

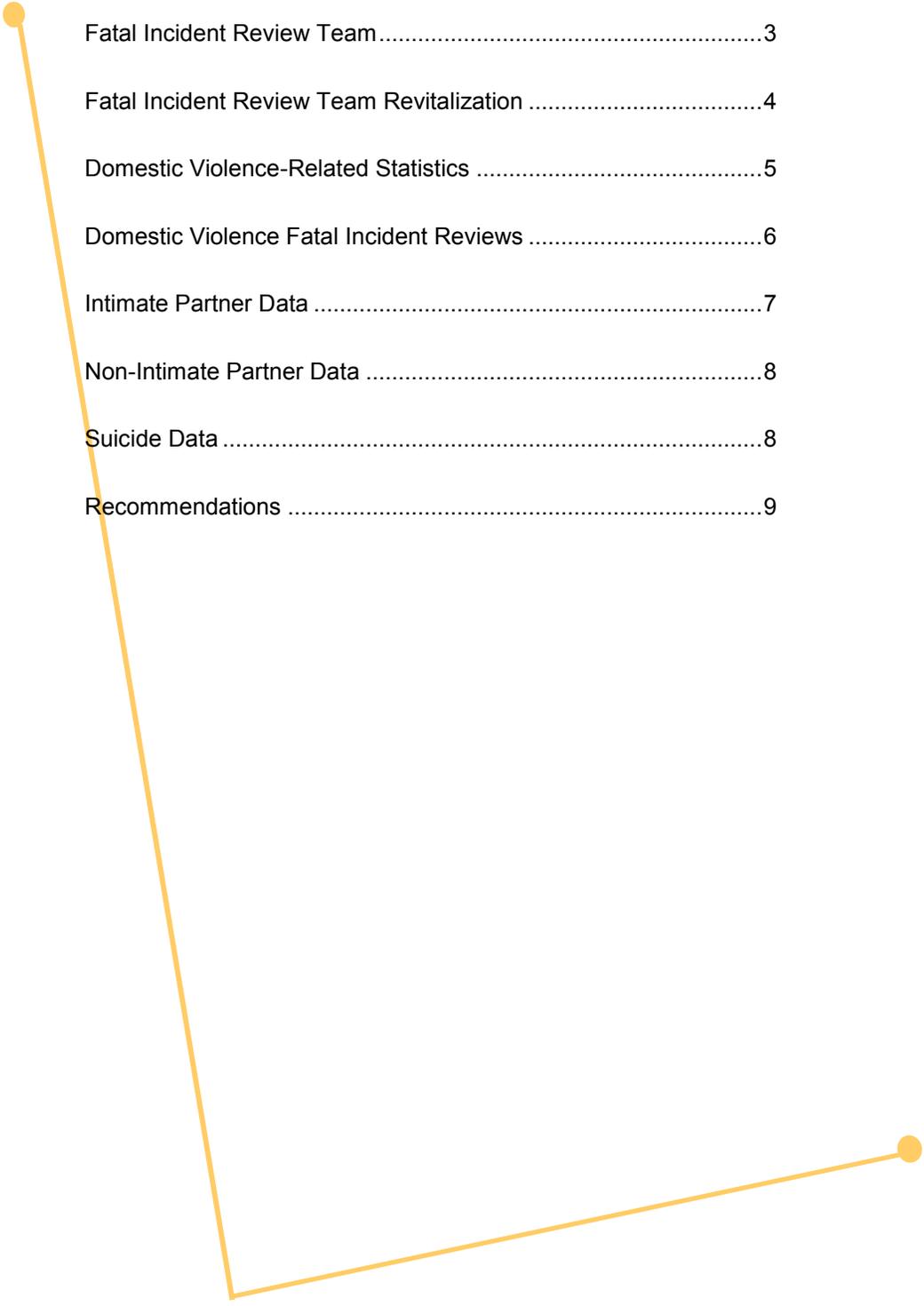
Fatal Incident Review Team Report

2016

This report is dedicated to the domestic violence victims who lost their lives. The Fatal Incident Review Team honors the memory of those lost and strives to create a safer community through our work.



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Fatal Incident Review Team

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT) was established by statute in 1996 and became the first statewide team in the country. FIRT members are dedicated professionals who conduct system audits of State agencies and private organizations that had contact with the victim and/or the perpetrator to assess the system's response. Although domestic violence fatality reviews are retrospective in nature, their purpose is prospective. Reviews focus on identifying trends, patterns and obstacles in services, assessing agency interventions, and most importantly, developing practical recommendations aimed at improving the system and preventing future injury and death. In 2009, the General Assembly granted FIRT the authority to conduct near-death reviews. These reviews enhance the team's ability to improve Delaware's response to domestic violence with the wealth of knowledge that can be gained from speaking directly with the domestic violence survivor about the incident, the history of violence, system involvement, and awareness of resources.

FIRT Co-Chairs

The Honorable Vincent J. Poppiti
The Honorable Jan R. Jurden
Dana Harrington Conner, Esq.

FIRT Members

In accordance with 13 Del. C. § 2105, in addition to the co-chairs, the Review Team shall consist of :

- The Attorney General or the Attorney General's designee;
- The Chief Defender or the Chief Defender's designee;
- The Director of the Division of Family Services or the Director's designee;
- The President Judge of the Superior Court, or the President Judge's designee;
- The Chief Judge of the Family Court or the Chief Judge's designee;
- The Chief Magistrate of the Justice of the Peace Courts or the Chief Magistrate's designee;
- The Director of the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, or the Director's designee;
- The Commissioner of the Department of Correction or the Commissioner's designee;
- A law-enforcement officer to be appointed by the Delaware Police Chiefs' Council;
- A treatment provider from a certified batterers' intervention program appointed by the Council;
- Two victim advocates appointed by the Council; and,
- A victim of domestic violence appointed by the Council.

All members of the Review Team, plus other individuals invited to participate, are considered part of the review panel for a particular case or incident. The Review Team frequently invites law enforcement personnel to participate in any case in which the agency investigated the death, near-death or had involvement with the victim prior to the domestic violence incident under review. The Review Team may also invite the participation of individuals with particular expertise that would be helpful to the review panel, or representatives from organizations or agencies that had contact with or provided services to the individual prior to that individual's own death or near-death, that individual's abusive partner or family member and/or the alleged perpetrator of the death or near-death.

Fatal Incident Review Team



The 2016 Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT) Annual Report provides a summary of the Review Team's activities and accomplishments over the last year. This report contains statistical data for the domestic violence fatalities that occurred in calendar year 2015, as well as information and recommendations from the death and near-death cases reviewed by FIRT in 2015. This report is a supplement to the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Annual Report which is published in the fall of each year.

In May of 2015, three FIRT members attended the annual conference of the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative (NDVFRI). By attending this conference, the team members were not only educated on the most recent research and best practices, but they were able to meet and consult with fatality review experts regarding ways to revitalize FIRT after 20 years of conducting fatality reviews.

In consultation with NDVFRI, it was recommended that we assess the membership of our review team. As a first step, we invited additional community partners and a domestic violence survivor to participate in the reviews this year. The added participants proved to be an asset to the Team, which led to formalizing their positions on the Team by amending the FIRT statute. In June 2016, the FIRT statute was amended by House Bill 220 to expand membership to include representation from the Office of Defense Services, a treatment provider from a certified batterers' intervention program, two victim advocates and a survivor of domestic violence.

Also in consultation with NDVFRI and Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA), the Team expanded the scope of information gathered during a fatality review. In June 2015, the Team began conducting interviews with family, friends and co-workers of both the victims and perpetrators of fatal domestic violence incidents. In interviewing those who knew the victims and perpetrators personally, the Team was able to gather a greater history of events leading up to and surrounding the deaths of the victim and/or perpetrator in these cases. Those that were interviewed, added insight into family histories, prior domestic violence, previous relationships, and the reality of what life was like for the victims and perpetrators prior to the fatality or near death incident. This information is not always captured in official records.

In March 2016, the Team gathered for a training session facilitated by two consultants from NDVFRI. The Team addressed roles and responsibilities of Team members; making meaningful recommendations; and working with the survivors and family members. Team members spent time discussing these issues ensuring that Delaware is in line with best practices in the field of fatality reviews.

Over the past year, the DVCC staff has been working to complete a database for FIRT cases. Once the database is complete, the DVCC and FIRT will have over 20 years' worth of information available from 131 fatality reviews that have occurred prior to this year. FIRT will be able to analyze information and track data to better identify trends that are specific to Delaware and enhance our reporting in the future.

Domestic Violence-Related Deaths

The DVCC tracks domestic violence-related deaths that occur throughout the State of Delaware. These domestic violence-related deaths include victims, perpetrators, or by-standers if the death was a result of domestic violence, either intimate partner violence or between family members.

	2013	2014	2015
Incidents of domestic violence homicide	11	11	6
Victims of domestic violence homicide (excluding by legal intervention)	11	8	6
Homicides by legal intervention (responding law enforcement)	0	1	1
All domestic violence-related homicides	11	9	7
Perpetrator suicide (excluding by legal intervention)	4	4	1
Total deaths (victim and perpetrator)	15	13	8

The demographics of the six domestic violence homicides in 2015 were as follows:

Cause of death:*

- 4 Stabbing
- 1 Gunshot
- 1 Blunt force trauma

Victim relationship to offender:

- 2 Girlfriend
- 2 Wife
- 1 Husband
- 1 In-law

Race of victim:

- 4 Caucasian
- 2 Black

Race of perpetrator:

- 2 Caucasian
- 3 Black

Gender of victim:

- 5 Female
- 1 Male

Gender of perpetrator:

- 1 Female
- 4 Male

Age of victim:

- 3 ages 26-35
- 1 age 36-45
- 1 age 56-65

Age of perpetrator:

- 4 ages 26-35
- 1 age 66-75

* According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, female intimate partners are more likely to be murdered with a firearm than all other means combined. However, in Delaware during 2015, there was one homicide victim killed by gunshot which is unusual when compared to previous years.

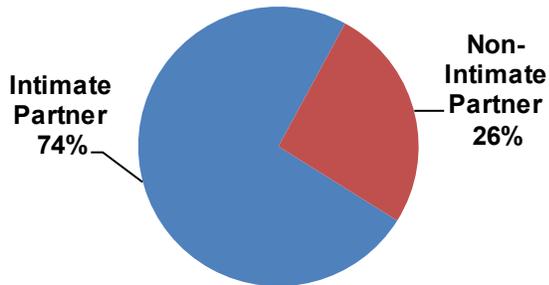
Domestic Violence Fatal Incident Reviews

This portion of the report is a collection of data from 131 domestic violence fatal incident reviews conducted by FIRT between 1996 and December 2015. These reviews included cases where prosecution was completed and the Department of Justice authorized FIRT to conduct a final review. The cases reviewed do not reflect all domestic violence homicides or near-deaths in Delaware since 1996. Of the 131 fatal incident reviews, there were 164 domestic violence-related deaths plus two near-deaths.

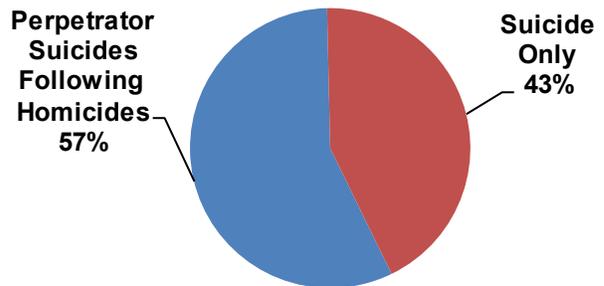
Domestic Violence-Related Deaths and Near-Deaths

Homicide Victims	112
Perpetrator Suicides Following Homicides	29
Suicide Only	22
Undetermined Victim Deaths*	1
Near-Death	2

**Homicide Victims
1996 - 2015**

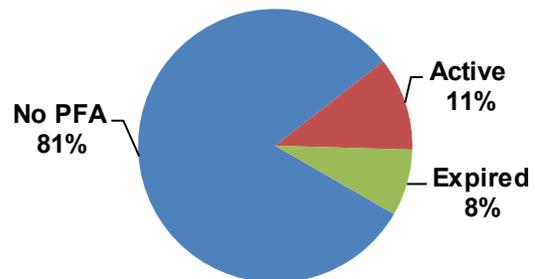


**Suicide Deaths
1996 - 2015**



In the 131 cases reviewed by FIRT, 122 children lost a parent to domestic violence homicide and two children were impacted by the near-death of a parent.

**Victims with Protection from Abuse Orders
1996 - 2015**



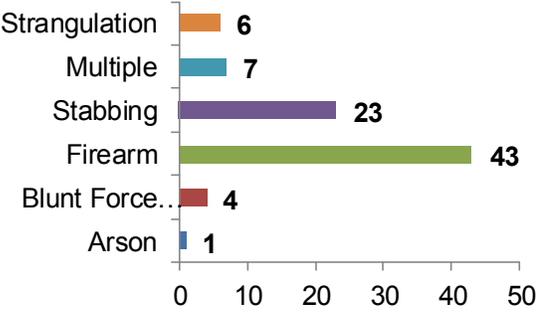
* If a case lacks a clear indicator as to whether or not the death was intentionally caused by another or accidental, the case will remain suspicious in nature and the exact manner of death will be undetermined.

Intimate Partner Data

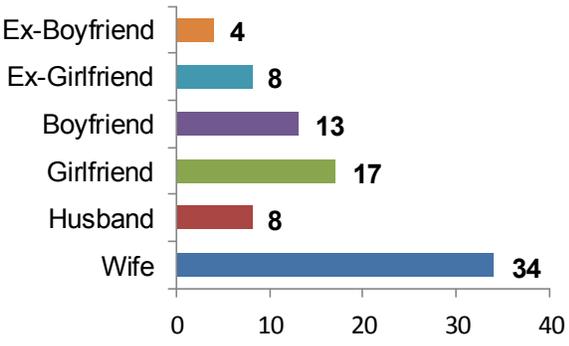
Of the 112 homicide victims and 2 near-death victims reviewed by FIRT, 84 victims or 74% of the homicides occurred in a past or present intimate partner relationship. The term “intimate partner” includes current and former spouses, current and former dating couples with or without a child in common, and teen dating couples. Intimate partners may be of the same gender.

Out of 84 intimate partner homicides or near-deaths, 47% of the homicides occurred when a victim attempted to leave or had ended a relationship with the perpetrator.

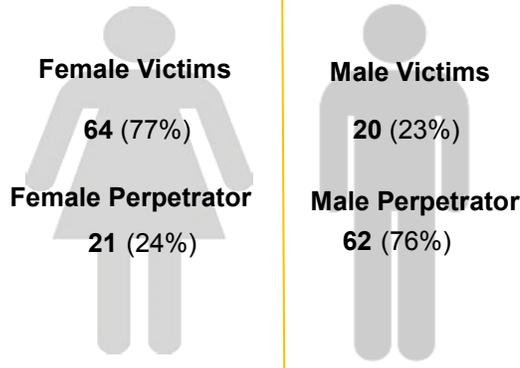
Victim Cause of Death



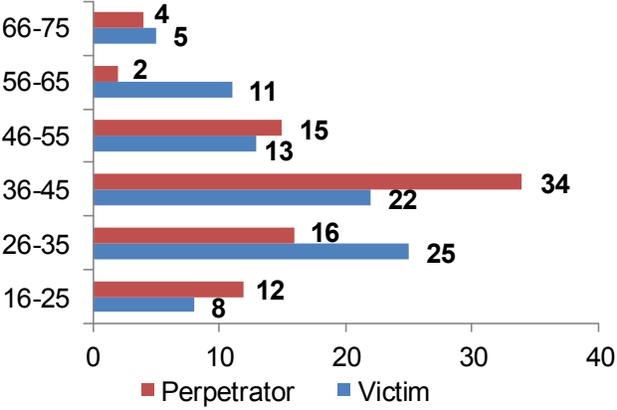
Victim Relationship to Offenders



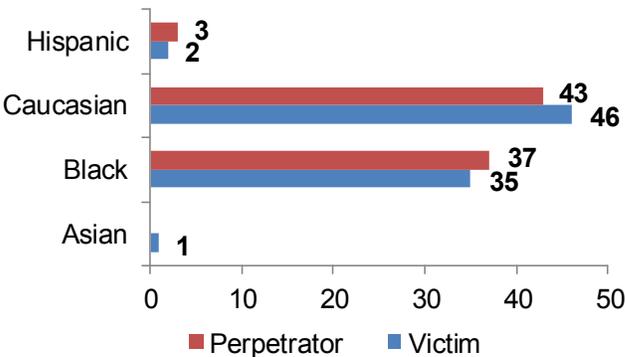
Victims & Perpetrators by Gender



Victims & Perpetrators Age at Time of Incident



Victims & Perpetrator by Race

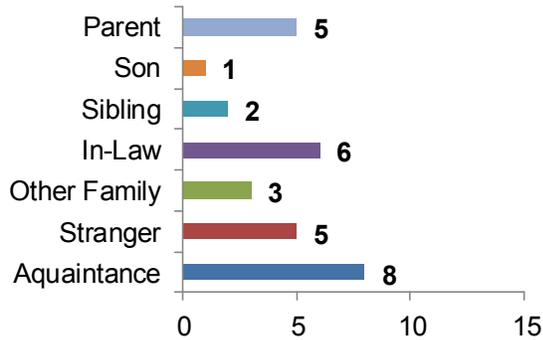


Non-Intimate Partner Data

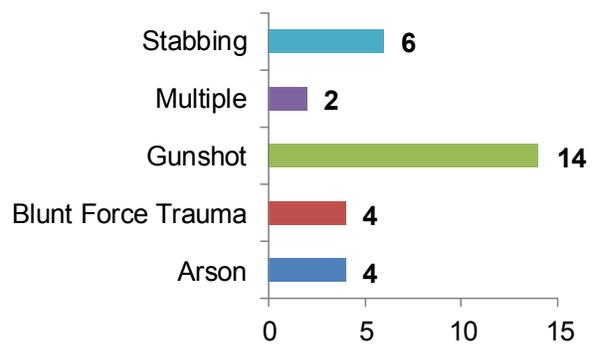
Domestic violence-related deaths between non-intimate partners includes individuals with a familial relationship such as parent/child or sibling relationship.

Of the 112 homicides victims included in this report, 30 victims were “non-intimate partners”. Also included in these homicide numbers are victims who were bystanders (acquaintances or strangers).

Victim Relationship to Offender



Victim Cause of Death



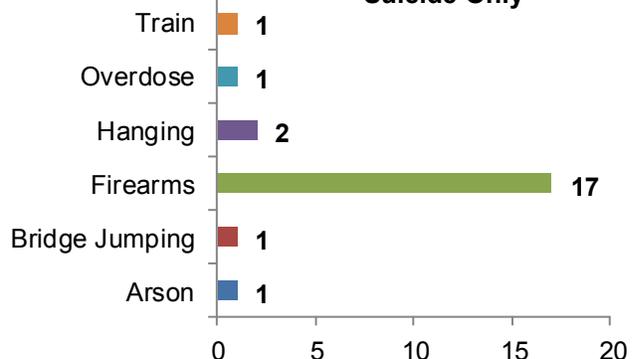
Suicide Data

Of the 164 domestic violence deaths included in this report, there were 29 perpetrator suicides following a homicide or murder/suicide. Out of the 29 murder/suicide cases reviewed, 27 of the perpetrators were male and 2 were female.



“Domestic violence-related suicides” are counted separately from the murder/suicide cases. The suicide only cases are victims or perpetrators who have taken their own lives and have a significant history of abuse by or toward their partner. There were a total of 23 domestic violence-related suicides, including one undetermined death where it could not be concluded if it was a suicide or accidental.

**Cause of Death
Suicide Only**



FIRT Recommendations & Responses

The ultimate purpose for reviewing domestic violence fatalities is to reduce the incidence of such deaths. At the end of each case review and following the presentation of information, Team members are asked if they have any recommendations for improving the system response to domestic violence.

The 2016 FIRT recommendations were sent to relevant agencies and organizations throughout the State. The responses to those recommendations are listed below in **BOLD**.

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council is extremely grateful to the participating agencies for their commitment towards the mission to improve the system's response to domestic violence. We are fortunate to have the high level of cooperation demonstrated by the agencies' response to the Fatal Incident Review Team's recommendations.

Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

Recommendation:

The DVCC Legislative Committee should explore legislation to facilitate the temporary removal of firearms in alleged psychiatric emergencies.

Domestic Violence Coordinating Council Response:

The DVCC Legislative Committee will discuss the recommendation and possible legislation at the Committee's meeting in November of this year.

Recommendation:

The Fatal Incident Review Team should research national campaigns for the workplace to provide education on domestic violence and risk factors for lethality and report out to the Fatal Incident Review Team at the next meeting.

Domestic Violence Coordinating Council Response:

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council staff is researching national campaigns for the workplace to provide education on domestic violence and risk factors for lethality. This research will be presented to the FIRT at an upcoming meeting with the Team.

FIRT Recommendations & Responses

Recommendation:

The DVCC shall continue to discuss the development of a Domestic Violence High Risk Team in Delaware to enable and enhance better communication and collaboration among stakeholders.

Domestic Violence Coordinating Council Response:

The DVCC has established a workgroup of stakeholders to explore the feasibility of developing a Domestic Violence High Risk Team in Delaware. The DVCC supports this effort to enhance communication and collaboration among stakeholders to help victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families

Recommendation:

The Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families should revise the Divorcing and Separating Parents Curriculum to include information about the challenges of blended families and domestic violence.

Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families Response:

The Department of Services for Children, Youth and their Families has 27 Separating and Divorcing Parent Education providers. By September 1, 2016, we will send out a letter to our providers requesting that they include core educational components on blended families and domestic violence into their basic and domestic violence curriculums.

Clerk of Peace

Recommendation:

The Clerks of the Peace should provide domestic violence information and blended family information with resources to marriage license applicants.

Clerk of Peace Response:

The Clerk of Peace offices in NCC and Sussex County offices will have domestic violence and blended family information available, supplied by the DVCC, to applicants for marriage licenses.

If you are in danger, please call 911.

Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis 24-Hour Hotline Numbers

New Castle County

Domestic Violence	302-762-6110
Bi-Lingual	302-762-6110
Rape Crisis	1-800-773-8570
TTY	1-800-232-5460

Northern Kent

Domestic Violence	302-678-3886
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Kent & Sussex

Domestic Violence	302-422-8058
Rape Crisis	1-800-262-9800
Bi-lingual	302-745-9874

DVCC Main Office

New Castle County Courthouse
Suite 700
500 N. King Street
Wilmington, DE 19801

Phone: 302-255-0405

Fax: 302-255-2236

www.dvcc.delaware.gov

DVCC Kent & Sussex County Office

Milford State Service Center
Suite 105
13 S. W. Front Street
Milford, DE 19963

Phone: 302-424-7238

Fax: 302-424-5311

www.dvcc.delaware.gov

Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

www.dvcc.delaware.gov