

Picture was submitted by Jessica Kayse for the 2008 Survivors Art Show. Reprinted with her permission

## Interim Report of Domestic Violence Fatalities in Wood County, Ohio

Offenses Occurring between June 1991 to June 2007

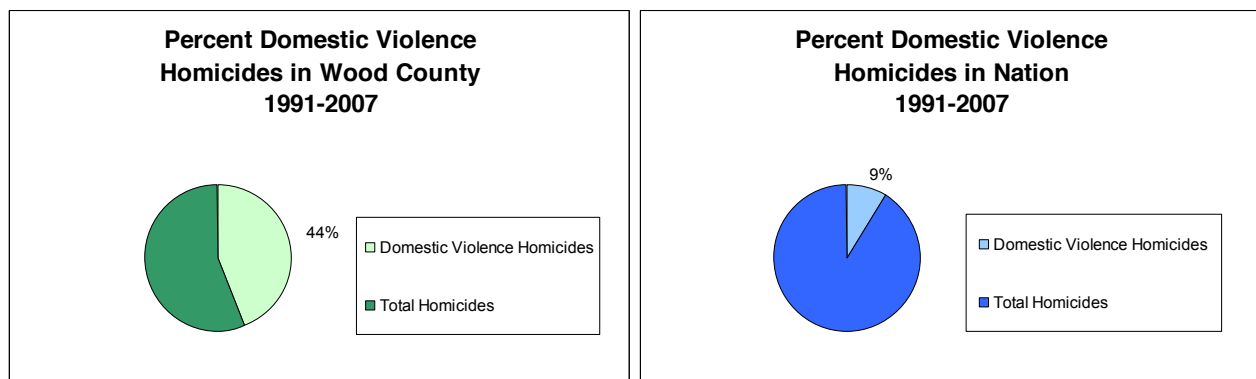
Prepared by Wood County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (FRT)  
March 2010

*FRT started meeting monthly in January 2006 to review Wood County cases of victims murdered by their intimate partners. Team membership is voluntary and based on invitation by Behavioral Connections and includes representatives from Behavioral Connections, Bowling Green Municipal Court Probation Department, Bowling Green Police Department, Bowling Green State University Institute for Child and Family Policy, Cocoon Shelter, Family Service Counseling Center, Person to Person Resources, Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Wood County Adult Probation, Wood County Job and Family Services, Wood County Common Pleas' Clerk of Courts, and The Wood County Prosecutor's Office and the Victim/Witness Division.*

*The Wood County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team would like to acknowledge the victims and surviving family members and friends.*

Domestic violence is a community issue. To be responsive to the safety issues inherent in intimate partner/domestic violence situations, the Wood County Fatality Review Team (FRT) was formed in November 2005. A domestic violence fatality review team engages in a deliberative process for identifying deaths caused by domestic violence, examining agency and community involvement with the victim and perpetrator, and exploring possible systemic changes to prevent future domestic violence related deaths. All reviewed Wood County cases are closed – any and all litigation is finished. It is not FRT’s role to reinvestigate cases or place blame. The goal is to find gaps in the system and look for high risk factors in domestic violence situations. The FRT examined each Wood County intimate partner domestic violence homicide in-depth in order to gather data and make recommendations that might prevent future homicides within the context of domestic violence and to strengthen the response of local systems.

Out of the 27 Wood County homicides that occurred from June 1991 to June 2007, 12 (44%) were domestic violence homicides compared to 9% nationally (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2004). Of the Wood County domestic violence homicides, 9 of the 12 (75%) were intimate partner homicides. Intimate partner domestic violence homicides comprised 33% (9 out of 27) of all homicides in Wood County. It should be noted that 4 of the 9 (44%) intimate partner homicides occurred in a 28 month span from December 1991 to March 1994; there were no domestic violence homicides from April 1994 to May 2002; there were 5 intimate partner domestic violence homicides from June 2002 to June 2007. (The three non-intimate partner domestic violence homicides were the 1992 murder of a child by her father during the murder of his wife and a dating partner; the 1994 homicide of a child by his father, later found not guilty by reason of insanity; and the dating partner of a victim present in the home at the time of her murder in 2007.)



### Domestic Violence

Domestic violence occurs when one person purposely causes physical and/or mental harm to a family or household member and can include family violence, child violence, sibling violence, and/or elder abuse. Intimate partner violence is a type of violence that occurs between two people who are in or have been in a close relationship, such as spouses and dating partners. In the 9 Wood County cases of domestic violence deaths reviewed, 4 victims were killed by a spouse and 5 by a dating partner. Duration of the intimate relationship ranged from 2 months to 20 years with the average relationship duration being 8 years.

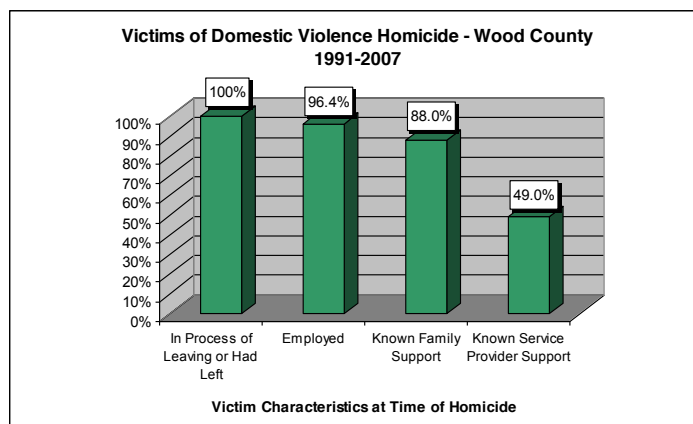
In 5 (56%) of the Wood County intimate partner homicides reviewed, a firearm was used. In the 4 (44%) remaining cases, a knife was used. In 3 of these cases, the knife was considered a weapon of opportunity. In the remaining knife case and all of the cases involving a firearm, the weapon was not a weapon of opportunity. It should be noted that the use of a knife is higher in Wood County than nationally (15%) and Ohio (14%), whereas the use of a firearm is similar to national (51%) and Ohio (45%) figures (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2004).

## Location and Time

In the 9 Wood County intimate partner homicides, 7 occurred at the victim's home and 2 occurred in a motor vehicle. Three homicides occurred in Perrysburg Township, 2 in Bowling Green, and 1 each in Pemberville, Rudolph, Weston, and Freedom Township. In the time period reviewed, no intimate partner homicides occurred on a Friday or Saturday or occurred during the summer months (June 21 to September 21). There were no other specific patterns of day or week or month when the homicides occurred.

## Victims

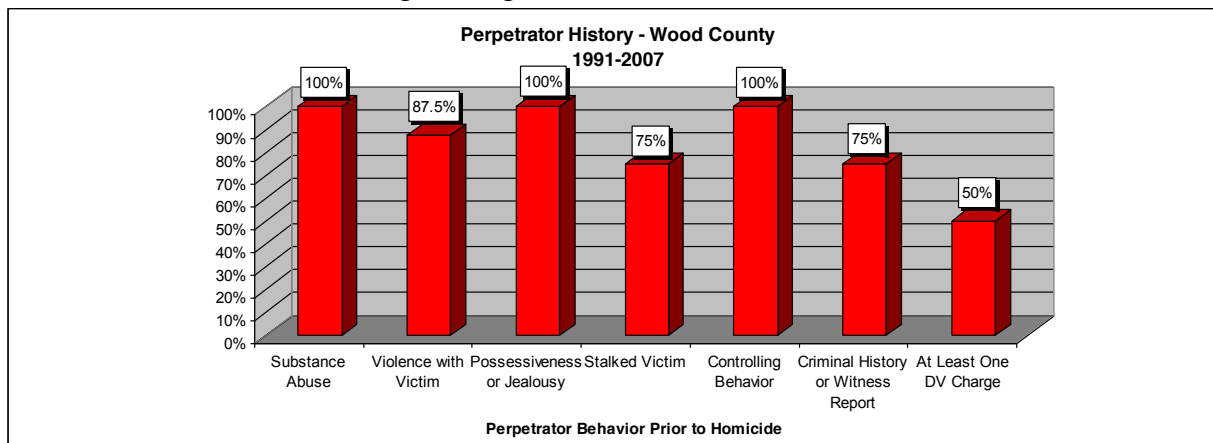
All Wood County intimate partner victims were women. Average age of the victim was 36 (range: 24-48). All of the victims in the cases reviewed were in the process of leaving or had left the perpetrator at the time of their murder. Research has indicated that the lethality risk increases during the time a victim is leaving. At the time of the murder, all but one of the victims was currently employed. In terms of support, 8 of the victims had known family support, 4 were receiving known support from a service provider.



## Perpetrators

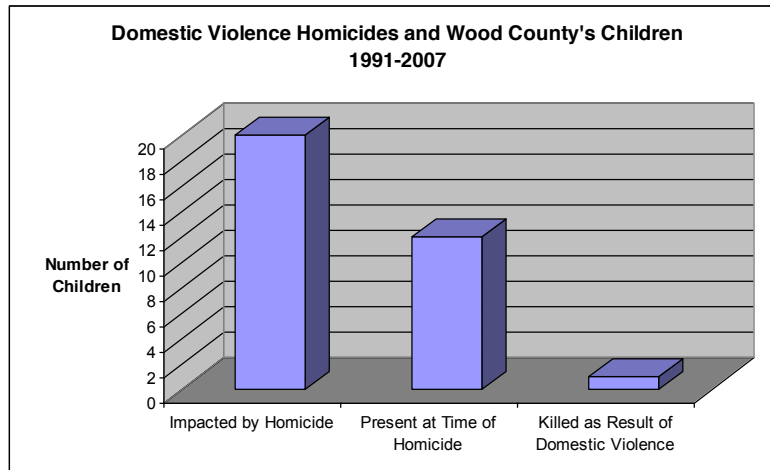
All Wood County intimate partner perpetrators were men. There were 8 perpetrators and 9 victims as one perpetrator committed two intimate partner homicides. The average age of the perpetrator was 38 (range: 30-47). Five out of the 8 perpetrators were unemployed at the time of the murder. In one instance, the perpetrator committed suicide immediately after the homicide.

All perpetrators exhibited signs of substance abuse during the relationship with 5 using alcohol at the time of the homicide. Seven of the 8 perpetrators were known to have a previous history of violence with the victim. All perpetrators exhibited a sense of possessive behavior considered to be controlling toward their victims. There were known incidences of all perpetrators exhibiting signs of jealousy, 6 exhibited stalking behavior, and 6 had a previous history of violence based on criminal history or a witness report. Collectively, 4 perpetrators had at least one domestic violence charge; charges were dismissed twice and 4 times there was a conviction.



## Children

Children are often forgotten or invisible in cases of domestic violence. In Wood County, 20 children were impacted due to the murder of their mother: 12 children were present in the home at the time of the murder, with one of the 12 children being killed. These 20 children are now without their mother. These children are most often raised by family members who have been impacted by the murder of their loved one as well.



## Wood County Response

The Cocoon Shelter, Bowling Green, Ohio

- The Cocoon Shelter is the first and only shelter for victims of domestic violence in Wood County. The Cocoon was created in 2005 in response to the domestic violence fatalities and lack of safe emergency housing in Wood County. The Cocoon exists to provide safety, healing, and justice for victims of abuse and their children.

The Center for Access to Safety and Justice, Bowling Green, Ohio

- The Center was created in 2008 by a consortium of Wood County agencies under the leadership and fundraising efforts of Alicia's Voice, a community group focusing on ending domestic violence. The Center, staffed by Victims Services of Behavioral Connections of Wood County (BCWC) provides assistance to domestic violence victims in a centralized location.
- Serves as a training site for Wood County agencies to increase professionals' knowledge of issues surrounding domestic violence.

Bowling Green Municipal Court Collaboration with Victims Services of BCWC

- Since 2007, a domestic violence advocate contacts victims the morning of the perpetrator's arraignment to gather information about the charge and the victim's safety concerns. A lethality assessment (list of research-based questions about the perpetrator's behavior used to help predict a victim's lethality risk) is completed with the results presented to the judge to make decisions regarding the perpetrator's bond.

Wood County Family Justice Committee

- Since 2007, the Family Justice Committee has met to increase coordinated community response by providing an opportunity for professionals to address concerns as well as get updates on domestic violence-related issues.

FRT will continue work on systems-wide recommendations based on the findings of this report. The following areas have been identified as needing further improvement.

- Increase inter-agency communication and collaboration related to domestic violence.
- Increase community education and encourage community collaboration in response.
- Hold batterers accountable.
- Increase outreach and support for domestic violence victims.
- More clearly define risk factors related to domestic violence.