

Domestic violence claimed

46 LIVES

in Wisconsin in 2008

Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicide Report 2008

Published September 2009



Social Change Through Action and Advocacy

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Executive Summary

Continuing with the work launched in 2000 with publication of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence's first Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicide Report, this edition details domestic violence-related homicides in the calendar year 2008.¹ This brief accounting in no way represents the victims' full lives. That would require a far more detailed inquiry, in-depth study of official case records, and conversations with family and friends left behind. Within the limitations of readily available public information we have endeavored to construct as accurate a description as possible of key events and circumstances related to each homicide.²

In 2008 there were 33 domestic violence homicide incidents resulting in 46 deaths: 36 homicides and ten perpetrator suicides.³ Compared to recent years there were relatively few multiple homicide incidents (two) with fewer victims (four) in those incidents. The numbers of victims and total deaths are slightly higher than in 2006 and slightly lower than 2007.⁴

Other aspects of domestic violence-related homicide during 2008 include:

- There was an average of three domestic violence homicide deaths per month in Wisconsin. When perpetrator suicides and deaths in conjunction with homicides are included the rate was almost four domestic violence-related deaths per month.
- Perpetrators of domestic violence homicide incidents were overwhelmingly male: 97% (33 of 34).
- Two-thirds of victims were female (24 of 36). Most males who were murdered were killed by another male (10 of 11), either by their father, in the case of child homicides, or in conjunction with an attack on or in relation to a female partner who had left the relationship by divorce or separation. One male victim was also a homicide perpetrator who was killed when his adult son tried to protect his mother from the attack.

1. Homicides were considered "domestic" if the victims and perpetrators were spouses or partners, former spouses or former partners, adults with children in common, and adults or teens who had been in a dating relationship. Homicides of others were also included if the circumstances of murder included obsessive control of the perpetrator's current or former partner that extended to her or his new partner or an attempt to protect a domestic violence victim from future harm. This report also details homicides of domestic violence perpetrators that occur as their victims acted in self-defense. See Methodology for additional information on definitions and criteria.

2. Primary sources include news media (print and Internet editions) and Wisconsin Circuit Court Access records.

3. The Office of Justice Assistance, using Uniform Crime Report data submitted by law enforcement agencies, reports 146 homicides in 2008, which is the lowest level since 1988. 2008 data on deaths in Wisconsin, including homicide, was unavailable from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Bureau of Health Information and Policy at the time this report was published. See Methodology.

4. See the statewide map and 2000 through 2008 comparison at the conclusion of this report.

- Intimate partner violence characterizes the domestic violence homicides included in this report. Victims were current or former partners, children or family members of a current or former partner, or bystanders present during the attack. The analysis for 2008 did not find any incidents of non-intimate partner homicide that met the definition and criteria used in the report, with the exception of the son who killed his father in an attempt to protect his mother from a fatal assault.
- Half of the homicides involved a victim or someone close to the victim who had left the relationship or was taking action to leave the relationship, such as moving out or filing for divorce.
- Victims reflected the span of life, from five weeks to 71 years. In comparison with recent years, a higher proportion of victims and perpetrators were age 50 and older.
- Victims were from 18 counties across all regions of the state.
- At least 15 minor children and 25 adult children were left orphaned or without a mother or father as a result of a domestic violence homicide. Of the ten minor children who lost one parent, eight lost their mothers.
- Past history of domestic violence involving either the victim, a victim's family member (e.g., a daughter or sister) or friend, or another person remains largely unknown and unexplored in published accounts of domestic violence homicides.
- When perpetrators had a record of arrest on domestic abuse–related charges, such as battering, restraining order or harassment order violations, or intimidating a victim, such charges were often dismissed or reduced to disorderly conduct, thereby avoiding the firearms prohibition.
- Firearms accounted for almost half of all domestic violence homicides.
- Together the 2008 cases reflect the factors that research has found to be particularly associated with lethal violence and the risk of violence.⁵ These include, among other factors: stalking, strangulation, threats to kill the victim and threats to kill that the victim believes, threats to kill that are conveyed to others, forced sex, serious injury to the victim, access to or use of weapons, violence outside the home, a victim who is attempting a permanent break, obsessive jealousy, and prior arrests, police calls and/or restraining orders.

5. For a summary of key factors, see the “Practitioners’ Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases,” in *The Blueprint for Safety: An Interagency Response to Domestic Violence Crimes*, forthcoming from Praxis International; www.praxisinternational.org.

While intimate partner homicide rates overall have declined nationally for all race and gender groups in the past twenty years, the decline has varied significantly for different populations, from a drop of 83% for black males killed by female intimate partners to a drop of only 6% for white females. This downward trend has been attributed to increased awareness, services, and intervention. Nevertheless, the proportion of female victims of intimate partner homicide has increased over the past thirty years, from 55% to 78%.⁶

Several key themes emerged across the 2008 cases and are addressed in detail in the report. These include: the reach and impact of domestic violence homicide, including attempts by family and friends to intervene in some way; the impact on children; the level of brutality in male-perpetrated domestic violence; stalking behavior; the persistent role of firearms in domestic violence homicides; help-seeking by victims of ongoing abuse and the efforts of family members to protect them and get the attention of official interveners on their behalf; the reach of domestic violence homicide into later life; and the impact on African American communities.

This report also includes a preview of 2009 figures and an update to incidents from prior years.

Our intent with this report is to honor the victims of domestic violence homicide and help Wisconsin communities create opportunities for intervention and prevention. We want to expand the understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence among Coordinated Community Response Teams, Elder Abuse Interdisciplinary Teams, and other critical systems where victims and perpetrators might seek help, assistance, support, and treatment. We hope to inspire community members to get involved in efforts to prevent domestic violence.

6. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Homicide trends in the U.S., Intimate partner homicide, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/intimates.htm>. Data compiled from Federal Bureau of Investigation Supplementary Homicide Reports. It does not include the relationship categories of ex-girlfriend and ex-boyfriend. In 1976, 55% of intimate partner homicide victims were female (1,587 of 2,891); in 2005, 78% of victims were female (1,181 of 1,510).

Key Findings – 2008

The following tables provide snapshots of the number and characteristics of victims and perpetrators, homicide methods and location, and factors related to domestic violence homicide, such as prior history of domestic violence and whether the victim tried to leave the relationship.

Overview

Domestic violence homicide incidents	33
Victims of domestic violence homicide	36
Homicide incidents with two or more victims	2
Homicide incidents with perpetrator suicide	10
Total deaths (victim and perpetrator)	46
Female victims	24
Male victims	11
Female perpetrators	1
Male perpetrators	33

- The victim count includes one perpetrator who was killed by his adult son in defense of his mother (a homicide victim). The son is counted as a perpetrator. The case is not included in the multiple homicides, however.
- The two multiple homicide incidents accounted for four of the 36 victims.
- Of the 12 male victims, 11 were killed by a male perpetrator.

Age and gender of victims

	Female	Male	Total by age
0-6 years	1	2	3
7-17	--	--	--
18-29	6	4	10
30-49	10	3	13
50 and older	7	3	10
Total	24	12	36

- Of the victims age fifty and older, five were over 60 years of age and one was over 70.

Age and gender of perpetrators

	Female	Male	Total by age
18-29	1	10	11
30-49	--	13	13
50 and over	--	10	10
Total	1	33	34

Race or ethnicity of victims and perpetrators

	Victims		Perpetrators	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Caucasian	18	6	--	20
African American	3	4	1	7
Asian	--	--	--	--
Latino or Hispanic	2	1	--	4
Native American	--	--	--	--
Other or unknown	1	1	--	2

- Race and ethnicity listed according to identification in an official record or news report.

Methods of killing

A homicide often involved multiple methods of assault. The following figures reflect the primary method contributing to the victim's death.

By number of victims killed by each method	
Shot	17
Stabbed	8
Beaten or assaulted by being punched, pushed, bludgeoned	8
Fire (burns and/or smoke and soot inhalation)	2
Strangled	1

- 18 of the 33 incidents of domestic violence homicide (including self-defense or defense of another) involved a firearm, primarily as the method of killing.
- One victim was severely beaten, collapsed into the street, and was struck by a passing vehicle.

Relationship of victim to male perpetrator

When perpetrator was male, victim was:	
Current female partner	15
Former or estranged female partner	7
Perpetrator's child (<u>and</u> child of current or former female partner)	3
Family member of former or estranged female partner	2
New male partner or male otherwise connected to the perpetrator's former or estranged female partner	3
Former male partner of perpetrator's current female partner	1
Brother	1
Male partner of perpetrator's sister	1
Bystander	1
Father killed by adult son in defense of his mother	1

Relationship of victim to female perpetrator

When perpetrator was female, victim was:	
Current male partner (dating relationship)	1

Homicide-suicide

Homicide incidents with perpetrator suicide	10
Number of victims in homicide with perpetrator suicide	10
Homicide-suicide incidents involving firearms	5
Male perpetrator/suicide	10
Female perpetrator/suicide	--

- None of the homicide-suicide cases in 2008 involved multiple homicides.
- In eight of the homicide-suicide cases the homicide victim was the perpetrator's current female partner.

Multiple homicides

Multiple homicide incidents	2
Number of victims in multiple homicides	4
Multiple homicide incidents with perpetrator suicide	--
Multiple homicide incidents involving firearms	1
Male perpetrator	2
Female perpetrator	--

- The count of multiple homicide incidents and related victims does not include an incident involving an adult son who killed his father while attempting to defend his mother from a fatal attack. A multiple homicide is counted as such when the perpetrator has targeted and killed more than one victim.
- In one multiple homicide the victims were the perpetrator's children. In the second, the victims were a former male partner of the perpetrator's former female partner and a bystander present in the attempted homicide of her new partner.

Impact on children

Children killed (under age 18)	3
Children at the scene of an adult homicide	12
Minor children orphaned	5
Adult children orphaned	3
Minor children left motherless	8
Adult children left motherless	19
Minor children left fatherless	2
Adult children left fatherless	3

- The number of children killed is most likely an undercount, as are the numbers of children left orphaned or without a parent. See Methodology.

Prior history of domestic violence

(By incident)	
Known prior history with homicide victim	12
Known prior history with other victim(s)	7
Prior history with this or any victim was unknown	14

Leaving the relationship

(By incident; involving either the victim or someone the victim was related to or involved with, e.g., a daughter)	
Divorced, pending divorce, or separation	8
Unmarried and separated or leaving the relationship	9
Unknown if action to leave or end the relationship	16

Location of homicide

(By incident)	
Victim's home or shared home with perpetrator	21
Public location (e.g., street, park, motel, parking lot)	6
Perpetrator's home	6

2008 Homicides

Note: Perpetrators are identified according to news accounts and public records, including persons charged with a crime where the case remains open. Case status reflects information available at the time of publication of this report.¹

County	In the death of...
Burnett	John Peach , 29, Swiss – January 20 Shot twice in the chest by Kyle Lee Huggett, 32, the current partner of Peach's former girlfriend. Initial charges of second-degree reckless homicide against Huggett were dismissed on grounds of self-defense following additional investigation.
Columbia	Rebecca Weisenberger , 25, Portage – November 2 Shot once in the head by her fiancé, Jason Hardt, 25, after he loaded and unloaded a single bullet into a .357 revolver. Hardt entered a no contest plea to a charge of homicide by intoxicated use of a firearm, with a domestic abuse modifier. He was sentenced to ten years probation, sentence withheld, and twelve months jail time.
Dane	Aaron Roberts , 11 weeks, Waunakee – February 13 Beaten to death by his father, David A. Roberts, 20, with injuries that medical authorities described as comparable to those sustained from a fall from a three-story building or high-speed crash. Roberts pled no contest to a charge of first-degree reckless homicide. He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and twenty years of extended supervision, with the condition of no contact with Aaron's mother or her family and no contact with the couple's other child. Charges of intimidation of a victim, false imprisonment, misdemeanor battery, and disorderly conduct related to an incident involving the child's mother the night before the homicide were dismissed as part of the plea agreement.
	Cassandra Mays , 45, Madison – July 15 Stabbed to death by Daniel L. Wright, 50, her former boyfriend. She had multiple slash and stab wounds to her back, hands, face, and neck. Wright pled no contest to a reduced charge of second-degree intentional homicide and was sentenced to twenty years in prison and twenty years of extended supervision.
	Viviana Tellez-Giron , 33, Madison – October 4 Beaten to death by her estranged husband, Salvador Tellez-Giron, 66, who then hung himself. She had previously called police to report threats that he had made when she moved out and told him that she would be filing for divorce.
	Mark Gregory Johnson , 37, Madison – November 3 Beaten and kicked to death by Michael E. Voltz, 46, who pled guilty to a reduced charge of second-degree reckless homicide. Sentencing is pending. A charge of battery in connection with injuries to his former girlfriend during the same incident was dismissed and will be read in as part of the sentencing.
	Craig Severson , 45, Cross Plains – October 31 [See also death of Craig Finley, Iowa County] Shot to death by Charles E. Witzel, Jr., who fired six shots, including one to Severson's head, and then shot and wounded Severson's fiancé. Severson had once had a relationship with Witzel's former girlfriend. After the shootings, Witzel attempted to find his former girlfriend and then fled the state. He returned a few days later and went to the home of her current partner in Iowa County where he shot and wounded him, then shot and killed her boyfriend's brother, Craig Finley. Witzel pled no contest and was found guilty of first-degree intentional homicide in both deaths, plus charges of reckless injury and attempted homicide in the related attacks. He was sentenced to life in prison.

7. The current status of an open case is available through the Wisconsin Circuit Court Access site: <http://wcca.wicourts.gov/index.xsl>.

County	In the death of...
Eau Claire	Kathryn S. Padilla , 62, Augusta – October 22 Jeffrey T. Rodrick, 49, has been charged with felony murder in the death of Kathryn Padilla, whom he was living with. A trial is pending. Padilla died from complications related to being beaten. Rodrick was initially charged with domestic abuse substantial battery with intent to cause bodily harm and other charges that were all dismissed and replaced with the felony murder charge when Padilla died.
Grant	Sheron Eggert , 71, Muscoda – December 27 Died as the result of a fire intentionally set by her husband, Arthur R. Eggert, 71, who subsequently died from burns to himself.
Iowa	Craig Finley , 37, Mineral Point – November 6 [See death of Craig Severson, Dane County]
Jackson	Alisha Sidie , 27, Hatfield – November 7 Shot to death by her former husband, Douglas Sidie, 39. On August 11, 2009 he pled guilty to a charge of first degree intentional homicide. Sentencing is pending. Additional charges of hiding a corpse and resisting or obstructing an officer are pending at the time of this report.
Kenosha	Joann Reidenbach , 64, Kenosha – May 15 Gary Sabol, 63, has been charged with first-degree intentional homicide, first-degree sexual assault using a dangerous weapon, and mayhem in the stabbing and shooting death of Joann Reidenbach, his wife. Charges were initially filed on May 16, 2008; the case has been closed and reopened and there have been multiple competency hearings. Sabol was arraigned and pled not guilty on May 20, 2009. At the time of this report he had been sent back to Mendota Mental Health Facility to be reevaluated for competency to stand trial.
	Roy Villarreal , 62, Somers – May 31 Killed by two wounds to the abdomen from a 12-gauge shotgun fired by David L. Spencer, 55, who fled the scene and then committed suicide. Roy Villarreal was living with Spencer's former girlfriend, whom Spencer had been stalking.
Marathon	Diane Goulet , 50, Weston – June 22 Stabbed nineteen times by Scott Nehls, 43, her longtime partner, who then stabbed himself to death.
Marinette	Dina Evans , 40, Marinette – July 26 Joseph W. Evans, Jr., Dina's estranged husband, has been charged with first degree intentional homicide in her death. A trial is pending. Dina Evans died after a single gunshot wound to the chest. She was killed the same day that Joseph Evans was served a temporary restraining order that she had applied for ten days prior to her death.
Milwaukee	Kathy Acompanado , 47, Wauwatosa – March 2 Stabbed more than fifty times by her fiancé, Allen Keeler, who then committed suicide by self-inflicted stab wounds. Her children, ages nine and thirteen, and another child fled the house at 1:30 a.m. and sought help from a friend who took them to their father's house. He subsequently called law enforcement twice before officers entered an unlocked door and discovered the bodies. In the three years prior to the homicide, Keeler had been arrested at least four times for disorderly conduct and domestic violence-related incidents, three of which involved Kathy Acompanado.

County	In the death of...
Milwaukee <i>continued</i>	<p>Sandra Green, 44, Milwaukee – March 27 Fell into the street after being severely beaten and kicked by her boyfriend, Willie Nash, 51, and was hit by a passing vehicle. A jury found Nash guilty of an amended charge of second-degree reckless homicide and he was sentenced to ten years in prison and ten years of extended supervision.</p>
	<p>Randy Gordon, 22, Milwaukee – April 6 Shot once in the shoulder by Milton Deshawn Robinson, 24, as he ran toward his girlfriend, Robinson's sister. Gordon and Robinson's sister were known to have an ongoing abusive relationship. Robinson had come at his sister's request to pick her up at a restaurant after she had become concerned about Gordon's behavior and wanted to leave. Gordon followed them from the restaurant. Robinson pled guilty to an amended charge of second-degree reckless homicide and was sentenced to seven years in prison and five years of extended supervision.</p>
	<p>Johnny C. Levy-Spears, 20, Milwaukee – April 17 Shot in the neck by his brother, John M. Levy, 26. At the time Levy-Spears was in a physical confrontation with his girlfriend, whom he had thrown to the ground. Levy was found guilty by a jury of second-degree reckless homicide by use of a dangerous weapon. He was sentenced to seven years in prison and seven years of extended supervision.</p>
	<p>Carl C. Coleman, 22, Milwaukee – May 18 David Brown, 26, has been charged with first degree reckless homicide and being a felon in possession of a firearm in the shooting death of Carl Coleman. Coleman is the brother of Brown's former girlfriend. Coleman was shot when he accompanied his sister to pick up the son she had in common with Brown.</p>
	<p>Elisabeth K. Witte, 65, Milwaukee – May 25 Gerhard Witte, 70, has been charged with first-degree intentional homicide in the stabbing death of Elisabeth Witte, his former wife. A trial is pending. Elisabeth Witte was stabbed to death in a public parking garage. Friends who saw Witte in the vicinity alerted police because they knew there was an active restraining order against him. Elisabeth Witte was pronounced dead at the scene after police arrived.</p>
	<p>Lauren Aljubouri, 18, Milwaukee – July 19 Strangled to death by her boyfriend, Eric Tavulares, 18. He pled guilty to first-degree reckless homicide and was sentenced to forty years in prison and twenty years of extended supervision.</p>
	<p>Miranda Young, 25, Milwaukee – October 25 Shot to death by her boyfriend, Phil Hughes, 24, who then killed himself. She was planning to leave the relationship.</p>
	<p>Mirtha Romero-Perez, 49, Milwaukee – November 3 Jesus Reynoso de la Cruz, 55 Mirtha Romero-Perez was stabbed to death by her estranged husband, Jesus Reynoso de la Cruz. He was shot and killed by their twenty-three-year-old son as he attempted to protect his mother and himself. Romero-Perez had a restraining order, which her husband violated at least once prior to the homicide.</p> <p>Ronald McNeal, 53, Milwaukee – November 6 Stabbed once in the chest by Badiatu Tunis, 26. They were in a dating relationship. Tunis pled guilty to homicide by a dangerous weapon and was sentenced to five years in prison and three years of extended supervision.</p>
Ozaukee	<p>Mary Butler, 39, Port Washington – December 20 Beaten to death by her former husband, Chad Ganshow, 35, who then hung himself. Earlier in the year she had filed a petition for a restraining order and filed for divorce. The divorce was final approximately six weeks prior to the homicide.</p>

County	In the death of...
Polk	LaVonne Relander , 66, Luck – December 27 Shot to death by Rayburn Boyd, 74, her longtime partner, who then committed suicide.
Price	Charlotte Engle , 58, Philips – September 1 Shot to death by her daughter’s estranged boyfriend, James J. Lahoud. Charlotte’s daughter survived a severe wound to her face. Lahoud had been subject to domestic violence-related criminal charges and/or restraining orders in three different counties. There was an active restraining order at the time of the homicide. Lahoud pled guilty to one count of first-degree intentional homicide and one count of attempted homicide. He entered an Alford Plea to one count of first degree sexual assault with use of a dangerous weapon and was found guilty. ⁸ Sentencing is pending.
Rock	Stacey Hosey , 31, Beloit – August 9 Donyil Anderson, 35, has been charged with first-degree intentional homicide and attempted first-degree intentional homicide in the stabbing death of Stacey Hosey and wounding of her male partner. A trial is pending. Hosey died after being stabbed approximately thirteen times. Anderson is her former boyfriend.
	Jennifer Vordermann , 24, Edgerton – August 18 Jennifer Vordermann was shot in the back by her husband, Shaun Vordermann, 25, who then committed suicide. She had been in the process of moving out. Prior to the homicide, law enforcement had at least two contacts with Shaun Vordermann, in response to calls from the victim and from her mother, including one where he was ordered out of the house at gunpoint. He had made numerous threats to kill himself.
	Shukrije Menxhiqi , 38, Janesville – August 30 Shot to death by her husband, Rexhep Menxhiqi, 54, who then committed suicide. She was shot four times in the chest. Four of the couple’s five children were home and heard the gunshots.
Sauk	Savannah Yates , 5 weeks, Baraboo – April 13 Tyler Yates , 5 weeks David R. Yates, 45, has been charged with two counts of first-degree intentional homicide in the deaths of his infant twins. A trial is pending. The children died after receiving fractured skulls and multiple blunt force injuries. On February 12, 2008, Yates pled no contest to charges of disorderly conduct with a domestic abuse modifier related to abuse of the twins’ mother while she was pregnant. Two charges of domestic abuse battery were dismissed on the prosecutor’s motion. Yates was placed on probation for twelve months.
Shawano	Dawn Schutt , 49, Shawano – August 21 Michael R. Schutt, 47, has been charged with first-degree intentional homicide, arson, attempted first-degree intentional homicide, and reckless endangerment in the death of his former wife and injuries to his adult son. A trial is pending. Dawn Schutt died from smoke and soot inhalation in the fire at her home.
St. Croix	Kelly Dahm , 18, Hudson – September 20 Kelly Dahm was shot to death by her former boyfriend, Christopher Ledesma, in his car while it was in a public parking lot. A bystander heard multiple “popping” noises and saw Ledesma standing next to the car, but left without calling the police. Ledesma’s in-laws subsequently drove by the car containing Kelly Dahm’s body; they did not call the police. Ledesma pled no contest to a reduced charge of second degree intentional homicide. He was was found guilty and sentenced to thirty-five years in prison and twenty-five years of extended supervision.

8. In an Alford Plea the defendant does not admit the offense charged, but admits that the prosecution could likely prove the charge. The court pronounces guilt.

A Closer Look: The Wide Reach of Domestic Violence Homicide

Each domestic violence–related homicide has a wide impact on those who know the parties involved or witness any aspect of the events involved. In compiling the 2008 data we noticed many cases where that wide reach was particularly direct and immediate. The cases included examples of family members interceding in an attempt to halt an attack, with fatal consequences for themselves or the perpetrator; friends or family members discovering the bodies; a perpetrator targeting a former partner’s new relationship; and homicides occurring in public places. This is all in addition to the impact of domestic violence homicide in the lives of the children who were present at the scene or directly involved.

The 2008 report takes a closer look at seven cases that illustrate the wide reach of domestic violence homicide. The following brief accounts are drawn from available public information. The cases cross all regions of the state, from rural to urban counties. They are presented in the order in which they occurred during the year. Together these six cases account for seven homicides, three attacks on others who survived, and three perpetrator deaths (two suicides and one as a result of intervention to protect a victim).

March 2, 2008 – Wauwatosa, Milwaukee County

Kathy Acompañado was stabbed more than fifty times by her fiancé, Allen Keeler, who then committed suicide by self-inflicted stab wounds. Her children, ages nine and thirteen, and another child fled the house at 1:30 a.m. after hearing arguing and a thump. The parent of a friend took them to their father’s home (Acompañado’s former husband). Because of the children’s concern and his knowledge of Keeler’s past abuse of Acompañado, the children’s father contacted police and asked them to investigate. There was no response to the dispatcher’s return calls to the residence or to an officer’s knock on the door. The responding officer concluded that there was nothing visibly out of order, nor was there any sound to indicate a need for emergency assistance, and there was no basis for a warrantless forced entry to the home. Because of his children’s fear and concern for their mother, their father contacted police again several hours later. Police entered the premises through an unlocked door and found the bodies. In the three years prior to the homicide, Keeler had been arrested at least four times for disorderly conduct and domestic violence–related incidents, three of which involved Acompañado. Twice he appeared in the early hours of the morning at the home of friends where she had gone for safety. On one occasion he attempted to force his way into the home. On another he shoved the homeowner and grabbed Acompañado, who retreated to another room. She told police who responded to the call at that time that she feared for her safety.

August 18, 2008 – Edgerton, Rock County

Jennifer Vordermann was shot in the back by her husband, Shaun Vordermann,

who then committed suicide. Married less than a year, she had been in the process of moving out. Shaun was described as an obsessively jealous man who often made threats of suicide. Jennifer's mother reported that Shaun had been stalking Jennifer for months, using telephone tracking devices and finding her if she did not answer his calls. Four days before the couple was found dead, Jennifer's mother had contacted police because of text messages Shaun was sending and her fears for the couple's safety. Police made contact with Shaun, but they did not take him into custody or take possession of any weapons. Within a couple of days, Shaun was sending messages to Jennifer and her family threatening to kill himself with his gun. Jennifer had gone to a nearby town to get away from him, but called police upon receiving the messages. Shaun briefly barricaded himself in their home, resulting in police ordering him out of the house at gunpoint and arresting him. He told police that he was only trying to get Jennifer's attention because she had left and would not return his calls. Police called Jennifer back to the residence to secure the couple's dogs and verify Shaun's statements. Shaun disclosed that there was a gun and ammunition in the home and police removed it and asked Jennifer to lock it in the trunk of her car. Police took Shaun to a crisis intervention facility for a mental health evaluation and he was released a few hours later to the custody of his sister. Shaun returned home and police found the bodies less than twenty-four hours later, after a call from Jennifer's mother when Jennifer did not call for a ride to work. Shaun killed Jennifer and then himself after retrieving the gun from the trunk of the car.

September 11, 2008 – Phillips, Price County

Charlotte Engle was shot to death by her daughter's estranged boyfriend, James Lahoud. Charlotte's daughter survived a severe wound to her face. A passing motorist discovered her on a roadway, bloodied and distraught. Charlotte's daughter had recently moved in with her mother and had told a coworker that she was considering obtaining a restraining order against Lahoud. At the time of the killing, Lahoud was under a deferred agreement on a charge of domestic abuse disorderly conduct for an incident involving Charlotte's daughter that occurred in October 2006. He was also subject to a domestic abuse restraining order with firearms restrictions obtained in 2005 by another woman. Earlier in 2008 a four-year restraining order obtained by another woman expired. Between 2003 and 2008 he was subject to domestic violence-related criminal charges and/or restraining orders in three different counties. Lahoud pled guilty to one count of first-degree intentional homicide and one count of attempted homicide. He entered an Alford Plea to one count of first degree sexual assault with use of a dangerous weapon and was found guilty.⁹ Sentencing is pending.

9. In an Alford Plea the defendant does not admit the offense charged, but admits that the prosecution could likely prove the charge. The court pronounces guilt.

September 20, 2008 – Hudson, St. Croix County

Kelly Dahm was shot to death by her former boyfriend, Christopher Ledesma. The attack occurred in his car, in the parking lot of the county government center. A bystander heard multiple “popping” noises and saw Ledesma standing next to the car, but left without calling the police. Shortly after the shooting Ledesma called his wife in another city and told her that he had shot and killed Dahm and where the car and body could be found; she did not call the police. His in-laws subsequently drove by the car containing Dahm’s body; they did not call the police. The homicide was discovered after Ledesma’s brother called police because he was threatening members of his family and they refused to let him in the house. Dahm had recently ended her relationship with Ledesma and moved in with her parents. Her parents had expressed concerns about his behavior and encouraged their daughter to get away from him. Ledesma pled no contest to a reduced charge of second degree intentional homicide and was found guilty. He was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison and twenty-five years of extended supervision. Ledesma had previously spent four years in prison after a stabbing (non-domestic violence). At the time of the homicide he was prohibited from possessing a firearm.

October 31, 2008 – Cross Plains, Dane County

November 6, 2008 – Mineral Point, Iowa County

Craig Severson was shot to death by Charles E. Witzel, Jr. Witzel fired six shots, including one to Severson’s head, and then shot and wounded Severson’s fiancé. Witzel killed Severson after hearing that he had had a relationship with Witzel’s former girlfriend. Witzel’s relationship with that woman had ended approximately a year prior to his attack on Severson, but in days prior to the homicide Witzel had been sending threatening text messages to her. (While in that relationship, Witzel reportedly shot a man in the leg who he believed had a romantic interest in her.) After the shootings, Witzel attempted to locate his former girlfriend at her place of employment, then fled the state. He returned to Wisconsin a few days later and went to the home of her current partner where he shot and wounded him, then shot and killed her boyfriend’s brother, Craig Finley. Witzel’s former girlfriend was not at the house; she had left to stay with friends when she learned that he was wanted in Severson’s death. Witzel pled no contest and was found guilty of first degree intentional homicide in both deaths, plus charges of reckless injury and attempted homicide in the related attacks. He was sentenced to life in prison.

November 3, 2008 – Milwaukee, Milwaukee County

Mirtha Romero-Perez was stabbed to death by her estranged husband, Jesus Reynoso de la Cruz, who was then shot and killed by their twenty-three-year-old son as he attempted to protect his mother and protect himself as his father came toward him. Another son was also at the scene and tried to protect her.

Three weeks prior to the homicide, Romero-Perez filed for divorce and obtained a domestic abuse restraining order, which Reynoso de la Cruz violated at least once prior to the homicide. In obtaining the restraining order, Romero-Perez described her husband as punching her in the face, threatening to “break” her face, biting her in the back, threatening her with a sword and a gun, threatening to kill her and to kill himself, and breaking down the door when she tried to hide in one of her son’s rooms.

Multiple homicides

Multiple homicides, where a single perpetrator kills more than one person, immediately illustrate the wide-reaching harm caused by domestic violence. The circle of people directly touched by the attack and resulting deaths expands greatly and there is often much media attention to the event.¹⁰ Sometimes family members and friends who have tried to help and support a victim are also the targets. Often the attack includes or is directed at the perpetrator’s children. Almost always the homicides include or are directed at a current or former intimate partner, such as killing the children, but leaving their mother alive. Most multiple domestic violence homicides are perpetrated by men, as are most homicide-suicides.¹¹

In 2008 there were two cases involving multiple homicides, with a total of four victims. The case involving the deaths of Craig Severson and Craig Finley, and attacks on two people who survived, is described above. In another case a father has been charged with the deaths of his infant twins and a trial is pending. 2008 marks a decline in multiple homicides from the previous three years. In each of the years from 2005 through 2007 there were four multiple homicide cases, with ten, eight, and fifteen victims, respectively (a total of thirty-three).

‘Near homicides’

While we do not track non-fatal attacks systematically, such cases quickly come up in the search for homicide cases. These ‘near homicides’ are distinguished by an apparent intention to kill the victim that is thwarted by the victim’s actions, intervention by others, a shot or blow that did not do as much damage as it could have, or prompt medical attention. If we could identify all near homicides that occur in Wisconsin, the range and impact of domestic violence would be even wider and more visible than it already is. For

10. This media attention is often highly sensational and lacking in its understanding of domestic violence. Past editions of the Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicide Report have paid specific attention to media accounts of domestic violence homicides (e.g., see the 2004 and 2003 reports). They identified the following issues in media coverage of domestic violence homicides: (1) the homicides are rarely labeled as or placed in the broader context of domestic violence; (2) coverage provides an inaccurate view of domestic violence and reinforces myths; and, (3) sources that shape the stories are often limited or poorly chosen.

11. See the discussion of intimate partner homicides and suicides in David Adams, *Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2007.

every assault that ends in death there are countless others that leave victims terrorized, severely hurt, and traumatized and often draw in family members, neighbors, and responding officers as well.

The 2008 examples include a standoff with police that ended in officers shooting and wounding the suspect, who had earlier held the woman he lived with against her will; a man who shot and badly injured his former girlfriend before killing himself; a man who survived a stab wound to the chest from his former wife; and an attempted contract killing that left a man with gunshot wounds to his face and back.

Key Themes and Policy Implications

Impact on children

Children at the scene and losing parents

Living with domestic violence has a profound effect on children, particularly when it leads to homicide: the impact of seeing a parent murdered and perhaps seeing a parent commit suicide; the aftermath of losing a parent to homicide; and, attacks on children. Homicides that occur in a public setting may be witnessed by children who live next door, pass on the street, or play in the park. Children are also sometimes killed or injured as bystanders during an attack that targets another person, although there were no such deaths in 2008.

At least 12 minor children were at the scene of six of the 2008 homicides in 2008. Those children ranged in ages from one-year to eighteen. In one case children fled the house in the middle of the night after hearing arguing and a disturbance. In another case children called the police for help. Young adults (ages 18 to 23) were also present, including one son who shot and killed his father in an attempt to protect his mother and himself.

Domestic violence homicide also means that many children lose one or both parents through homicide and often a related suicide. While the tally cannot be precise, and is most likely an undercount, in 2008 at least five minor children were orphaned, eight were left without a mother, and two were left without a father. Adult children were similarly affected by the death of one or more parents.

The intersection of domestic violence and child custody

There is a growing understanding of the ways in which batterers use children as a tactic of coercion and control against their mothers, including threats to abduct or kill the children, particularly if a woman tries to leave the relationship.¹² News media reporting often refers to a “custody battle,” without any closer examination of how killing a child is perhaps the most powerful form of coercion and control.

Despite the overall trend to recognize the seriousness of domestic violence, particularly within the criminal legal system, abusive men who fight for custody continue to win contested actions. In 2003, the state legislature enacted a law (2003 Act 130) aimed at addressing this problem. The new law created a rebuttable presumption that it is not in the best interest of children to be placed with a parent who is known to have engaged in domestic abuse. However, there is currently no centralized method for tracking the outcome of family law cases involving domestic abuse. There has also been no review

12. See Adams, *Why Do They Kill?* Also, Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman, *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics*, Sage Publications, 2002.

of the extent to which the new law has been successfully implemented in family courts across the state. One of the few comprehensive studies of this issue, released by the federal Department of Justice in 1995, found that abusive men who fight for custody win 70% of contested actions, obtaining at least joint physical and legal custody or sole custody.¹³ Many family courts compound difficulties related to adult victim and child safety when they fail to recognize domestic abuse, its seriousness, and its profound effects on children. Many batterers pursue custody of the children as means to continue to exert control or to abuse their estranged partners. The existence of joint custody and visitation orders can provide a batterer with access to information about the child's mother, her location, who she is dating, and her activities. All of this can contribute to stalking and the risk of homicide.¹⁴

It is clear that separation and decisions related to custody and visitation are a volatile and dangerous time, although they remain largely unexamined and unreported in coverage of domestic violence homicide. In 2008, only one incident directly referenced custody issues as a factor in the homicide. In two other incidents that involved an intimate partner who was leaving or had left the relationship there were minor children and potential custody and visitation issues.

The intersection of domestic violence and child abuse

Various studies estimate that between three and ten million children are exposed to domestic violence annually. The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse suggests that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in the country.¹⁵ While not all of these homicides occur within the context of domestic violence, many do.

Each edition of this report includes many discussions back and forth at WCADV about how and whether to include child abuse–related deaths. We include children who were killed as a direct result of a domestic violence incident, such as children killed along with their mother. Because of the pervasive use and abuse of children as a tactic of battering, we also include children killed when there are indications that one parent has abused the other. While we believe that a larger number of child deaths are directly related to an ongoing pattern of domestic abuse, our current methods of tracking homicides do not allow us to consistently identify children killed by perpetrators of domestic violence. For 2008 we omitted three child abuse deaths where we could not definitively make the domestic violence link. We included the following case and one other in the 2008 report.

13. R. Bachman and L.E. Saltzman, National Crime Victimization Survey, Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey, U.S. DOJ, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995. More recent studies show that raising allegations of abuse often hurts the abused or protective parent. The Leadership Council on Child Abuse and Interpersonal Violence provides an annotated review of research: <http://www.leadershipcouncil.org/1/pas/dv.html>.

14. See Bancroft and Silverman, *The Batterer as Parent*.

15. Research cited by Family Violence Prevention Fund, *The Facts on Children and Domestic Violence*, <http://www.endabuse.org/resources/fats/Children.pdf>.

- Aaron Roberts, eleven weeks old, was beaten to death by his father, David A. Roberts. Medical authorities described the injuries as comparable to those sustained from a fall from a three-story building or high-speed crash. Roberts was found guilty of first-degree reckless homicide after a no-contest plea and sentenced to fifteen years in prison and twenty years of extended supervision, with the condition of no contact with Aaron's mother or her family and no contact with the couple's other child. The night before the homicide Roberts had been physically violent with the child's mother. Charges related to that incident (intimidation of a victim, false imprisonment, misdemeanor battery, and disorderly conduct) were dismissed as part of the plea agreement.

Leaving does not equal safety

Every year thousands of battered women make decisions to leave their abusive partners and make new and better lives for themselves and their children. Leaving an abusive relationship is often a very difficult, complex, and dangerous process.

According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, the rate of domestic violence homicides by husbands was 25 times higher when women were separated from their husbands than when married and cohabitating.¹⁶ Other research has found that a woman's attempt to leave was the precipitating factor in 45% of intimate partner homicides of women.¹⁷ Leaving means weighing and reweighing threats to themselves and their loved ones. The frequency of such threats is related to an increased risk of violence for victims who had left their relationship.¹⁸ The work of Jacquelyn Campbell and others shows that women whose partners threatened them with murder were 15 times more likely than other women to be killed.¹⁹ Nearly half of domestic violence homicides occur a month or more after a couple has separated.²⁰

Many of the homicides described earlier in this report illustrate the frequent connection between leaving a relationship and homicide. Of the 33 incidents in 2008, almost half (17/33) involved a marriage or other intimate partner relationship where a woman had ended or was taking action to leave the relationship. In the remainder of the cases it was unknown whether a victim was taking any steps to leave.

16. Neal Websdale, *Understanding Domestic Homicide*, Northeastern University Press, 1999.

17. Carolyn Rebecca Block, "How Can Practitioners Help an Abused Woman Lower Her Risk of Death?" *NIJ Journal*, Issue 250, November 2003.

18. Ruth E. Fluery et al., "When Ending the Relationship Does Not End the Violence: Women's Experiences of Violence by Former Partners," *Violence Against Women*, December 2000.

19. Campbell et al., "Assessing Risk Factors."

20. Jacquelyn Campbell et al., "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multi-site Case Control Study," *American Journal of Public Health*, 2003.

Stalking

Stalking has a lengthy legal definition under Wisconsin law.²¹ To paraphrase, it is a pattern of unwanted conduct that carries an implied or explicit threat that causes fear in the person who is the target of the behavior. It can include “following me” and “checking up on me,” as behaviors battered women often describe. It can include repeated hang-up calls, e-mail, or appearing at someone’s place of work. It can include leaving a bouquet of flowers on a doorstep. Changes in technology—such as global positioning tracking devices, text messaging, and the proliferations of databases with personal identifying information—have expanded the ways in which stalking can occur. In one study of victims of battering who survived a homicide attempt, every woman reported some kind of stalking behavior by the abusive partner with a significant escalation prior to the final assault. Other research has found that perpetrators of domestic violence homicide are twice as likely to have used stalking behaviors.²² Stalking often escalates as a woman is trying to leave an abusive relationship.

The 2008 homicides included several examples of stalking behavior, including tracking a victim’s movements and knowing her whereabouts and the increased use of cell phone text messaging as an aspect of stalking. One perpetrator used telephone tracking and appeared at the victim’s place of work or other locations when she did not respond to his calls. Another sent threatening text messages and attempted to track down the victim at her place of work.

Wider brutality and contrasts between male and female perpetrators

Beyond the overarching brutality of any method of killing someone, certain acts stand out. In 2008 these included:

- Stabbing a woman over fifty times
- Stabbing a woman and slitting her throat
- Beating a woman to death
- Slashing and stabbing a woman on her back, hands, face, and neck
- Stabbing a woman over thirteen times
- Stabbing a woman and firing three gunshots to her chest and stomach
- Shooting a man six times, including one to the head
- Shooting a woman in the face
- Stabbing a woman nineteen times
- Hitting a child with or against something to cause “severe blunt force trauma”
- Beating a man to death

21. §940.32, Wisconsin Statutes

22. Adams, *Why Do they Kill?*; and, Campbell et al., cited in Adams.

There was a contrast between men and women as perpetrators in the level of brutality involved in the homicide. All of the above examples describe the actions of men. The victims were women, children, and two men killed because of their relationship with or proximity to a woman who was the focus of the attack or the focus of the perpetrator's prior violence and threats.²³ Men were the perpetrators of all but one of the 2008 homicides.

Two of the homicides involved sexual aggression and attacks, including repeated assaults on a surviving victim and a woman who told police prior to her death that her husband attacked her because she had resisted his demands to have sex.

The homicide committed by a woman in 2008 that is included in this report was caused by a single stab wound to the victim's chest. It did not include the kind of repeated assault or mutilation described above. The perpetrator told police that she applied salt to the wound in an attempt to stop the bleeding and when the victim lost consciousness attempted to perform CPR. She did not call for help, however, and initially told investigators that someone else had committed the crime. There are factors in the case that suggest the possibility that elements of self-defense or resistive violence may have been involved in the perpetrator's actions. The perpetrator reported that they were arguing and that the victim had pinned her down and was choking her. She said she accidentally stabbed him when she tried to break away. The homicide victim in the case had two prior convictions for domestic violence-related crimes (not involving the perpetrator).

Strangulation

Strangulation is a tactic of battering that can signal severe or fatal violence. Block and Campbell have found that past attempts to strangle (or, as victims often refer to this kind of attack, "choke") are key indicators of risk.²⁴ When strangulation is the cause of a domestic violence homicide, it is unlikely to be the first occurrence.

In 2008 there was one homicide caused by strangulation and another where strangulation was a contributing factor. In the latter case the perpetrator shoved his fingers down the victim's throat, cutting off her airway, in addition to beating the victim. In a third case, the alleged perpetrator was convicted of charges against his son's mother when she was pregnant that included grabbing her by the throat.

23. Adams makes this observation: "Our research suggests that killers denigrate and blame their partners even more than abusers who don't kill. Perhaps the most surprising single finding about these men was how much rage they still held toward the women they had killed." *Why Do They Kill?* 30.

24. Block, *How Can Practitioners Help?* and Campbell, *Assessing Risk Factors*. Investigators make a distinction between "strangulation," as external force applied to someone's throat, and "choking" as an obstruction in the airway. Common usage does not distinguish, however, and the words are often used synonymously.

Later life

In comparison with recent years, a higher proportion of victims and perpetrators were age 50 and older. Fifteen domestic violence homicide incidents involved either a victim or perpetrator who was over age fifty (and in four incidents both parties were over 50). Seven of those 15 incidents involved current or former intimate partners as the perpetrator and victim. Five victims were over age sixty, as were five of the perpetrators. Four incidents involved couples where both the victim and perpetrator were over age 60.

The homicides with older victims and perpetrators ranged from one very new relationship to a couple who had been together forty years. There were adult children in at least three of those relationships.

In approximately one-third of the homicide incidents (10 of 33) the perpetrator was a male over the age of fifty (ranging from 50 to 74 years). Five of these ten men committed suicide, which accounted for half of the perpetrator suicides in 2008. With one exception, when the perpetrator was over age 50 the victims were current or former intimate partners: wives (5), former wives (1), girlfriends (2), and former girlfriends (1). The exception was a man killed by his current partner's former boyfriend. In half of the cases there was information that the victim had left or was attempting to leave the relationship. In half of the cases there was known prior domestic violence by the perpetrator toward the victim.

In contrast, in the nine incidents where the victim was over age fifty (ranging from 53 to 71 years), the prior history of domestic violence was unknown in all but one of the situations. Similarly, the victim's actions to leave the relationship were largely unknown (6 of 9). Seven of the nine victims were the perpetrator's current intimate partner.

Impact on African American communities

While intimate partner homicide rates have declined for all race and gender groups over the past twenty years, African American women continue to experience higher rates of intimate partner homicide than White women and the rate is higher for African American women in the relationship category of girlfriend than for any other group.²⁵ African American women between the ages of 15 and 45 have the highest intimate partner homicide rate.²⁶ Lifetime rates of intimate partner violence for African American women and men exceed the rates for any group other than Native American, according to Tjaden and Thoennes's analysis of the National Violence Against Women Survey data.²⁷

25. Roberta K. Lee, Vetta L. Sanders Thompson, and Mindy B. Mechanic, "Intimate Partner Violence and Women of Color: A Call for Innovations," *American Journal of Public Health*, April 2002, 530; and, BJS, *Homicide Trends*.

26. Meklit Zewatos and Patricia Bunton, *A Comparison of Domestic Violence in African American, Asian, and Hispanic Women*, results of literature review presented to Graduate Research and Scholarly Project Symposium, Wichita State University, April 27, 2007.

27. Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*, July 2000, 26.

This toll reinforces a call to examine what has been described as the “double bind” that African American women face when confronting domestic violence—in meeting what they perceive as the greater good of the community before their own well-being—and the “triple jeopardy” of intersecting factors of poverty, substance abuse, and battering.²⁸ As Bent-Goodley and Williams characterize this complexity of risk and safety, “many African Americans forego reporting abuse in an attempt to protect their intimate partner from abuse by police or loss of income through imprisonment or incarceration. The result is that the woman and her child(ren) are at an increased risk for violence and often do not report violence until the lethality of the abuse cannot be withstood.”²⁹ African American communities throughout the country and in Wisconsin have been working to address domestic violence through advocacy, prevention, and intervention measures.³⁰

For African American communities in Wisconsin, domestic violence homicide carries a disproportionate impact in comparison to their representation in the state’s population (as 6% of state residents). Encouragingly, that impact has somewhat lessened since 2005. In 2005 African Americans comprised 28% of domestic violence homicide victims and 39% of homicide perpetrators. In 2006 that declined to 14% of victims and 25% of perpetrators. In 2007, 15% of victims and 25% of perpetrators were African American.

While 2008 saw an increase over the prior two years in the proportion of African Americans who were homicide victims, at 20% it remained below the figure for 2005. At 24%, the proportion of perpetrators remained close to that of the previous two years and was still significantly below the 2005 figure.

In 2008 the eight domestic violence homicide incidents involving either African American victims or perpetrators occurred in three counties: Milwaukee (6), Rock (1), and Dane (1). None of the incidents involved multiple homicides and there was one perpetrator suicide. Seven of the eight victims in these cases were also African American.

Victims included four women and four men. One man was killed by an intimate partner (the single homicide committed by a woman) and the other three in relation to circumstances involving the victim or perpetrator’s current or former partner. Perpetrators tended to be younger; five were between the ages of 24 and 26. Half of the homicides (4 of 8) were committed with a firearm.

28. Tricia B. Bent-Goodley and Oliver J. Williams, *Community Insights on Domestic Violence among African Americans: Conversations About Domestic Violence and Other Issues Affecting Their Community*, Seattle, WA, 2004. The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) has convened discussion groups in nine U. S. cities to expand knowledge about community perceptions of and responses to domestic violence. This report and others are available at <http://www.dvinstitute.org/>. See also: Doris Williams Campbell, et al., “Intimate Partner Violence in African American Women,” 2002 Online *Journal of Issues in Nursing*, January 31, 2002.

29. Bent-Goodley and Williams, *Community Insights*, 5.

30. See IDVAAC link at note 4.

Gun violence

A gun is the most commonly used weapon in domestic violence homicide in the United States.³¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that family and intimate assaults with a firearm were three times more likely to result in death than those involving knives or other sharp instruments and twenty-three times more likely to result in death than assaults involving other weapons or bodily force.³²

In 2008, 17 of the 36 domestic violence homicide victims in Wisconsin were killed by guns. The guns used ranged from a variety of small to large caliber handguns to a shotgun. Guns were used in one of the two multiple homicide incidents. Five perpetrators died from gunshot wounds, including four who committed suicide and one who was shot by his adult son in defense of his mother and himself. In 21 of the 46 deaths related to domestic violence in 2008 (victim and perpetrator), a firearm was the method of killing.

Guns continue to be the most likely weapon used in a domestic violence homicide in Wisconsin. Between 2000 and 2008, 156 people were murdered with a gun in domestic violence related homicides. This is more than those killed by knives, other weapons, beating, strangulation, and other methods of killing combined (148).

In response to the heightened risk that guns pose to domestic violence victims, federal law restricts an offender convicted of a domestic violence related misdemeanor crime from possessing a firearm. Similarly, both federal and Wisconsin law prohibits possession of firearms while a person is subject to an active domestic violence restraining order. In 2008, at least five perpetrators who used a gun as the method of homicide should not have had access to firearms under either felony or domestic abuse–related convictions or an active domestic abuse restraining order.

One 2008 homicide by firearm involves a temporary restraining order. Currently, the mandatory firearms surrender in a domestic abuse restraining order applies only to the final order. In this case the perpetrator has been charged with killing his estranged wife the day that the temporary restraining order was served (ten days after she had applied for it). As a convicted felon, the perpetrator was prohibited from possessing or using a firearm under federal and state law. According to the criminal complaint, in the weeks prior to the homicide, he made an attempt to purchase a gun, but was turned down. He then tried to purchase a handgun from a relative, who refused, but who did show him how to use it. He succeeded in purchasing the same model from another relative, which is the weapon investigators linked to the homicide.

31. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Homicide Trends in the United States: Trends in Intimate Homicide*.

32. Leonard J. Paulozzi et al., "Surveillance for Homicide Among Intimate Partners – United States, 1981 – 1998," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Surveillance Summaries*, October 12, 2001, 50:1 – 16.

According to various research studies, when firearms are in homes, an abused woman was six times more likely than other abused women to be killed.³³ Guns are kept in homes where there is domestic violence more often than in homes that are not violent. In addition, if a gun is present, its use in domestic violence situations is relatively common.³⁴ In 2008, 13 of the 15 firearm-involved incidents occurred in the victim or perpetrator's home or a home in common. All of the incidents involved an intimate partner relationship, either between the perpetrator and the victim, or between the perpetrator and someone related to or otherwise involved with the victim.

Guns and murder-suicide are closely linked. A study by the Violence Policy Center found that 73.7% of murder-suicide incidents involved intimate partners and nearly all (94.5%) of the murder-suicides involved firearms.³⁵ In 2008, four of the ten perpetrators who committed suicide used a gun.

Help-seeking

Most victims of domestic violence seek help from a variety of sources, both informal (e.g., talking with family and friends, finding information online or through a library) to formal (e.g., local domestic abuse services, police, courts, counseling). While the homicide report does not specifically examine help-seeking strategies used by victims prior to their deaths, it provides numerous examples of their efforts. Help-seeking efforts reflected the approaches reported in research studies, as well as findings that abused women who were killed were more likely to have sought help and that "by seeking help, an abused woman indicates that her situation could be serious."³⁶ This picture of help-seeking raises questions about what kinds of new strategies might support those efforts to be safer and more protective. It also reinforces the challenge of recognizing opportunities for intervention.

Women used informal approaches such as letting friends, family members, and coworkers know what they were experiencing. One woman temporarily moved out of the country and had her friends watch for her former husband. Another was in frequent contact with her mother. Many women told family members about their plans to leave the relationship. One woman who feared for her safety asked a coworker to lock the door and stay until her shift ended so that she would not be alone. Two women moved in with their parents after leaving abusive partners and another moved in with a friend.

The formal help-seeking evident in the homicide reviews is split between contacts with domestic violence advocacy organizations, trying to persuade a partner to seek help

33. Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., "Assessing Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Homicide," *NIJ Journal*, National Institute of Justice, Issue 250, November 2003.

34. S.B. Sorenson and D.J. Wiebe, "Weapons in the Lives of Battered Women," *American Journal of Public Health*, August 2005, 94:1412- 1417.

35. Violence Policy Center, *American Roulette: The Untold Story of Murder-Suicide in the United States*, 2002.

36. Block, *How Can Practitioners Help?* See also, Adams, *Why Do They Kill?* Adams reports a range of help-seeking by women who survived homicide attempts. The top five include: sought help from her family, obtained protective order, sought medical treatment for domestic violence injury, called police, and sought help from friends.

and counseling, calls to police, and turning to the civil legal system for divorce actions or restraining orders. Few victims apparently sought restraining orders. We identified four cases where an active temporary restraining order or restraining order was in effect at the time of the homicide.³⁷ At least three victims had sought help from police shortly before the homicide. In cases where there was some known level of prior history of domestic abuse, victims had called police for help and/or sought restraining orders. Such examples, in particular, reinforce Block's finding that seeking help can be a signal of escalating and severe violence.³⁸ In at least two cases others who feared for the victim's safety tried to persuade law enforcement authorities to intervene. Half of the 2008 homicide incidents involved a victim who had left or was attempting to leave the relationship.

2009 Preview

Based on incidents identified through just over half of the year, 2009 is likely to see an increase in domestic violence homicides over 2008 and to perhaps be among the highest years since the report has been published. Twenty-seven likely cases with 30 victims have been added to the database for January-July of 2009.

Updates to the 2006-2007 Report

Two additional deaths occurred in 2007 that came to our attention after the report was published. The statewide map at the end of this report and its year-by-year tally reflect this change.

- Wautoma, Waushara County
Sheri Rose, 40, was killed by her husband, Thomas W. Stinson, 51. Stinson struck and killed her with his van after she had left the vehicle to walk alongside the road instead of remaining in the van. Stinson pled guilty to a charge of first-degree reckless homicide and was sentenced to seventeen years in prison without early release and eight years of extended supervision.
- Clinton, Outagamie County
Timothy Harrington, 36, was shot and killed by law enforcement officers who responded to a call for help when Harrington broke into the home where his estranged wife, children, and mother-in-law were present and shot and wounded his mother-in-law as she shielded her grandchildren.

At the time the report was published, criminal prosecution was pending in several of the 2006-2007 incidents. The following actions, all from 2007, have been concluded.

37. Victims may not seek restraining orders for a variety of reasons: threats from the abuser, past experience with inadequate enforcement, messages that it will not make any difference, and limited information about the process.

38. Block, *How Can Practitioners Help?*

- LaFayette, Chippewa County
Julie A. Birtzer pled no contest to a charge of second degree intentional homicide in the shooting death of her boyfriend, Ralph Hakes. Birtzer was sentenced to ten years probation and 1,000 hours of community service. If her probation is revoked she will have to serve five years in prison and ten years of extended supervision. The sentence reflected the court's judgment that Birtzer believed that she and her children were in danger from Hakes.
- Brodhead, Green County
A jury found Casey J. Shelton guilty of first-degree reckless homicide in the beating death of his ten-week-old son, Christopher. He was sentenced to forty years in prison with no early release and ten years of extended supervision. A trial on charges of physical abuse of Christopher's surviving twin brother is scheduled for December 2009.
- Milwaukee, Milwaukee County
Cesar Sanchez-Dominguez pled no contest to a charge of first degree reckless homicide in the stabbing death of Sihay Chittamath and was sentenced to two years in prison and two years of extended supervision. Chittamath had broken into Sanchez-Dominquez's home looking for his girlfriend.
- Milwaukee, Milwaukee County
Pheng Yang pled guilty to second degree intentional homicide in the beating death of his estranged wife, Bao Vang. He was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison and fifteen years of extended supervision. A charge of hiding a corpse was dismissed. Also in relation to Bao Vang's death, Yang's cousin, Kao Yang, pled no contest to felony murder-battery and hiding a corpse, with both charges modified as party to a crime. He was sentenced to different but concurrent sentences on both charges which resulted in five years in prison and five years of extended supervision. Kao Yang was ordered to have no contact with at least seventeen specifically named members of the victim's family.

The 2006 homicide of Sue Weiland, Star Prairie, occurred in St. Croix County (not Polk County, as listed in the report). The statewide map at the end of this report will reflect this correction.

Methodology

Our definition of homicide is the killing of one human being by another. This encompasses criminal, justifiable, self-defense and reckless homicides. Homicides were considered domestic violence related if:

- The victims and perpetrators were spouses or partners, former spouses or former partners, adults with children in common, and adults or teens that had been in a dating relationship. We also include cases that involved adults related by blood if dynamics of power and control were demonstrated.
- It was a homicide of a person other than the intimate partner and it occurred within the context of domestic violence. This includes cases where the circumstances of the murder included obsessive control of the perpetrator's current or former partner that extended to her or his new partner; or, of a person who attempted to protect a domestic violence victim from future harm.
- The homicide occurred as an extension of or in response to ongoing abuse between intimate partners. For example, when a partner or estranged partner killed their children in order to exact revenge on his partner.

The report also accounts for overall deaths related to domestic violence homicide, including perpetrator deaths. Most perpetrator deaths are suicides. The count of domestic violence homicide victims occasionally includes perpetrators killed by responding law enforcement officers or killed by someone in defense of another person who is under attack. The victim count also includes law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty when responding to domestic violence.

To determine the domestic violence homicides that occurred in Wisconsin in 2008 we examined the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) submitted to the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance (OJA) by local law enforcement agencies. UCR fields include: reporting agency; county; homicide date, type, and location; victim and offender demographics; weapon used; relationship between the perpetrator and victim; and, circumstance of the homicide. The UCR does not provide the name of the victim or the offender. We reviewed the UCR reports and identified domestic violence-related homicides for further review.

The next step was a search for news accounts of the selected homicides and those that might not have appeared in the UCR. WCADV tracks daily media coverage of domestic violence homicides in three Wisconsin newspapers, which is supplemented with Internet searches. Finally, in some cases we contacted one or more of the following sources for clarification of information: local domestic violence programs, district attorney's offices, adult protective services, law enforcement agencies, and coordinated community response coordinators in the counties where the homicides took place. We also used the Wisconsin Circuit Court Access Program to research the criminal history of the

homicide perpetrator and victims.

We sought to uniformly report the facts of the case for each incident. However, if additional information was not available to us, we reported only the simple demographic information available in the UCR. Reporting on domestic violence related homicides is complicated since we cannot know the exact characteristics of the relationship. Our knowledge is ultimately limited by the information reported to community systems and friends and family by the involved parties prior to the homicide, and how much of that knowledge finds its way into the official record.³⁹

The scope of our report is limited to those homicides identifiable through public access. Due to confidentiality laws, WCADV could only obtain records of public access and such data as death certificates were not available to us. We know this methodology is imperfect and can result in undercounts in at least two areas:

- ***Children killed by domestic violence abusers:*** We include children who were killed as a direct result of a domestic violence incident. We believe this count is low since a homicide of a child is often viewed as an isolated incident of child abuse. An investigation of a child homicide can often overlook past domestic violence or the domestic violence might not be included in the public record. While we believe that a larger number of child deaths are directly related to an ongoing pattern of domestic abuse, our current methods of tracking homicides do not allow us to consistently identify children killed by perpetrators of domestic violence.
- ***Same-sex relationships:*** It is likely that we undercount domestic violence homicides that occur in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) relationships. Due to the stigma that is placed on LGBT communities, relationships can be hidden and the nature of a relationship might not be accurately identified in the public record of a homicide. An LGBT relationship might be coded as “friend,” “roommate” or “other known to victim”.

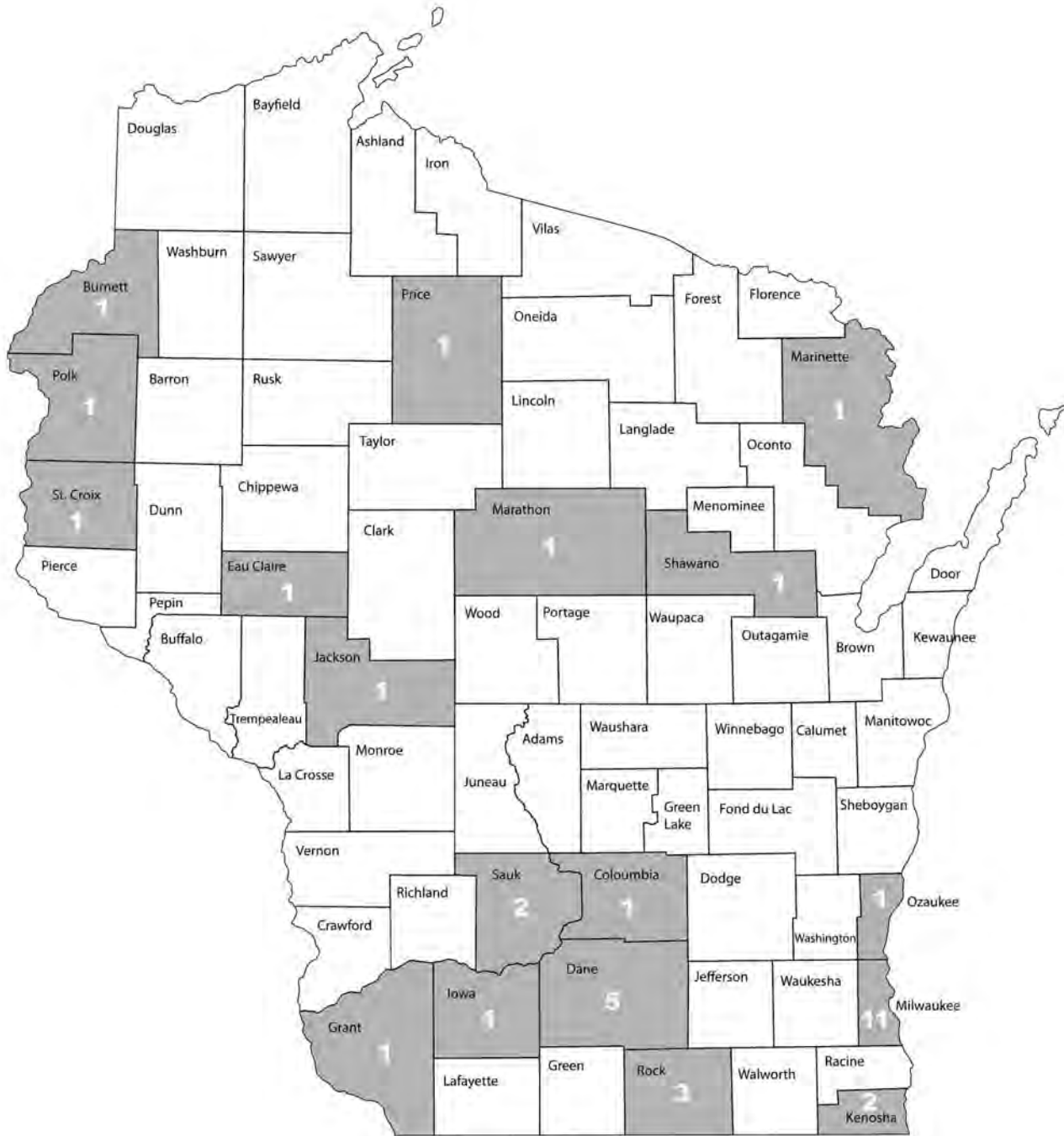
In compiling our summary data we sought to include the total number of homicides committed in Wisconsin in 2008. The figure for 2008 comes from the Office of Justice Assistance (OJA). Information from the Bureau of Health Information (BHI) was not available at the time the report was completed. Each agency compiles its data from various reporting methods including death certificates, police reports, coroner, medical examiner and hospital records. For example, BHI counts homicides of Wisconsin residents that occur in other states, as well as traffic fatalities from intoxicated driving; OJA counts homicides in the Wisconsin county in which they occur and conforms to UCR standards that omit intoxicated driving deaths. The BHI figure is therefore usually higher than the UCR-based count.

39. Neil Websdale, *Lethality Assessment Tools: A Critical Analysis*, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 1999.

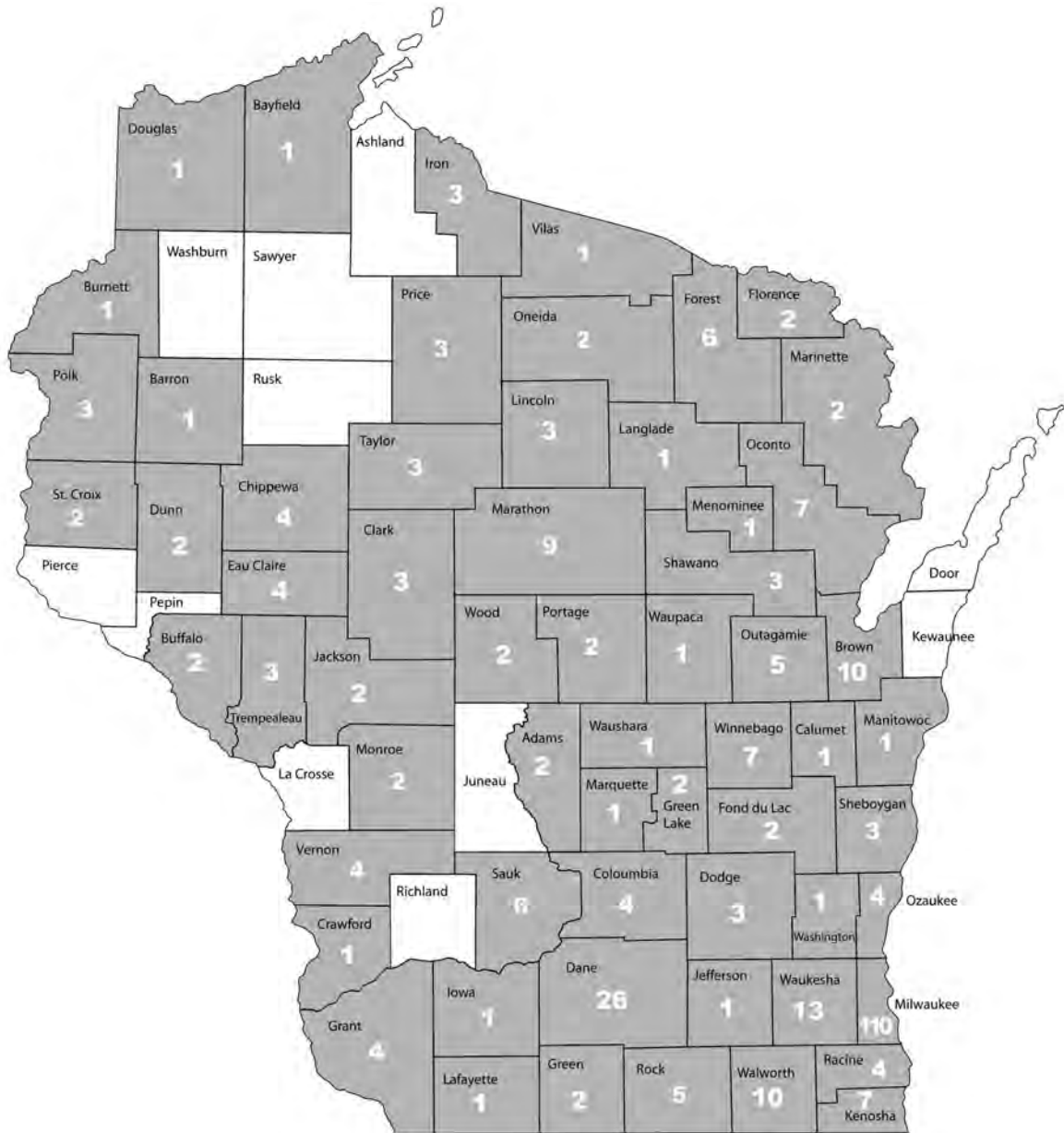
In each case of homicide-suicide, we chose to list the murdered person in our heading as we recognized this person as the homicide victim.

We seek to be as consistent and as accurate as possible year to year in the homicides included in the report. The methodology leaves out certain kinds of violence between individuals who know one another or are related to one another. It does not take in the full scope of “family violence,” for example. With few exceptions, it does not include deaths from child abuse and neglect, deaths of parents or grandparents at the hands of adult children or grandchildren, or one sibling’s murder of another. In applying this framework, most of the cases included in the report are related to intimate partner violence.

2008 Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicides



2000 - 2008 Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicides



Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicides 2000-2008

Year	Homicide Deaths	Suicides	Total
2008	36	10	46
2007	41	10	51
2006	28	8	36
2005	40	6	46
2004	28	5	33
2003	45	16	61
2002	38	11	49
2001	33	9	42
2000	33	8	41
Totals	322	83	405

Postscript: Reading domestic violence homicide cases

Researching and writing this report each year brings many questions: questions about which cases to include and which to exclude; the circumstances of someone's death; the particular details to include and how. For example, how do we write about the sexual violence and brutality a victim experienced before her death? We always wonder whether we even have a right to put people's stories on the page, however well-intentioned the cause. They have no say in how the story is told, after all, whether by police or prosecutors or reporters or by us.

Each year brings its own distinctive set of questions. Among the questions in 2008: How could someone in a public parking lot hear "popping" sounds, see an angry man near a car, and not call police to investigate? How could someone be told that a woman had been shot and killed, drive to that parking lot and past the car, and not call police to investigate? How could authorities not take children's fears about their mother's safety more seriously and investigate more thoroughly? How could someone with a history of multiple domestic violence charges and restraining orders against three different women in three different counties receive a diversion agreement without significant safety-oriented conditions or monitoring? How can domestic abuse offenders be arrested for crimes related to actions that signal increased risk and danger—including increasing and more severe violence, stalking behavior, repeated threats to kill—and not be placed on conditions of pretrial release that might better protect their victims, such as daily reporting or electronic monitoring? How can we collectively, as communities and as a state, miss so many opportunities to intervene?

About WCADV

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV) is a statewide membership organization of domestic abuse programs, formerly battered women, and other individuals who have joined together to speak with one voice against domestic abuse. As a statewide resource center on domestic violence, we offer such services as:

- ⌘ Training and technical assistance to domestic abuse programs
- ⌘ A quarterly educational journal
- ⌘ Forums for the involvement of battered women
- ⌘ Networking and support for programs for battered women and their children and for professionals in related fields
- ⌘ Training for professionals in legal, health care, social services, child welfare, elder abuse, housing, education, and mental health fields and for employers throughout Wisconsin
- ⌘ Technical assistance for attorneys, legal advocates, prosecutors, and public defenders and limited funds for victims to acquire direct legal assistance

Acknowledgements

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Researchers: Alyssa Gerarden, Research Assistant

Editors: Patti Seger, WCADV Executive Director; Tess Meuer, Director, Legal Department; Julie Andersen, Community Response Coordinator; and Tony Gibart, Policy Coordinator.

We could not have developed this report without the help of the Office of Justice Assistance. We received essential guidance and information from Emelia McAuliff with the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission.

Special thanks go to the staff of domestic abuse programs, district attorneys' offices, law enforcement agencies, and victim witness offices who helped us find information about the domestic homicide victims whose stories are included in this report.

We have benefited greatly from the findings and recommendations of The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Domestic Violence Fatality Review. Their definitions of a domestic violence fatality and undercounts have been of particular use in crafting the Wisconsin report.

Finally, we want to acknowledge each and every individual life taken by domestic violence, and their surviving families and communities.



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