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Report of Intimate Partner Violence Fatalities in Wood County, Ohio
Prepared by the Wood County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team

June 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wood County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team would like to acknowledge the victims' surviving family members and friends who contributed to the interviews for this report. All family members and some friends were invited to be involved in the process. We would like to thank those who were able to meet with us.

We would also like to thank St. Mark's Lutheran Church for the generous use of their space as well as Bowling Green State University's Human Development and Family Studies for their work on the report.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The Wood County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team would not have been able to meet, discuss, and produce this final report without the support of the following partners:

Behavioral Connections (Outpatient Therapy and Victims Services), Bowling Green Municipal Court Probation Office, Bowling Green Police Division, Bowling Green State University Counseling Center, Bowling Green State University Human Development and Family Studies, Bowling Green State University Library, The Cocoon Shelter, Family and Child Abuse Prevention Center, Family Service of Northwest Ohio, Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Person to Person Resources, Wood County Adult Probation, Wood County Clerk of Courts, Wood County Job and Family Services, Wood County Prosecutor's Office (Investigations and the Victim/Witness Division), Wood County Sheriff's Office, and WSOS.

Special thanks to team members Michelle Clossick, Monica DeLeon, John Helm, Kelly Hickle-Lentz, Jeffery Howell, Laura Landry Meyer, Lucinda Weller, Debbie Whitson, Elizabeth Yarris, Ph.D., and others who wish to remain anonymous.

SPECIAL TRIBUTE

The Wood County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team is especially appreciative of the leadership shown by Kathy Mull, who was the Victims Services Program Coordinator when this project started. The Team is grateful for her coordination of the FRT meetings and the facilitation of the writing of this report. Her dedication to the process inspired other team members to see this project through to its conclusion.

PRINTING

The printing of this publication was made possible by generous donations from the following contributors:

Bowling Green Municipal Court Probation Office
Wood County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
Bowling Green State University Counseling Center
The Cocoon Shelter
Victims Services

DEDICATION PAGE

Domestic Violence* Homicide Victims since 1991 in Wood County

All are remembered as lives lost too early.

Julia Bedford

Alicia Castillon

Michelle Descant

Henrietta Foster

Kim Geringer

Linda Lambert

Susan Pelc

Travis Sharp

Debra Stout

Jeanne Brown

Karen Coldwell

LuAnn Downard

Carol Geringer

Lisa Hurt

John Mitchell

Michelle Rizzi

Sandra Smith

*Domestic violence: household/family members and collateral victims, not just the intimate partner violence cases highlighted in this report.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence refers to the physical, emotional or sexual abuse that occurs when one person purposely causes this type of harm to a family or household member. Domestic violence can include family violence, child violence, sibling violence, and/or elder abuse. This report focuses specifically on fatalities occurring in connection with intimate relationships. The term **intimate partner violence** will be utilized throughout the report. Intimate partner violence includes all violent, abusive behavior that occurs between two people whom are currently or have previously been in an intimate partner relationship, including spouses as well as dating partners. Intimate partner violence is distinguished from domestic violence by excluding other relatives, such as parents, siblings and grandparents.

As a result of this review of intimate partner related fatalities in Wood County, a series of recommendations for systematic change emerged. These recommendations are grounded in local data and state and national best practice research and are found at the end of the report.

TERMINOLOGY

Collateral Victim:

A person or witness harmed or killed in the process of an intimate partner homicide.

Coordinated Community Response (CCR):

Within the context of intimate partner violence, “a system, of networks, agreements, processes and applied principles created by the local shelter movement, criminal justice agencies and human service programs.”ⁱ

Domestic Violence (DV):

Domestic violence includes all physical, emotional and/or sexual harm to a family or household member; such abuse includes family violence, child violence, sibling violence and/or elder abuse.

- *Domestic violence homicide:* classified when the death of the victim occurs.

Intimate Partner:

Distinguished from other relatives, acquaintances and strangers. Includes current and previous spouses and dating partnersⁱⁱ.

Intimate partner violence (IPV):

All violent, abusive behavior taking place between two people whom are currently or have previously been in an intimate relationship; this includes spouses as well as dating partners.

- *Intimate partner homicide:* The death of a spouse, dating partner or other person at the hands of his or her partner.

Perpetrator:

A person who has committed domestic or intimate partner violence and/or homicide.

Victim:

A person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action or agencyⁱⁱⁱ specifically, the person harmed or killed.

FOREWORD

Intimate partner violence is a community issue. To be responsive to the inherent safety issues, the Wood County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (FRT) was formed in November 2005. A fatality review of this nature engages in a deliberative process for identifying deaths caused by intimate partner violence (IPV), examines agency and community involvement with the victim and perpetrator, and explores possible systemic change to prevent future intimate partner violence related deaths. All cases reviewed in this report are closed – i.e., any and all litigation is finished. It is not the FRT's role to reinvestigate cases or place blame; rather, the goal is to find gaps in the system and look for high risk factors in intimate partner violence situations.

The FRT began meeting monthly, in January 2006, to review Wood County cases in which victims were murdered by their intimate partners. Team membership was voluntary and based on invitation from Victims Services of Behavioral Connections and included representatives from Behavioral Connections (Victims Services and Outpatient Therapy), Bowling Green Municipal Court Probation Department, Bowling Green Police Division, Bowling Green State University Counseling Center, The Cocoon Shelter, Family Service of Northwest Ohio, Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Wood County Adult Probation, Wood County Job and Family Services, Wood County Common Pleas' Clerk of Courts, Wood County Prosecutor's Office (Investigations and the Victim/Witness Division) and the Wood County Sheriff's Office.

During the years the FRT met, the members examined in depth each Wood County intimate partner homicide since 1991. The goal of FRT was to gather data and make recommendations that might strengthen the response of local systems and prevent future homicides within the context of intimate partner violence. The monthly FRT meetings increased dialogue about the tragedy of intimate partner homicide and also strengthened collaboration among agencies. This report highlights the work that was done and includes FRT's recommendations for local system wide change to reduce the risk of intimate partner homicides in Wood County.

FINDINGS

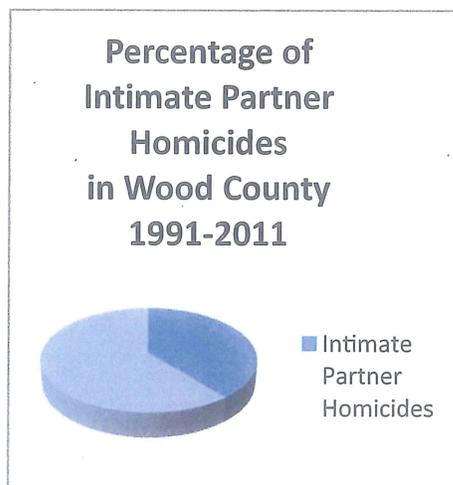
During the time period (June 1991 to June 2011) studied for this report, 31 homicides occurred in Wood County. Out of these 31 deaths, 13 (42%) were domestic violence homicides (household members who were not the intimate partners of the perpetrators); twelve (39%) were intimate partner homicides (studied in this report); and the remaining 6 (19%) were non-DV related (perpetrated by strangers or acquaintances who were non-household/family members/non-intimate partners).

All findings in this report are based on the review of the intimate partner homicides which occurred in, and therefore were prosecuted in, Wood County. (Two additional intimate partner homicide victims' bodies were found in Wood County but the crimes were committed outside of the county and prosecuted in those jurisdictions. Those cases do not factor into this report.)

The review of these cases consisted of in-depth examinations of public records, media sources, and interviews with surviving family members and friends. The findings are based on 12 intimate partner cases, which claimed 14 lives, committed by 11 perpetrators.

INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDES

The 12 intimate partner homicides in Wood County represented 39% of all homicides between 1991 and 2011. Comparatively, 10% of homicides nationally are intimate partner violence related^{iv}. In the 12 Wood County cases of intimate partner homicide, 5 victims were killed by a spouse and 7 by a current or former dating partner. The duration of the intimate relationships ranged from 2 months to 21 years, with the average relationship lasting 9 years.



GENDER

There is a direct relationship between gender and intimate partner homicide. All 12 Wood County intimate partner homicide victims were female. All of the perpetrators were male. This information is consistent with research findings that show that women are the majority of victims in all forms of intimate partner violence. Studies show that nearly 75% of victims murdered by their intimate partners are female, and nearly 85% of victims of intimate partner violence are female.^v

VICTIMS

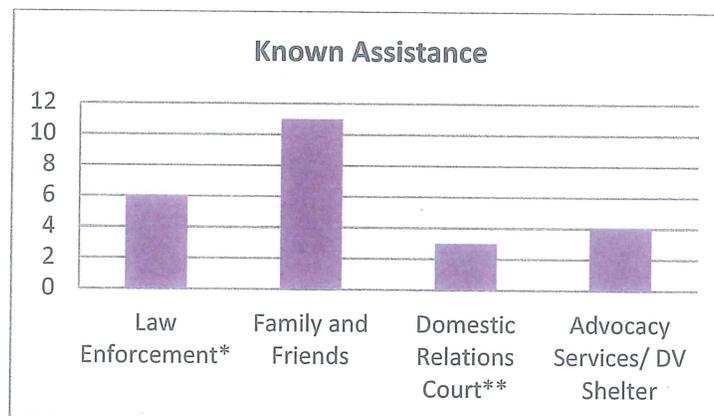
As noted earlier, while there were 12 intimate partner deaths studied for this report, there were a total of 14 deaths related to these crimes. In one case, a collateral victim was a female child. And in another case, the collateral victim killed was an adult male who was the current boyfriend of the victim.

In 5 of the 12 intimate partner cases, the victim and perpetrator were married (included within this is one common law marriage). Of the 7 remaining victims, 5 of the intimate partner homicide victims were currently dating the perpetrator and 2 were ex-dating partners. Six of the 12 intimate partner victims were living with the perpetrator at the time of the homicide.

The average age of the victim was 39 with a range from 24 to 57.

At the time of the murder, 9 of the victims were currently employed.

Eleven of the victims had known family support and 4 were receiving known support from social service providers. Six of the victims had law enforcement involvement during their relationship, and 3 victims had filed for a protection order at some point during the relationship.



* based on previous legal charges

** based on attempted protection orders

PERPETRATORS

All of the 11 perpetrators were male. At the time of the homicide, 5 (45%) of the perpetrators were married to the victim, including 1 common law marriage.

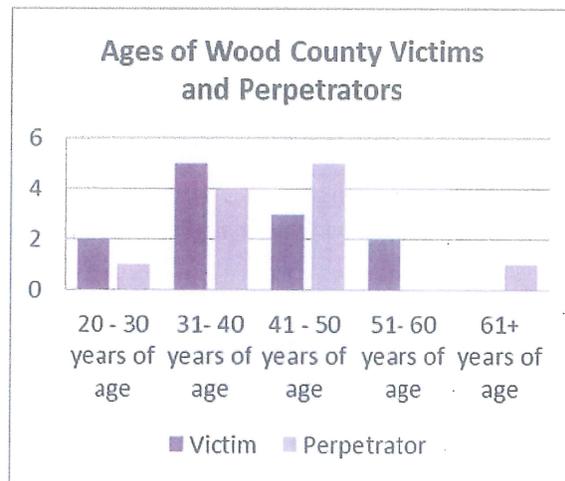
One perpetrator committed 2 intimate partner homicides (his spouse and a dating partner) plus killed a collateral victim (his child). In a separate case, the perpetrator killed one collateral victim as well as the intimate partner victim.

One perpetrator attempted suicide and another completed suicide immediately after the homicide. Another perpetrator completed suicide while incarcerated awaiting trial.

The average age of the perpetrator was 42 with a range from 30 to 61.

Five of the perpetrators were employed at the time of the fatality.

AGE

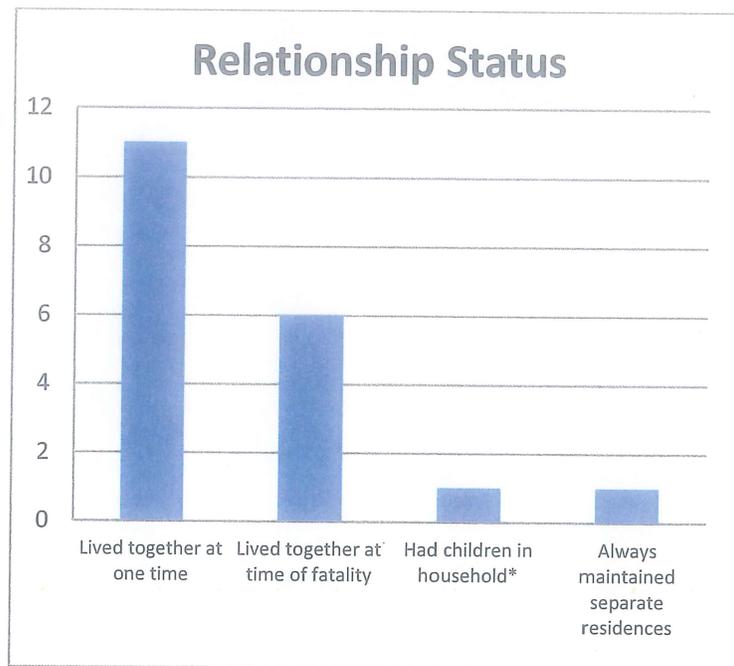


RELATIONSHIP

Eleven of the 12 victims had lived with the perpetrator at one time. Six of the victims were living with the perpetrator at the time of the homicide. Ten of the victims experienced verbal and physical abuse by the perpetrator during the relationship.

Five victims were killed by a spouse and 7 by a current or former dating partner. The duration of the intimate relationship ranged from 2 months to 21 years with the average relationship lasting 9 years.

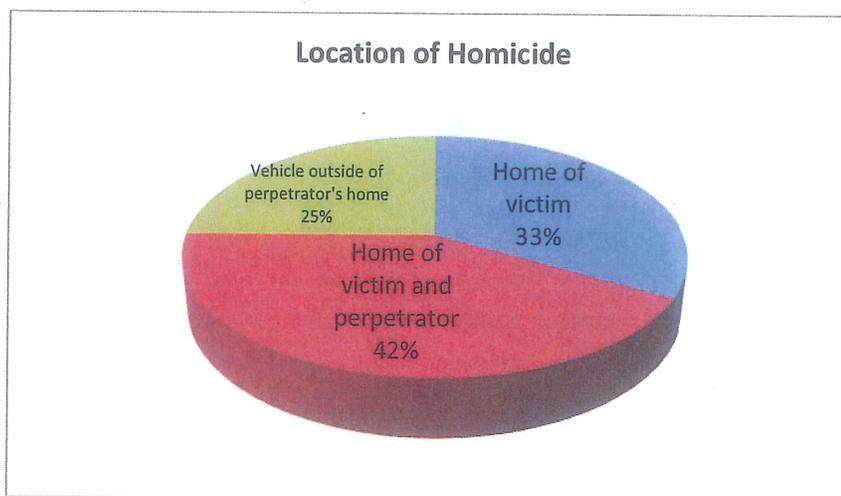
All the victims in the cases reviewed were in the process of ending the relationship or had left the perpetrator at the time of their murder. Research has indicated that the lethality risk increases during the time a victim is leaving. The term "separation assault" is often used to highlight the issues of power and control underlying a batterer's use of actual or threatened violence to keep his partner from physically or emotionally separating from him or to retaliate for her efforts to do so. Research also documents increased rates of violence, particularly lethal violence upon perceived, attempted, or actual separation of women from their abusive partner^{vi}.



* Child in household was not a common child of perpetrator and victim.

LOCATION OF HOMICIDE

All the homicides in the 12 cases occurred within the residence of the victim and/or perpetrator or within close proximity to the home. Nine of the homicides occurred at the victim's home, with 5 of those instances being a shared residence between victim and perpetrator. The other 3 homicides occurred in vehicles outside of the perpetrator's home. Four homicides occurred in Perrysburg Township, 2 in Bowling Green, and 1 each in Gibsonburg, North Baltimore, Pemberville, Rudolph, Walbridge and Weston.



SUBSTANCE USE

Substance use was present in 9 out of the 12 homicides. Nine of the perpetrators were using alcohol at the time of the homicide. In addition, all perpetrators had a history of substance use during the relationship. Nine out of the 12 victims also had a history of substance use during the relationship.

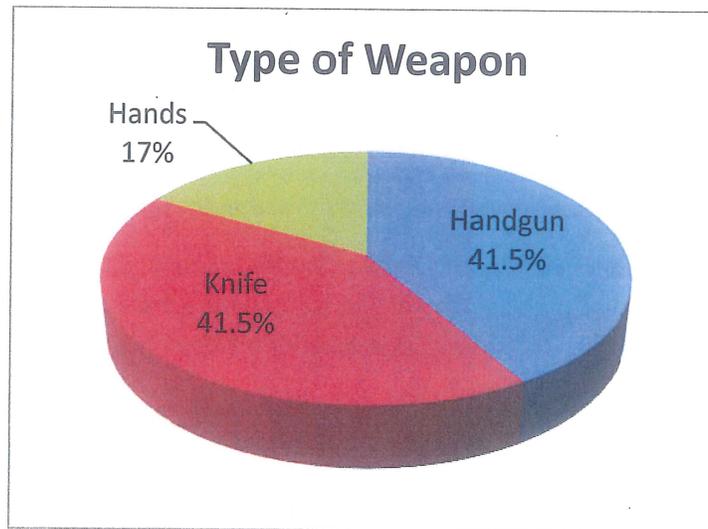
Although substance/alcohol use was present in the majority of homicides, this does not indicate that the substance/alcohol use was the cause of the homicide. Intimate partner violence and substance use need to be treated as independent issues. Research indicates that the use of substances/alcohol may increase the severity of the abuse, but the substance/alcohol use does not cause the perpetrator to become violent. The need to use violence to exert control needs to be part of the perpetrator's thought process prior to the use of substances/alcohol. More often, the use of substances/alcohol is a way for the perpetrators to justify their actions. Research also indicates that the majority of victims of intimate partner violence often use alcohol/substances as a way to cope with the abuse^{vii}. Statistics show that women who are abused are 15 times more likely to abuse alcohol and 9 times more likely to abuse drugs than women who have not been abused^{viii}.

These findings do suggest that the use of substances/alcohol may increase the risk for intimate partner homicide when either the perpetrator or victim is using substances/alcohol. Research indicates that understanding the risk inherent when substances/alcohol are being used in an abusive relationship is important when designing interventions to reduce the risk of intimate partner homicide, but taking substances/alcohol out of the equation alone will not prevent intimate partner homicide.

WEAPON

In 5 of the 12 homicides (41.5%), a handgun was used as the murder weapon. In 5 other cases (41.5%), a knife was used. In the remaining 2 cases (17%), the perpetrator used his hands to murder his victim.

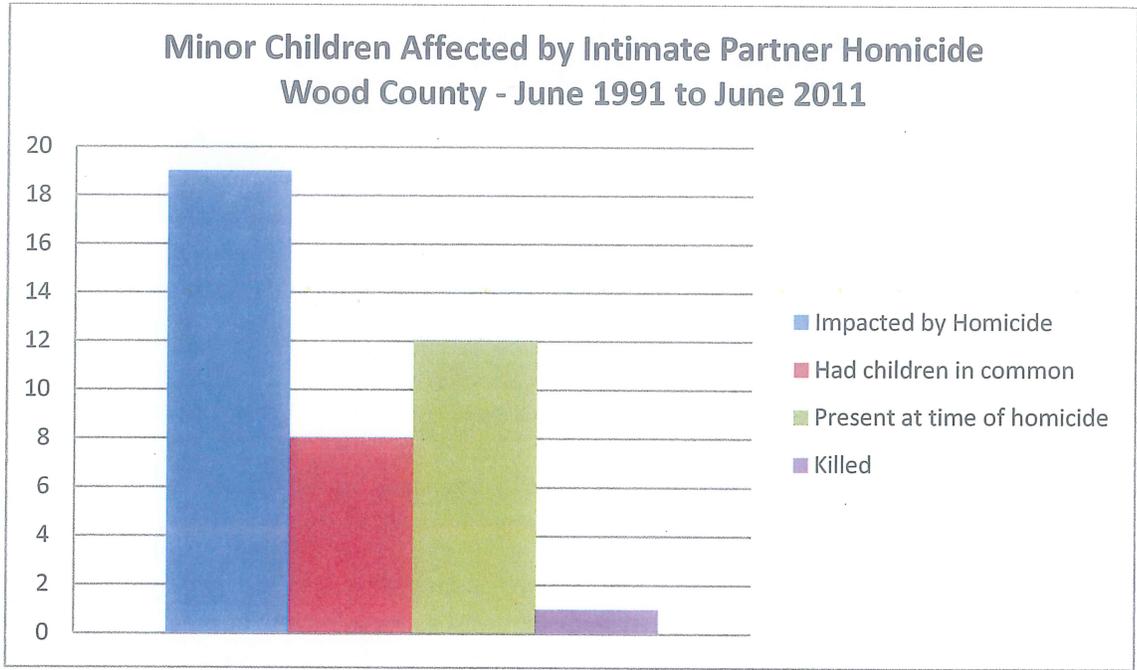
For each death in which the weapon was a gun (5 cases), as well as in 2 cases where a knife was used, the homicides were considered by investigating officials to be premeditated acts. This finding contradicts the perception that intimate partner violence/homicide is a "crime of passion" as 7 out of the 12 intimate partner homicides reviewed in Wood County had at least some degree of planning.



Nationally, from 1990-1999, 63% of female homicides by intimate partners involved guns. Having one or more guns in the home makes a woman 7.2 times more likely to be murdered by her intimate partner. According to a study of crime data from 1976-1987, more women were shot and killed by a husband or intimate acquaintance than were murdered by strangers using firearms, knives, or any other means^{ix}.

CHILDREN

All 12 of the victims included in this report had children. In total, 28 children lost their mothers due to intimate partner homicide. Of those 28, only 9 were adults at the time of the homicide. The remaining children were minors ranging from ages 9 months to 17 years old. Twelve children were present at the time of the actual homicide, with one of those children being murdered. Of the 28 children left without a mother, 16 (57%) were the perpetrator's biological child.



JEALOUSY, STALKING, CONTROL AND POSSESSIVENESS

Jealousy: mental uneasiness from suspicion or fear of unfaithfulness.^x

Stalking^{*}: harassing or threatening behavior that is engaged in repeatedly. Examples include: following someone, appearing at a person's home or place of business, making harassing phone calls, leaving written messages or objects, or vandalizing one's property.

Controlling behavior: Can be social, emotional and psychological. Some common controlling behaviors include, excessive clinginess, put downs, accusations, making all the decisions, public embarrassment and cutting off contact with close family and friends.

Possessiveness: jealously opposed to the personal independence of, or to any influence other than one's own upon, a child, spouse, etc.^{xi}.

^{*}Definitions listed above are not legal definitions and should not be used as a basis for legal charges

There were known instances that all 11 perpetrators exhibited signs of jealousy/possessiveness and 6 exhibited stalking behavior. Stalking is the name given to the combination of activities that batterers do to keep the connection between themselves and their partners from being severed^{xii}. All perpetrators were considered to be controlling toward their victims. Controlling behavior can be social, emotional and psychological. Of the cases reviewed, the controlling behaviors most often exhibited were isolating the victim from family and close friends and feeling entitled to know where the victim was and what she was doing at all times. These behaviors combined can create a level of fear and anxiety in a victim and gives the perpetrator power and control over the victim. These factors, when combined, also create an increased risk for intimate partner homicide as research suggests that perpetrators who exhibit these behaviors often have a sense of entitlement and ownership of the victim.

PREVIOUS HISTORY OF VIOLENCE AND LEGAL INVOLVEMENT

In 83 % of the cases (10 out of 12), there was a previous history of violence.

Approximately 70 police reports (average of 5.8) were filed that involved the current perpetrator and victim.

Nine perpetrators had non-violent arrests, 6 had domestic violence arrests, and 5 had arrests for other violent crimes. Six of the perpetrators had been previously charged with domestic violence with the most recent victim, and one perpetrator had been charged with domestic violence with a previous partner as well. This resulted in a total of nine domestic violence charges, of which three were dismissed and 6 resulted in a conviction. Three of the six perpetrators with DV convictions were ordered to complete a Batterer's Intervention Program. Of the three dismissals, two were a result of a deferred finding. Deferred findings allow dismissal of the charge once the perpetrator completes a Batterer's Intervention Program. One perpetrator had a DV charge currently pending at the time of the homicide.

Three of the 12 victims had filed for protection orders. Two of those victims had protection orders currently in place at the time of the homicide. There were documented incidences of 1 perpetrator violating the protection order 4 times prior to the homicide. One protection order violation charge was pending at the time of the homicide.

WITNESSES

In 5 of the 12 cases, children of the victim and/or perpetrator were present at the time of the homicide.

In 3 cases, a witness was also present at the time of the homicide. Two of the 3 witnesses became collateral victims; one was the daughter of the perpetrator and one was the boyfriend of the victim.

DISCUSSION

HISTORY

Of the 12 homicides, 4 occurred prior to 1995. Wood County did not experience another intimate partner homicide until 2002. The reason for this 7 year gap may never be fully understood; however there were several changes being made across the state and the country which may have contributed to the decline in intimate partner homicides. The mid 1990's was a time of change in the domestic violence movement

across the United States. In 1994, the federal government passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) which established the national domestic violence hotline, created confidentiality laws, prohibited interstate traveling for the purpose of domestic violence, and also required states to have certain uniform domestic violence responses in order to continue to receive funding^{xiii}.

In 1996, Ohio passed the Preferred Arrest Policy which made arrest the preferred method of law enforcement when responding to domestic violence calls. Also, the Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban went into effect which prohibited any person who has ever been convicted of domestic violence or is currently under a protection order from an intimate partner from owning or using a firearm^{xiv}.

Although it is not possible to tell if these new policies deterred acts of domestic violence including intimate partner homicide, they did send a strong message that intimate partner violence would be taken seriously and that offenders would be held accountable.

WOOD COUNTY CHANGES

There have been several system-wide changes within the Wood County community that have taken place between 1991 and 2011 in response to intimate partner violence. These include:

- The Cocoon Shelter established
- Wood County Sheriff's Office secured grant funding for a Domestic Violence Specialist position
- Bowling Green City Prosecutor's Office established a special prosecutor for domestic violence and assault cases in Bowling Green jurisdiction
- Wood County's Domestic Violence Task Force re-convened as the Family Justice Committee
- Victims Services implemented the use of a Lethality Assessment form with victims prior to arraignment hearings in Bowling Green Municipal Court
- Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team established
- Bowling Green Police Division implemented the Family Violence Form at the scene of domestic violence calls
- Collaborative agreement implemented between the Wood County Clerk's Office and Victims Services to assist victims in the completion of Civil Protection Order forms
- Alicia's Voice, a grassroots citizens' organization, formed
- Wood County Common Pleas judges instructed Adult Probation to write "pre-arraignment" reports of defendants' criminal history in domestic violence cases prior to addressing bond

RISK FACTORS

The basis for intimate partner violence is power and control. Perpetrators believe they are entitled to have control over their partner and are justified in using violence to achieve that goal. This creates increased risk for victims when they attempt to sever the relationship as this often increases the perpetrator's controlling, possessive and stalking behavior. With the exception of one perpetrator, these behaviors were present in all cases reviewed. All victims had left the relationship or were in the process of leaving. When these factors combine, it creates a high risk factor for victims of intimate partner violence

and should be used to guide advocates, service providers and law enforcement personnel's response when working with victims and perpetrators.

EMERGING ISSUES

The following are issues discussed at various times during Fatality Review Team meetings. The FRT believes these areas require further attention. This information will guide the continued efforts of this team.

- There is a distinct difference in how IPV cases are handled across jurisdictions. This creates confusion for victims and service providers and at times sends conflicting messages to perpetrators. Having a uniform response to perpetrators of intimate partner violence increases a victim's sense of empowerment and confidence in the legal system. It also communicates a clear message to perpetrators as they will be better able to predict consequences.
- One court system allows charges to be dismissed once treatment is completed while another court system does not provide this option. Having the charge dismissed does not allow for enhancement of future charges, i.e., the next DV charge cannot be considered a felony. In one court system, perpetrators charged with DV can bond out immediately, while in another court system, DV perpetrators cannot bond out until they have appeared before a judge.
- Focus needs to be expanded to include other forms of intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence is not just physical violence. Law enforcement agencies have opportunities to charge perpetrators with multiple offenses and more attention should be paid to behaviors that constitute various other charges, including telephone harassment, menacing, etc. Violations of protection orders need to be viewed as a form of intimate partner violence, and perpetrators should consistently be held accountable for violating orders.
- Professionals should not underestimate the victim's ability to stay safe. Recognition needs to be paid to victims' self-assessment of risk, and they should be empowered to participate in their own safety planning. This includes the right to have all helping professionals working together to create that safety net.
- Advocates need to be included in every step of the process. Currently the primary means of assistance is through a criminal justice perspective. This perspective needs to be expanded as each victim should be approached using an advocacy perspective which includes addressing the wide range of concerns of victims and providing them with holistic services that help to increase their sense of empowerment and reduce their risk by utilizing safety planning in all aspects of their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The FRT is committed to future discussions toward preventing intimate partner violence related deaths. The FRT makes the following recommendations based on the findings from the review of the 12 intimate partner homicides in Wood County:

STANDARDIZING PRACTICES AMONG COURTS/LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WITHIN WOOD COUNTY

- Create and implement a standard form for law enforcement to use in all jurisdictions when responding to intimate partner violence calls. This will ensure consistency in information recorded at the time of the offense. This form will also allow law enforcement officers to assess risk factors for intimate partner homicide.
- Mandatory completion of a lethality assessment by an advocate prior to the arraignment hearing.
- Requirement that prior criminal history, standardized intimate partner violence form and lethality assessment are available and reviewed by the judge prior to making decisions about bond.
- Requirement that a Pre-Sentence Investigation be completed on all offenders of intimate partner violence prior to their sentencing.
- Create a database that includes the initial charge and reasons the intimate partner violence-related charge was reduced or dismissed. Court personnel, law enforcement and advocates should have access to the database.

EFFECTIVELY HOLD BATTERERS ACCOUNTABLE

- Require all perpetrators to attend and complete a Batterer's Intervention Program that follows state standards set forth by the Ohio Domestic Violence Network.
- Create flexibility in the Batterer's Intervention Program to address unique needs of offenders. A one-size-fits-all approach is not effective.
- Enforce consequences for perpetrators who do not comply with the terms and conditions of their probation. This includes not completing Batterer's Intervention Programs.
- Increase accountability for protection order violations.
- Train professionals to be proactive and more responsive to risk factors such as controlling, possessiveness and stalking behaviors. Hold perpetrators accountable for these behaviors to deter the use of physical violence.
- Expand the focus of chargeable offenses beyond DV to include other charges such as menacing by stalking, disruption of public service, etc.

WIDENING THE SAFETY NET - INCREASE COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION AMONGST AGENCIES IN WOOD COUNTY

- Provide victims immediate linkage to an advocate. When a victim discloses intimate partner violence to a social service provider or law enforcement personnel, an advocate should be called to respond in person to provide safety planning and support.
 - Create a database that includes all intimate partner violence offenders.
 - Create a protocol that ensures transfer of information from system to system. This includes advocacy agencies, court systems (both criminal and civil) and law enforcement agencies.
 - Recognize that not all victims utilize the criminal justice system. Social service providers should be screening for intimate partner violence and making referrals to advocates.
 - Provide systemic training for community agencies on risk factors for intimate partner violence that do not focus solely on physical violence. This will allow non-DV service providers to better assess for risk.
 - Educate the community on possessiveness and controlling behavior and how to recognize these danger signs.
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FOOTNOTES

ⁱ Pence, E., and McMahon, M. (1997). *A Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence*, Duluth, Minnesota: The National Training Project.

ⁱⁱ U.S Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics Selected Findings.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from Dictionary.com Unabridged

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<http://www.fbi.gov/fbi-search?cx=004748461833896749646%3Ae41lgwqry7w&cof=FORI>

^v Walsh, C. (2006, 08 01). *Intimate Partner Violence and Gender*. Retrieved 01 18, 2012, from National Network to End Domestic Violence:
<http://www.ncdsv.org/images/intimate%20Partner%20Violence%20and%20Gender.pdf>

^{vi} Mechanic, M. B., Weaver, T. L., & Resnick, P. A. (2000). Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking Behavior: Exploration of Patterns and Correlates in a Sample of Acutely Battered Women. *Violence and Victims*, 15 (1), 55-72.

^{vii} Bennet, L. W. (1998, February). *SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND WOMAN ABUSE BY MALE PARTNERS*. Harrisburg, PA: VAWnet, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence/Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Retrieved month/day/year, from: <http://www.vawnet.org>

^{viii} Shipway, L. (2004) "Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Health Professionals."

^{ix} *Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban Fact Sheet*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 13, 2012, from National Center for Women and Policing: <http://womenandpolicing.com/gunban.asp>

^x Adapted from Dictionary.com Unabridged

^{xi} Adapted from Dictionary.com Unabridged

^{xii} Mechanic, M. B., Weaver, T. L., & Resnick, P. A. (2000). Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking Behavior: Exploration of Patterns and Correlates in a Sample of Acutely Battered Women. *Violence and Victims*, 15 (1), 55-72.

^{xiii} *Federal Domestic Violence Legislation: The Violence Against Women Act*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 13, 2012, from Find Law: <http://family.findlaw.com/domestic-violence/federal-domestic-violence-legislation.html>

^{xiv} *Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban Fact Sheet*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 13, 2012, from National Center for Women and Policing: <http://womenandpolicing.com/gunban.asp>