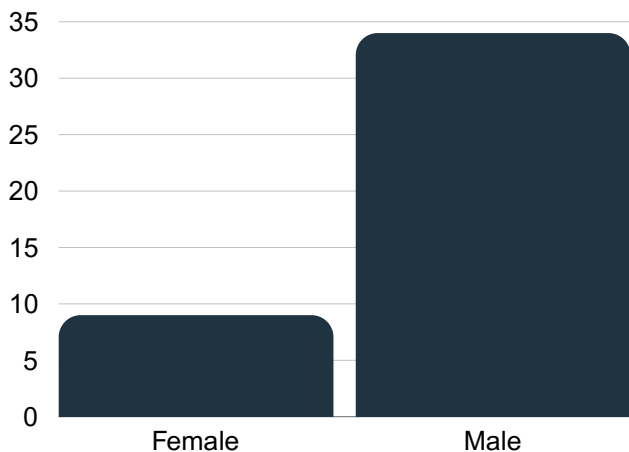


Suicides stemming from domestic violence are challenging due to the nature of investigations and the lack of a suspect being prosecuted. It may take years to identify these cases, often requiring collaboration with various agencies.

### Victims



### Perpetrators



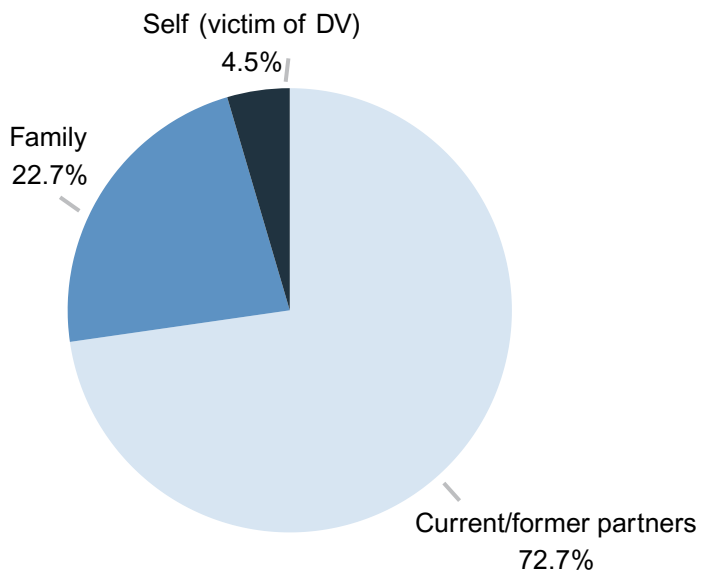
### Voices for Victims

*"She was a great person. She was always looking out for other people and never put herself first. If there was anything you needed, friend or stranger, she would do anything for that person."- Friend of Victim*

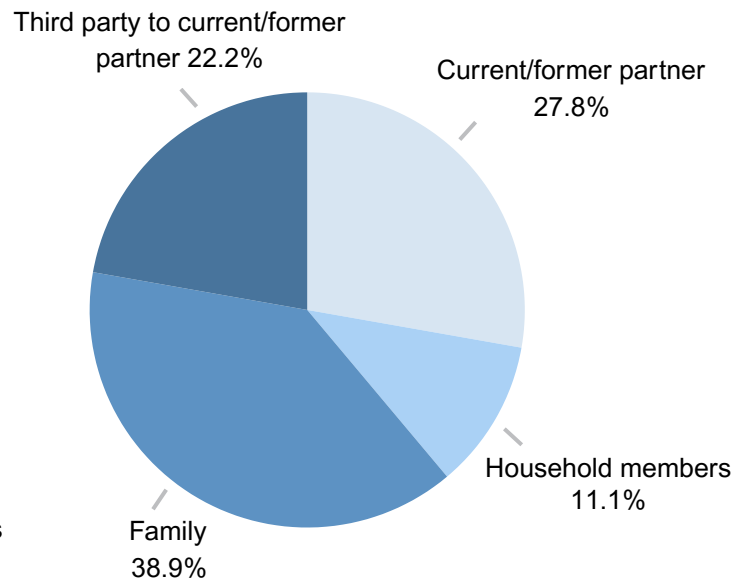


# Nebraska Statistics

## Relationship between Victim & Perpetrator (Female Victims)



## Relationship between Victim & Perpetrator (Male Victims)



In 51.2% of identified cases, there was a current or past intimate partner relationship between the perpetrator and victim. Nearly 39% of male victims had a family relationship with their perpetrator.

During the reporting period, there were no deaths of responding members of law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services, or other agencies responding to a domestic abuse incident.

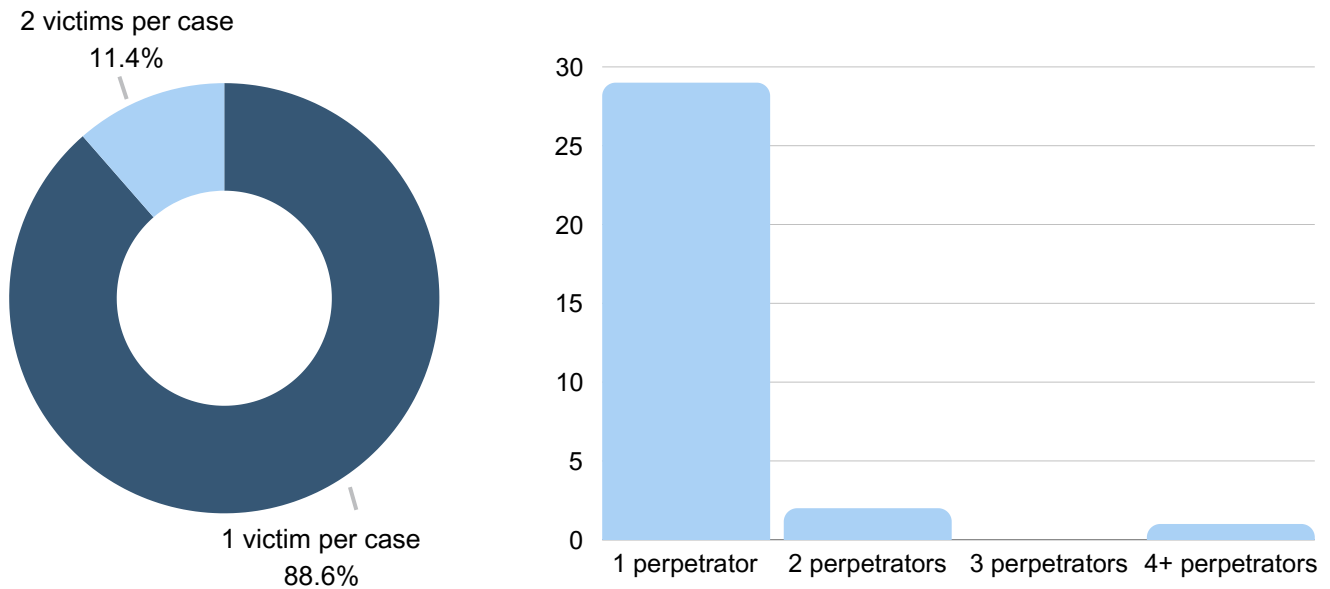
## Voices for Victims

*"I knew he had to get out of this relationship, all of his other friends talked to him... and everyone tried to convince him."- Mother of Victim*

*"Imagine how I felt, I felt very powerless, I talked to them when I saw any bruising, but in this country, grandparents don't have as many rights, so I tried to keep it peaceful to keep seeing my grandkids."- Father of Victim*

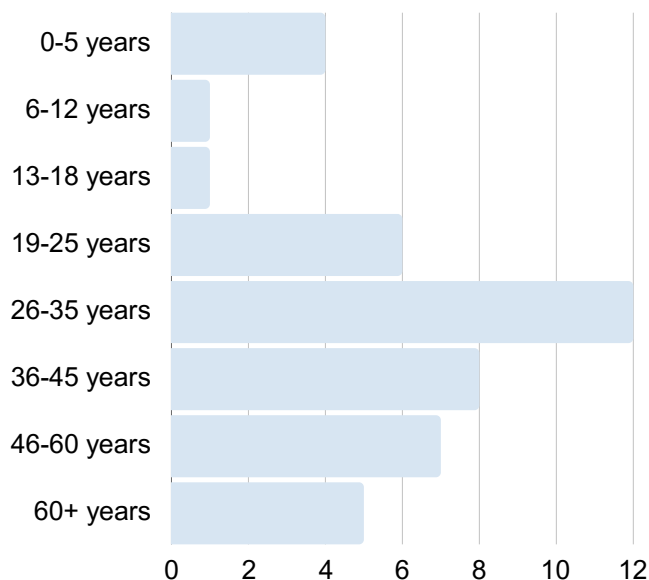
# Nebraska Statistics

## Number of Victims and Perpetrators Per Case

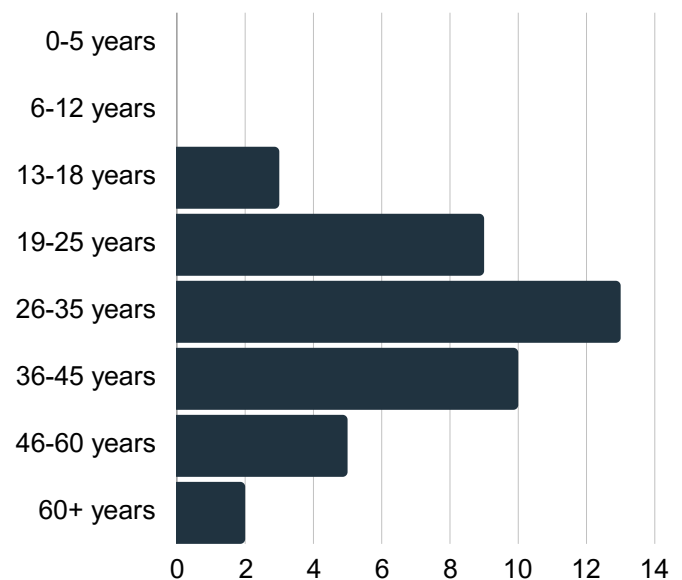


In most cases, there was only one victim killed and one perpetrator per case. During the reporting period, six murder-suicides occurred; one was a double murder-suicide. Males perpetrated 100% of the murder-suicides.

## Age of Victims



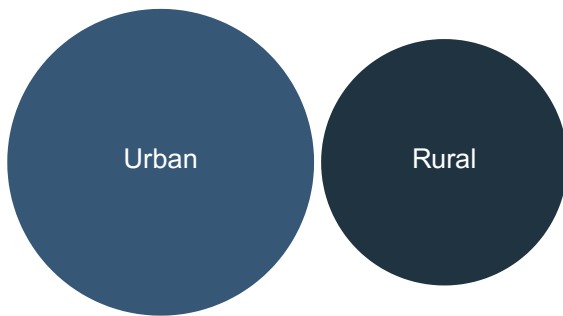
## Age of Perpetrators



Victims were most often between 26-35 years old. Perpetrators were most often between 26-45 years old. There were no perpetrators under the age of 12.

# Nebraska Statistics

## Urban Verses Rural Deaths



### Rural:

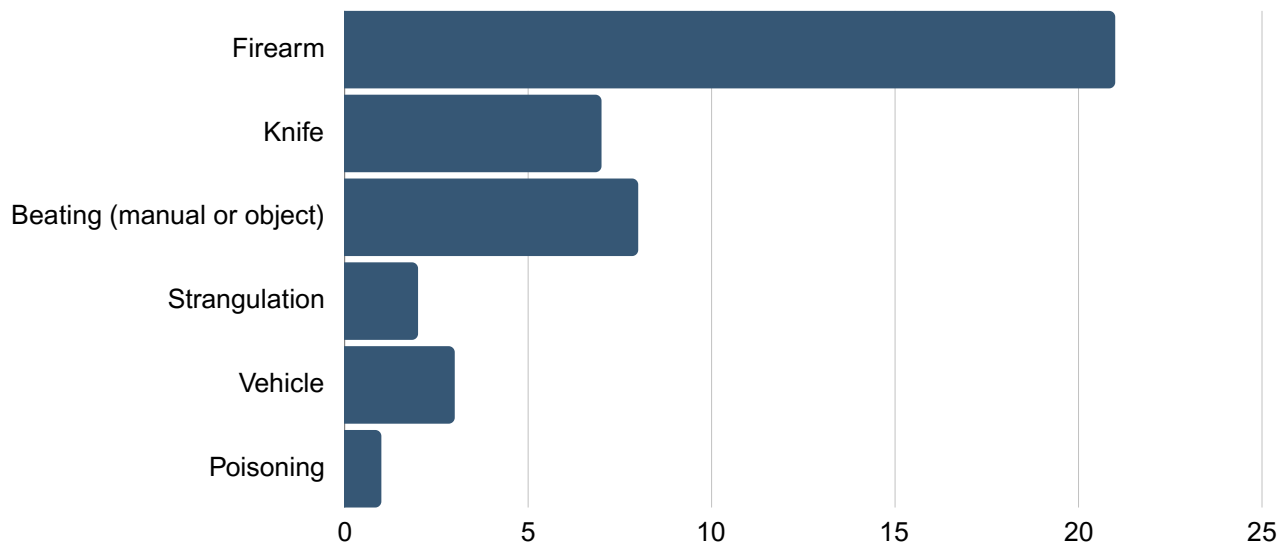
Encompasses all areas not considered urban.

### Urban:

A town or city with 20,000 or greater population.

Urban areas of Nebraska accounted for 60.8% of deaths occurred, in contrast to 39.2% of deaths occurring in rural areas of Nebraska.

## Methods of Violence during Deaths



The most common methods of violence during deaths were firearm (50%), knife (16.6%), and beating (19%). Men used firearms more often as a method of violence, and women used knives more often as a method of violence.

## Voices for Victims

*"I went and picked up the guns from the house...It was a few days before she died that she came to get the guns, and I told her he was going to kill her with that weapon." - Father of Victim*

# Items of Interest to be Monitored by the DADRT

## **Perpetrator History of Violence Toward or in Front of Children**

In both cases comprehensively reviewed, the perpetrators had a history of child abuse and neglect reports for physical abuse toward their children and had involvement with Child Protective Services. Further case review is needed to assess if more can be done to identify these violent offenders before a death occurs.

In one case reviewed, the perpetrator had five child abuse and neglect reports made that included assaulting an intimate partner in front of the children and hitting and throwing children into the wall within the three years leading up to the murder.

In a murder-suicide case review where firearms were used, violence occurring toward or in front of children was evident based on family member reports and school reports. Multiple behavior reports from the school showed the child becoming aggressive at recess, using imaginary guns, drawing a picture of a man shooting another person on his spelling test, and being aggressive with other students. These learned behaviors may be an indicator that violence was present in the home.

## **Lack of Support for Loved Ones of Deceased Victims**

After domestic violence deaths occur, ongoing support for children, family, and friends of the victims and perpetrators may be insufficient. The DADRT received feedback from friends and family members that while they were supported during the investigation and court process, that's where the support ended. Additional ongoing support may be warranted.

## **Voices for Victims**

*"There are no programs for my mom to heal, other than AA or NA. But that doesn't help with grief. Especially my poor mom, she was so beside herself, she didn't know what to do. The detectives were so great keeping her in the loop, but the loop was few and far between because of the actual time between the murder and sentencing." - Family Member of Victim*

# Items of Interest to be Monitored by the DADRT

## **Lethality Assessments**

The DADRT identified inconsistency across the state on the use of lethality assessments across disciplines, which can result in a lack of identification of victims with a high risk of lethality. In one case reviewed, several agencies in contact with the victim did not complete lethality assessments. However, the victim was very hesitant to disclose their domestic violence experiences, making it unclear whether a lethality assessment could have been effective at identifying potential danger.

The DADRT will monitor if lethality assessments are utilized in cases reviewed and their effectiveness and lack of use. The creation and implementation of a universal lethality assessment across disciplines in Nebraska may be a step toward protecting victims, but further data is needed about the use or lack of use of lethality assessments. When creating a universal tool across disciplines, it is essential to consider victim safety and information protection.

The DADRT will survey statewide agencies that serve victims and investigate domestic violence on the use of lethality assessments, as well as their feedback on the use of these tools.

## **Education for Family Members and Friends of Victims**

In both cases reviewed, friends and family of the victim and perpetrator were aware of past, current, and escalating violence. They had attempted to discuss concerns with the victim or perpetrator. Family members reported not knowing what more they could do to protect or assist the victims and their children.

## **Voices for Victims**

*“Many times I told her to split with him. I always told them that you’re always supposed to have family united, but there are times that you can’t have that unity and you can’t have the family.” - Father of Victim*

# Items of Interest to be Monitored by the DADRT

## **Firearms**

Fifty percent of domestic abuse deaths occurred by the use of a firearm. In the two cases comprehensively reviewed, both firearms were acquired and possessed legally. The DADRT would like to continue to monitor the acquirement, possession, and surrender of firearms by offenders in these cases.

Special attention will be paid to cases where offenders were convicted of a violent crime and unable to possess firearms and where offenders are issued a protection order and required to surrender firearms. Evaluation of firearm surrender and the resources needed in order to ensure surrender is needed.

## **Legal Services for Victims**

In cases comprehensively reviewed, victims experienced challenges securing funds to hire legal representation, difficulty understanding legal processes and language, experienced language barriers or were not aware of legal protections available to them. We will continue to monitor challenges to legal services for victims as more cases are reviewed.

## **Victim Suicide**

Only one victim suicide was identified during the reporting period. Based on national data, we expect additional victim suicides exist as a result of domestic violence, but these are difficult to identify.

The DADRT is currently working with the Nebraska Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) in order to better identify and track victim suicides and other domestic abuse deaths. We expect the number of identified victim suicides to increase over the next one to two years as a result of this collaboration.

The DADRT will monitor victim suicides to account for perpetrators staging homicide scenes as victim suicides. Investigators may benefit from additional training to identify cases of homicides staged as suicides.

# Items of Interest to be Monitored by the DADRT

## Looking Forward

- Over the next year, the DADRT will seek to complete at least two comprehensive reviews and gather data on at least ten additional cases.
- The DADRT will undertake specialized training on Nebraska protection orders and firearm laws pertaining to procurement, licensing, and surrender.
- The DADRT will survey statewide agencies that serve victims and investigate domestic violence on the use of lethality assessments, as well as their feedback on the use of these tools.
- The DADRT will examine the availability, effectiveness, and reach of current statewide support services for loved ones of domestic abuse homicide and suicide victims.
- The DADRT will continue to collaborate with the NVDRS to improve identification of domestic abuse deaths.
- The DADRT will survey nationwide policy and training regarding victim homicides staged as victim suicides and evaluate Nebraska's needs.

## Closing

The Nebraska Domestic Abuse Death Review Team strives to reduce domestic abuse deaths and improve support for domestic abuse victims in Nebraska. As we reflect on the last two years, we want to remember and honor all who have lost their lives to domestic abuse. We anticipate this Report and future reports may influence future policy and procedure changes.

# DADRT Members

## Nebraska Attorney General's Office

Anne Boatright, MSN, RN SANE-A FAAN  
State Forensic Nursing Coordinator

Amy Cirian, LMHP  
DADRT Coordinator

Macy Meyer  
Victim/Witness Coordinator

George Welch  
Assistant Attorney General

## Law Enforcement

Lieutenant Brent Bockstadter  
Nebraska State Patrol

Investigator Brandi Bruns  
Scottsbluff Police Department

Captain Jeremy Christensen  
Omaha Police Department

Jon Sundermeier  
Lincoln Police Department  
Retired

Sergeant Paul Koerner  
Buffalo County Sheriff's Office

## Advocacy

Hilary Wasserburger  
Executive Director  
The DOVES Program

Jamie Vetter  
Executive Director  
Family Advocacy Network

Leah Droge  
Executive Director  
Friendship Home  
*2023-2024 DADRT Member*

Christon MacTaggart  
Executive Director  
Nebraska Coalition to End  
Sexual Assault and Domestic  
Violence

Jane Cogan  
Executive Director  
Friendship Home  
*2022-2023 DADRT Member*

Ellen Reilly, PLMHP  
Assistant Vice President  
Trafficking and Violence Prevention  
Nebraska Children and Families  
Foundation

Kirby Williams, MS  
Tribal Representative



# DADRT Members

## Healthcare Professionals

Allyson Headrick, LCSW,  
Licensed Mental Health Professional

Dr. Erin Linde  
Forensic Pathologist  
Physicians Laboratory Services

Roger Robinson  
Deputy Director Programs and Services  
DHHS  
*2022-2023 DADRT Member*

Remonte Green, MPA  
Service Area Administrator  
DHHS  
*2023-2024 DADRT Member*

## Survivor Leaders

Candi Jones

Tia Manning  
MS, LMHP, PLC, LADC

Amber Harper

## Prosecution and Probation

Mike Nehe  
Domestic Violence Specialist  
Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation

Ashley Bohnet  
Deputy Lancaster County Attorney

## Appointment

Team members are appointed according to the requirements in [Nebraska Revised Statute 71-3416](#).

## A Special Thanks To:

The Nebraska Domestic Abuse Death Review Team wishes to thank all of the criminal justice and community service professionals across the State of Nebraska who assisted with the record collection necessary for conducting effective case reviews. We also wish to thank the Arizona State University Family Violence Center for their initial and ongoing assistance, support, and training as the Nebraska Domestic Abuse Death Review Team was created and as it continues to develop and grow.