

Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence

In Massachusetts 1991-1995



Domestic Violence: A Human Rights Crisis

This report is dedicated
to the memory of all the
victims killed due to
intimate partner violence
and to the hope that in
our lifetime this violence
will be eradicated.

Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence in Massachusetts 1991-1995

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Cite as:

Langford L, Isaac NE, Kabat S. *Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence in Massachusetts, 1991-1995*. Boston: Peace at Home.

February 1999.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by Peace at Home, National Institute of Mental Health National Research Service Award #F31-MH10986, the Harvard Injury Control Research Center; the Hyams Foundation, G.H. Shaw Foundation, The Reebok Human Rights Foundation, Give to the Earth Foundation, Zell Family Foundation, A.C. Ratchesky Foundation, Martin Dunn and family, and America On-line for Internet access.

The authors are grateful to Glenn Pierce and LeBaron Briggs of the Center for Applied Social Research at Northeastern University and Daniel Bibel of the Massachusetts State Police for supplying SHR data, helpful comments, and encouragement; Charlene Zion of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for supplying death certificate data; the Massachusetts District Attorney's offices, Marilee Kenney Hunt of the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance, numerous police officers, and advocates across the state for their help in identifying and confirming cases; and the Boston Globe, Boston Herald, The Berkshire Eagle, The Worcester Telegraph, and the New Bedford Standard Times for supplying news articles.

We appreciate the efforts of those who served as expert consultants on case definition and inclusion, especially Tito Wittington, David Finkelhor and the roundtable at the 1997 Homicide Research Working Group meeting: Cary Adkinson, Beth Ansari, Vickie Brewer, Bill Edison, Derek Paulson, Rick Rosenfeld, and Kim Vogt. We are grateful to William DeJong, Karen Emmons, Robert Flewelling, Carolyn Newberger, and Glorian Sorensen for their helpful comments on the design and implementation of this project. Special thanks to our Peace At Home Human Rights Review Committee: Stan Grossfeld, Margaret Lazarus, Renner Wunderlich, Jim Hardeman, Rai Cunningham, and Ken Carstens.

Staff, board members, and volunteers at Peace at Home worked tirelessly on this project, especially Wendy Baxter, Holly Curtis, Kerry Callahan, Ali Towfigi, Marcia Gordon, and Debra Kay Jefferson. A very special thank you goes to the Peace at Home interns who volunteered numerous hours on this project, Rebecca Meyer, Margaret Dunn, Robin Chalfin, Kristen Heineman, Amy Copperman and Amy Jones.

The opinions expressed in this report represent the views of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of any funding agency.

Design and layout by Hobbamock Design.

Printed by Recycled Paper Co.

Foreword

Kristin Lardner was 21 when she was killed on Boston's Commonwealth Avenue in 1992, shot by a young man under court order to stay away from her. She was my daughter and as a reporter for the Washington Post, I went up to Boston in the weeks after her murder to find out more about what happened and why.

What I discovered was a shattering, senseless series of lapses in the criminal justice system, a system that Kristin counted on to protect her. There are no excuses for what her killer, Michael Cartier, did, but the law made it easy for him. He was a serial batterer. He had two series of restraining orders taken out against him before Kristin obtained hers. She was a brave, self-reliant, young woman who was determined to put her short lived relationship with Cartier in the past, on her own, without telling her parents about the violence he'd inflicted on her or what she'd done to keep him away.

Cartier should have been in jail that awful day in 1992, serving the six-month suspended sentence he had coming to him for beating up a previous girlfriend, if he got in trouble again. He did, but nothing happened. His probation officer looked the other way. The courts failed to check his record. The police wrote him up for violating one of the orders Kristin had taken out, but apparently no one at the courthouse read the report until she was killed.

When I wrote about all this in the Washington Post six months later, some members of the criminal justice establishment were, predictably, defensive. One of them declared that it is wrong, even dangerous, to look for weak links in the system after each new tragedy because it 'sends the false message that people will no longer be in danger after we get the system in order.'

That is simply wrong, as the Peace At Home study shows so forcefully. A search for weak links sends no such message and poses no dangers, except perhaps to the weak links. What we need, as Peace At Home recommends, is a comprehensive approach to all potential intimate-partner-related homicides to get a better grasp of the problem and a better understanding of the weak links that need to be strengthened. This is a vitally important study, one that casts a stunning spotlight on a terrible crime that is still shrugged off as the predictable outcome of a nasty quarrel. Nasty? Yes. Predictable? Of course. So why didn't somebody notice? Why didn't somebody do something before it was too late?

George Lardner
Washington, D.C.
December 1998

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I. Executive Summary

Homicide related to intimate partner violence is a more extensive problem than previously thought. Traditionally, female partners are the most commonly recognized and documented victims of intimate partner homicide. Our report represents a first step in recognizing and counting the larger group of people who become victims of this fatal violence. These Other Victims include the children, family members, friends, attorneys, and new partners of abused women. Unfortunately, national data systems for compiling information on domestic violence homicide are not able to document these deaths accurately.

The current U.S. system of data collection, the Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) compiled by the FBI, does not account for all of the Other Victims killed 'in the line of fire,' nor does it fully document all of the Partner Victims. For Massachusetts during the period 1991-1995, the SHR missed 29% of the Partner Victims and didn't document the Other Victims as homicides related to intimate partner violence.

This project had two primary objectives: 1) to count all of the homicides related to intimate partner violence occurring in Massachusetts during a defined time period; and then 2) to characterize these incidents as fully as possible. Through this work, we sought to draw attention to the fact that individuals other than partners are also killed.

In Massachusetts during the years 1991–1995, **a total of 194 individuals were killed** in incidents related to intimate partner violence. In tallying these intimate partner violence related homicides, we learned the following:

- **23 % of the individuals killed in incidents related to intimate partner violence were people other than the partner (Other Victims)**
- **18 % of the homicide victims were children (ages 0-19)**
- **87 % of the intimate partners killed were women**
- **43 % of all female homicide victims in the state were killed by current or former intimate partners**
- **89 % of the perpetrators were men, 75% of them aged 19-44**

In characterizing these incidents, we learned that:

- **at least 52 % of the perpetrators had a prior criminal history of violence in Massachusetts**
- **at least 24 % of the perpetrators had an active restraining order against them at the time of the homicide**

- **at least 40 % of the perpetrators had a previous restraining order taken out against them**
- **35 % of victims were stabbed, and 38% were shot**
- **18 % of the perpetrators committed suicide at the time of the homicide**
- **at least 81 children witnessed these homicides or their immediate aftermath — incidents that usually involved the deaths of their own mothers**

The major recommendations that stem from this research are:

- **Establish a Death Review Process.** A comprehensive process of data collection and systems review should be established for all deaths related to intimate partner violence, including those involving individuals other than the partner. Data collection should be prospective and uniform. Death review teams, established at the county level, should bring together members of key programs and agencies for confidential discussions of case backgrounds. The intent of these discussions is to encourage system refinement and integration. Aggregate data on fatalities, without personal identifiers, should be compiled at the state level and published in annual reports.
- **Publicize the Homicide Risk.** Implement a public education campaign about the lethality risk that intimate partner violence presents to children and others. Messages must be tailored to be accessible to specific audiences, including cultural and linguistic minorities and those in same-sex relationships.
- **Expand Safety Planning.** Appropriate more funds to provide safety planning for women and their families (especially children), including follow-up planning at times of recurring risk. Safety planning should be available to all women seeking restraining orders in Massachusetts courts.
- **Help the Child Witnesses to Domestic Violence.** Due to the known negative impacts on children of witnessing domestic violence, we recommend further dissemination of both awareness and counseling programs that address the impacts of witnessing fatal and non-fatal domestic violence.
- **Increase Batterer Accountability.** Educate criminal justice personnel to take full advantage of criminal history and restraining order data in determining how best to hold batterers accountable.

See the Recommendations section for more detail.

II. Introduction: Domestic Violence is a Human Rights Crisis

As you read these pages and see the numbers, do not forget the faces that are behind these statistics. Do not forget Regina McGee, 19, shot to death by her boyfriend. Remember Zelia Dutra Goulart and her mother Maria Dutra, killed by Zelia's former boyfriend when he came to visit their son. Remember Nancy Nguyen and her daughter Joannah, age 7, fatally stabbed with a 10-inch carving knife by Nancy's husband as they were moving out of their apartment to escape the abusive relationship. Do not forget Joshua and Alberto Davila, ages 4 and 8, strangled and stabbed to death by their father because their mother would not reconcile with him.* And remember that for every person killed, thousands of others struggle every day to escape a similar fate.

Domestic violence is perhaps the most internationally ignored human-rights violation. This is calculated violence. Just as political prisoners in other parts of the world are mentally and physically tortured, kept in isolation, and at risk of death if they try to escape, so too are many victims of domestic violence. But because their assailant is someone they know, what is happening to these victims is often dismissed as a "family problem," "a private matter," or "beyond our control!"

In 1948, the United Nations adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but the member states have been slow to recognize the acts of private individuals as human rights violations (see sidebar). However, due to the testimonies of thousands of survivors of violence internationally and the tireless work of countless organizations and women's groups, this has begun to change. In Vienna in 1994, at the International Tribunal on Violence Against Women, 'domestic violence as a violation of human rights' was formally recognized.

One of the primary means used by human rights organizations to bring attention to a problem is the detailed documentation of incidents. Since 1991, the Boston-based human rights organization Peace at Home has compiled and published annual lists cataloguing the deaths related to domestic violence in Massachusetts. Staff at Peace at Home began to notice that, while female partners still make up the majority of victims, often other people are killed in the context of domestic violence. This report documents, we believe for the first time, the full extent of the victims who are killed due to intimate partner violence.

Comprehensive and accurate data about the number and dynamics of deaths from domestic violence are critical in raising awareness, demonstrating the need for resources, guiding problem-solving strategies, and influencing policy decisions. It is our hope that this report, by highlighting the full extent of deaths and providing concrete recommendations for response, will catalyze additional local and international action aimed at saving lives.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides an international standard by which to measure human rights and quality of life. This excerpt illustrates the kinds of rights that are being denied to the women, children, and men who are affected by domestic violence.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.

Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

* *It's not possible for us to detail here the stories for each victim in this report, for a complete listing please contact Peace at Home.*

III. Methodology

Case Definition

Homicide cases were included in the study if they occurred in the context of intimate partner violence. This definition encompasses two types of cases: 1) the murder of a spouse or unmarried romantic partner by a current or former partner (Partner Victims), and 2) murders of family members, friends, acquaintances, or strangers (bystanders) in the context of a partner- or ex-partner-related incident (Other Victims). The inclusion of Other Victims in our tally of intimate homicide cases is a key difference from previous studies in this area.

Who are the Other Victims?

The most common Other Victim cases included incidents in which the partner was the intended target of the assault, but someone else was killed accidentally or intentionally. For example, in several instances the perpetrator entered the home of his partner and attacked everyone living there, including other family members and friends.¹ Other Victims were also murdered while trying to protect women from abuse. In one case, a woman's ex-boyfriend came to her apartment and started a fight with her. Her brother tried to intervene, and the ex-boyfriend shot and killed the woman's brother to prevent him from interfering.² Finally, Other Victims were killed to seek revenge on the perpetrator's partner. For example, one man killed three of his ex-girlfriend's children to retaliate for breaking up with him.³

Identifying cases

Prior research has shown that using multiple data sources is critical to detecting the maximum number of homicide cases. In this study, we compiled a database of all intimate partner homicide cases from 1991 through 1995 using news articles, lists assembled by District Attorneys' offices, reports from domestic violence advocacy agencies, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR). The SHR is based on reports by law enforcement agencies. Because the SHR does not contain names, cases identified through the SHR were matched with death certificates to identify individuals by name.⁴ Only Massachusetts residents are included in this analysis.⁵

The findings reported here do not cover homicides more recent than 1995 due to the time-consuming and labor-intensive nature of retrospectively establishing a dataset that includes all homicides related to intimate partner violence.

Confirming cases

All but three cases were verified as being related to intimate partner violence by two data sources.⁶ The two most common sources used to verify cases were news articles and reports from District Attorneys' offices. In some cases where one of these sources of verification was not available, or where additional information was needed to establish the case as related to intimate partner violence, we consulted by telephone with police officers who had worked on the case.

Describing cases

Descriptive data on victims was obtained from victim death certificates. Information on the circumstances of the homicides was based primarily on news accounts, although District Attorneys' offices, police officers, and advocacy agencies provided additional details on some cases. The criminal and restraining order histories of the offenders were abstracted from computerized records of the Criminal Activity Record Information (CARI) database maintained by the Massachusetts Trial Court.

IV. How Many People Were Killed?

Over the five-year period from 1991 to 1995, a total of 194 people were killed in homicides related to intimate partner violence. The number of deaths each year

was quite variable, ranging from a low of 27 to a high of 49 (Table 1). A relatively small proportion of the incidents involved multiple victims (15/175, or 9% of all incidents) (Table 2). However, since two or more people were killed in each of these incidents, they together account for close to a fifth of all the deaths (34/194, or 18% of all victims).

Through media reports on the 194 intimate partner violence related homicides we were able to tally 30 non-fatal injuries inflicted during these same events. This figure is almost certainly an underestimate of how many other people were injured, since the main focus of news reporting in such cases was the fatalities. However, this information does remind us that witnesses and other bystanders may need to recover not only from the psychological trauma of these events, but from physical trauma as well.

National homicide statistics and individual research studies have previously been used to examine the question of what proportion of female homicide victims are killed by current or former intimate partners. In this study, we found that 43 percent of the female homicide victims were killed by partners (Table 3).⁷ By comparison, data at the national level indicate that 30 percent of all female homicide victims over age 14 were killed by intimate partners.⁸

Table 4 shows partner homicide rates by race and sex.⁹ For purposes of comparability to previous studies of partner homicide, these figures exclude Other Victims also killed in the context of intimate partner violence. The rate for Blacks (3.0 per 100,000) was much higher than for either Whites (0.5 per 100,000) or Asians (0.8 per 100,000). Among Whites, the homicide rate for women was eight times that for men, and for Blacks the rate for women was three times what it was for men. Among Asians, no male partners were killed during this time period in

Table 1

Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence, Massachusetts 1991–1995

Year	Victims
1991	31
1992	47
1993	40
1994	27
1995	49
Total	194

Table 2

Multiple Victim Incidents

Year	Incidents	Victims
1991	4	8
1992	6	15
1993	1	2
1994	1	2
1995	3	7
Total	15	34

Table 3

Proportion of Female Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence, Massachusetts 1991-1995

Year	Total Number of Female Homicides in MA	Number of Female Partner Victim Homicides	Percent of Total that are Female Partner Victim Homicides
1991	51	21	41.2
1992	60	26	43.3
1993	60	22	36.7
1994	51	21	41.2
1995	57	30	52.6
Total	279	120	43.0%

Table includes women ages 16 and older. Nine cases excluded due to missing data.

Table 4

Average Annual Partner Homicide Rates by Race and Sex, Massachusetts 1991-1995

Race	Female Victims	Male Victims	All Victims	Rate Ratio F:M
White	0.8	0.1	0.5	8.0
Black	4.4	1.4	3.0	3.1
Asian	1.5	--	0.8	--
Total	1.0	0.2	0.6	5.0

Rates are per 100,000 persons age 16 or older.

Table 5

Partner Victims: Comparison with Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) Data

Year	Number of Partner Victims (SHR data)	Number of Partner Victims (Study data)	SHR as Percentage of Study Database
1991	14	25	56.0
1992	17	29	58.6
1993	18	29	61.1
1994	23	26	88.5
1995	34	40	85.0
Total	106	149	71.1

Massachusetts. In interpreting these figures it is important to bear in mind that the non-White race categories represent groups that are very heterogeneous with respect to ethnicity, cultural norms, country of origin, and native language. The variability in homicide rates across these race categories may have as much or more to do with access to services as with risk factors in any subgroup of the population.

The Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR), which is maintained by the FBI, is the only national dataset that can be used to study intimate partner homicides because it is the only data source that contains information on the victim-offender relationship. Although the SHR is a useful measure for studying trends of homicide over time, there are some limitations to the data. Because SHR forms are completed voluntarily by local law enforcement agencies, some homicide cases are never reported. Of those that are reported, some are missing the victim-offender relationship, which is needed to identify the case as an intimate partner homicide. The SHR also has no categories to cover certain victim-offender relationships (e.g., ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend).

The SHR contained only 71 percent of the Partner Victim cases we identified, missing 29 percent (Table 5). There does appear to be a trend toward more completeness of the SHR in the later years of this series, though whether this reflects improved reporting or simply year-to-year variation is unclear.

The deaths of Other Victims in the context of intimate partner violence are not identifiable within the SHR unless the partner dies in the same incident. Thus, of the 45 Other Victims identified in this study, only twelve (36%) would be identifiable in the SHR if the SHR had no coding errors. However, given coding errors in the SHR, a very small fraction is actually identifiable.

V. Where in the State Were People Killed?

During the period 1991-1995, intimate partner violence related homicides occurred in nearly all counties in Massachusetts.

Table 6 shows how many intimate partner violence related homicides occurred in each county of Massachusetts. While these county-specific data illustrate the distribution of domestic violence homicides across the state, they should be interpreted with caution. In particular, it is not appropriate to assume that people experiencing severe violence will have a stable residence. Women may deliberately move out of their normal county of residence for safety reasons, and may be killed in other locations such as their new residence, at their workplace, at a friend or relative's home, or on the street, all of which may be in different counties. These data serve to highlight the importance of coordinating services across county lines, regions of the state, and even with neighboring states.

Table 6		
County of Occurrence* for Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence		
County Name	Number of Homicides	Rate
Barnstable	8	4.3
Berkshire	2	1.4
Bristol	15	3.0
Essex	33	4.9
Franklin	3	4.3
Hampden	18	3.9
Hampshire	4	2.7
Middlesex	34	2.4
Norfolk	5	0.8
Plymouth	13	3.0
Suffolk	40	6.0
Worcester	16	2.3

Note: No intimate partner violence related homicides occurred in Dukes or Nantucket Counties during the period 1991-1995.

* County where the homicide occurred, which may not be the victim's county of residence.

** Rate per 100,000 population.

Richard Stuart and Nelson DeOliveira

At least 4 neighbors called 911 when they heard Stephen Gruning fighting with his ex-girlfriend, Rhonda Stuart, her brother Richard, and her new boyfriend, Nelson DeOliveira in their apartment in Lynn. When police arrived, they removed Gruning from the scene and released him later that night. Gruning went home, retrieved a gun, and then returned to the Stuarts' apartment where he opened fire. On February 12, 1995 both Richard Stuart and Nelson DeOliveira died from their gunshot wounds. Rhonda Stuart survived.

Table 7

Victim Characteristics

Characteristic	Partner Victims (n=149)		Other Victims (n=45)		All Victims (n=194)		MA Population (%)
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	
Sex							
Female	129	(86.6)	13	(28.9)	142	(73.2)	(52.0)
Male	20	(13.4)	32	(71.1)	52	(26.8)	(48.0)
Age							
<18	4	(2.7)	21	(46.7)	25	(12.9)	(22.5)
18–24	31	(20.8)	8	(17.8)	39	(20.1)	(11.8)
25–34	47	(31.5)	7	(15.6)	54	(27.8)	(18.3)
35–44	42	(28.2)	3	(6.7)	45	(23.2)	(15.3)
45–54	15	(10.1)	5	(11.1)	20	(10.3)	(10.0)
55+	10	(6.7)	1	(2.2)	11	(5.7)	(22.1)
Race							
White	97	(65.1)	22	(48.9)	119	(61.3)	(87.8)
Black	31	(20.8)	3	(6.7)	34	(17.5)	(4.6)
Hispanic/ any race	14	(9.4)	14	(31.1)	28	(14.4)	(4.8)
Asian	4	(2.7)	6	(13.3)	10	(5.2)	(2.3)
Race unknown	3	(2.0)	0	(0.0)	3	(1.6)	--

Source: Victim Death Certificates

Table 8Victim-Offender Relationship for
Male-on-Female Partner Homicides

Perpetrator	n	(%)
Husband	21	(18.8)
Ex-husband	23	(20.5)
Current boyfriend	39	(34.8)
Ex-boyfriend	29	(25.9)

Note: Table excludes 14 cases where the current or 'ex' status of the relationship was too ambiguous to code.

VI. Who Was Killed?

Roughly three-quarters of the victims of intimate partner violence related homicide are women (Table 7). The large majority of Partner Victims (81%) were ages 18-45; by comparison, this age group makes up 45% of the state population. Close to half of the Other Victims (47%) were legal minors. The age difference between Partner and Other Victims is also reflected by their average ages, which were 35 (SD 13.1) and 21 (SD 15.8), respectively. Relative to their representation in the state population, Blacks were especially over-represented among Partner Victims, while Hispanic and Asian individuals were over-represented among Other Victims.

Most of the 149 partner homicides involved either men killing their current or former female partners or, less commonly, women killing their male partners. Three cases involved homosexual couples (one female and two male couples).

Table 8 shows the victim-offender relationship for the male-on-female partner homicide cases in this study. Current or former boyfriends perpetrated over half of the male-on-female partner homicides (61%).

For female-on-male homicides (n=18), about half of the women were married to their partner and half were girlfriends. The majority of the relationships were current as opposed to former. As many as half of these incidents appear to have occurred in self defense.

Among the partner homicide cases, nearly half of the former or unstable relationships had ended more than a month prior to the homicide. While many people think of the time of separation as being the time of highest risk for partner homicide, these data indicate that risk may be ongoing for months or even years.

Information provided in news accounts suggested that many of the homicides among estranged partners occurred in the context of the victims' constructive actions, such as getting a job, dating, gaining custody of the children, moving, or proceeding with divorce actions. Future research should examine whether these kinds of steps, which signal the separated partner's increasing independence, are times of renewed risk.

VII. How Often Were Other Victims Killed?

One in four of the people killed in the context of intimate partner violence during the period 1991-1995 were someone other than the partner.

While female partners and ex-partners remain the most common victims of intimate partner violence related homicides, we found that during the period 1991-95 in Massachusetts, nearly one-quarter (23.2%) of victims were someone other than a partner (Figure 1). Among these Other Victims were the children, other relatives, new boyfriends, friends and divorce attorneys of the female partners. Men perpetrated all homicides involving Other Victims.

Of 45 Other Victims, 26 (57.8%) were children of the targeted partner (Table 9). Although many were young children, several adult children were killed as well. Of the 26 children, 12 were the biological children of offenders, one was the stepchild of the offender, and 13 were the children of offenders' girlfriends. Complete data were not available on the number of children present in the household who were not killed.

The second largest category of relationships (9 cases) was other family members (20.0%). Among these victims were three mothers, four brothers, and two sisters of the targeted partner. The remaining categories each contained four or fewer victims. Four victims (8.9%) were current or former partners of the targeted partner. Two victims were friends, two were divorce lawyers, one was the targeted partner's sister's boyfriend, and one was a stranger (a bystander) who tried to intervene in a domestic dispute.

Figure 1

Intimate Partner Homicides by Year — Partner Victims vs. Other Victims

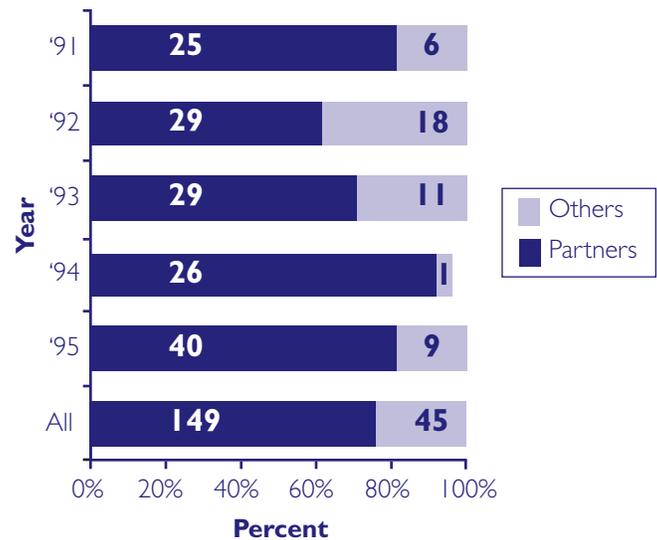


Table 9

Relationship of Other Victim to Targeted Partner

Relationship to Targeted Partner	Number of Victims	
	n	(%)
Child	26	(57.8)
Other family member	9	(20.0)
Current/former partner	4	(8.9)
Friend	2	(4.4)
Lawyer	2	(4.4)
Sister's boyfriend	1	(2.2)
Stranger	1	(2.2)
Total	45	(100)

Sovanna, Visal, Virak Men

In November of 1995, Chong Yim ended her short and violent relationship with Vuthy Seng, 34, because he was unhappy about the attention she paid to her children. Upset at the breakup, Vuthy Seng broke into her apartment in Lowell, where he found only her 4 children, ages 9, 12, 13, and 15. Seng shot and macheted Sovanna, Visal, Virak, and Sathy Men. Only Sathy Men survived.

VIII. How Often Were Children Involved?

In recent years there has been growing concern regarding the impact of partner violence on children. In this study, we attempted to document how many children were directly affected by the most serious cases of partner violence, those resulting in death. During the years 1991-95, we counted 34 intimate partner violence related homicides of children (individuals ages 0-19), many of whom were killed by their mothers' partners. Twelve of these 34 cases were instances of teen dating violence, where a young person was killed by their own current or former partner as opposed to the partner of their parent or another person. This is a strong reminder that intimate partner violence can and does occur among youth, and can be just as deadly as among adults.

It was also documented that 81 children of the victim and/or perpetrator witnessed the homicide or its aftermath. At least another 64 people (family, friends, neighbors, or other bystanders) also witnessed a homicide and/or suicide, and because these numbers were generated from news accounts this is a conservative estimate.

Children and Youth Victims (Ages 0-19)

- Of the 194 victims, 34 (17.5%) were under the age of 20; these 34 victims were killed in 29 separate incidents
- Of the 34 victims under age 20:
 - 12 were killed by partners (“teen dating violence”)
 - 15 were age 10 or younger
- At least 81 children of the victim and/or perpetrator witnessed the homicide or its immediate aftermath

IX. Who Did the Killing?

Eighty-nine percent of the perpetrators of intimate partner violence related homicide are men.

Most perpetrators of intimate partner violence related homicides are young men (Table 10). In most instances (79%), the perpetrator killed a single victim, in 6% of cases they killed both Partner Victims and Other Victims, and in 16% of the cases only Other Victims were killed. None of the women who committed homicides related to partner violence ever killed anyone other than a male partner.

X. Did The Perpetrators Have Criminal Histories?

According to available information, three-quarters of perpetrators had a prior criminal history in Massachusetts, and slightly over half had a prior history of violence (Table 11). Close to a quarter of perpetrators were under an active restraining order at the time of the homicide; the vast majority of these orders had been taken out by the partner who was killed or targeted (even if an Other Victim was the person actually killed). A number of victims had restraining orders that had recently expired.

Forty percent of perpetrators had a history of having been under a restraining order at some time prior to the homicide, taken out by the victim or some other person. It is important to note that these data do not, of themselves, indicate that restraining orders 'don't work.' Approximately 40,000 restraining orders are issued in Massachusetts every year, 90 percent in the context of intimate partner abuse.

The proportion of perpetrators with criminal histories or restraining order histories may actually be somewhat higher than reported here, since we do not have access to information from other states. Also, the restraining order registry in Massachusetts was begun in September 1992. Prior to this time, we can determine a restraining order history only if there is a criminal record of such an order being violated, or if press clippings mention an order.

Table 10

Perpetrators of Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence

Trait	Perpetrators	
	n	(%)
Sex		
Male	155	(89.1)
Female	19	(10.9)
Age		
<18	5	(2.9)
19–24	24	(13.8)
25–34	53	(30.5)
35–44	56	(32.2)
45–54	23	(13.2)
55+	13	(7.5)
Total	174	(100)

Table 11

Criminal and Restraining Order Histories of Perpetrators

Type of History	Percent of Perpetrators
Any criminal history*	74.7
History of violence**	51.8
Active restraining order at the time of the homicide	23.6
Any history of restraining order(s)	39.7

* History of arraignment

** Crimes against a person

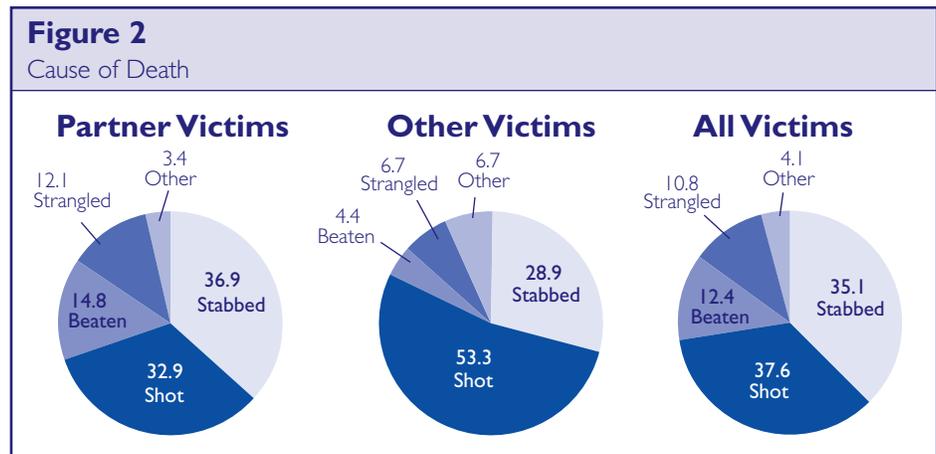
XI. How Were Victims Killed?

Trudy Manion

After serving 5 years for the attempted murder of a former girlfriend and her brother, Ernest Anthony continued his pattern of abuse with his next girlfriend, Donna Manion. Manion tried to end the relationship and took out a restraining order against him. Two weeks later, on February 6, 1992, he tracked Donna down at her parent's house in Winchester and fatally shot and ran his car over Donna's mother Trudy. He then kidnapped Donna and fled the scene. When police tracked him down five days later, he released Manion and shot himself to death.

One third of Partner Victims and slightly over half of Other Victims were killed with guns.

Figure 2 shows the means by which homicide victims were killed. This information was gleaned from victims' death certificates and news accounts. While only about a third of Partner Victims were killed by firearms, the majority (53%) of Other Victims were killed this way. Stabbing was the leading cause of death among Partner Victims (36.9%) and also caused the death of a substantial number of the Other Victims (28.9%).



XII. How Often Did Perpetrators Commit Suicide?

Close to one-third of perpetrators attempted or completed suicide at the time of the homicide.

	n	Cases (%)
Completed suicide	32	(18.3)
Attempted suicide	19	(10.9)
No suicide*	124	(70.9)
Total**	175	(100)

* In 8 other incidents perpetrators were injured, but these were not considered suicide attempts.

** The total is 175 since one perpetrator committed homicide more than once and thus had two opportunities to commit suicide.

Close to a third of perpetrators attempted or completed suicide (Table 12). Of the perpetrators who completed suicide, all but one were male. The majority of the suicides (78%) occurred following homicides committed with firearms. Eight of the ten perpetrators who killed both Partner Victims and Other Victims in a single incident either attempted or completed suicide. Suicides related to intimate partner violence were only counted in this study if they occurred at the same time as a homicide. For instance, in a situation where a perpetrator attempted to kill a partner and then shot himself, but the partner ultimately lived, his suicide would not be included in our tally.

Though we do not know what proportion of abusive partners ever make suicide threats, these findings support previous assertions that suicidal behavior by the abuser should be considered an indicator of increased lethality risk to the victim.

XIII. Recommendations

This report brings into detailed focus the reality that intimate partner violence poses a lethal threat not only to female (and occasionally male) partners, but to others who are in proximity to the situation. The risk is especially acute for children, but extends to other family members, friends, new partners, acquaintances, co-workers and occasionally even strangers. Because so much attention is given to the fatal instances, it is important that we make as full a count as possible of the toll taken by intimate partner violence. Therefore, counting only one set of individuals (female partners) is not sufficient. Also, merely counting such deaths is not enough — they must be as fully characterized as possible so that we might learn from each tragedy how to continue to improve our response to this problem.

However, counting and characterizing these cases can be very cumbersome and time-consuming when the circumstances surrounding such events must be patched together retrospectively from media accounts and other publicly available information. A systematic multidisciplinary approach to reviewing all deaths related to intimate partner violence, as expediently and thoroughly as possible, is needed.

A process of domestic violence death review is one possible approach that deserves further consideration. Death reviews bring together members of multiple agencies to discuss confidentially the background of a homicide case, the contact that various agencies had with the individuals involved, and what approaches to communication or practice might have been more effective in serving the needs of victims or in holding perpetrators accountable. Death review has promise for improving our ability to count cases accurately and for encouraging better coordination of the many services that play a role in addressing this complex problem. It has the potential to highlight where systems can be improved either individually or in their integration. It is a way of asking ‘What went wrong?’ not for the purpose of assigning blame, but in the spirit of continuously improving the quality of services we are providing to families in need. (See Appendix A for a more complete description of the death review process.)

An informal death review of sorts occurred in Boston in the wake of one of the cases included in this study. In the days and weeks that followed the death of Kristin Lardner in May of 1992, both the local Boston media and Kristin’s father, George Lardner, a journalist with the *Washington Post*, delved into the background of Kristin’s case. What they found was a series of miscommunications and procedural flaws across a range of responding agencies that was very disturbing. This detailed examination of Kristin’s case brought about changes in the systems that address domestic violence. One concrete product was the restraining order registry that now tracks all such orders issued across the state. We assert that a formalized process that reviews all such deaths would enable continuing evaluation and improvement of systems.

William F. Kahn

After his marriage of six months ended in divorce, John T. Lin, 25, planned to kidnap his wife’s lawyer, William Kahn, so the lawyer would lead him to his ex-wife’s hiding place. Kahn escaped Lin’s initial attempt to kidnap him and enlisted the help of a police officer, Jonathan Stratton. On November 30, 1995 Lin then opened fire, in downtown Boston on Kahn and Stratton, and shot himself. Only Stratton survived.

Sherry Morton and Cedric Seabrooks

After repeated episodes of abuse, Sherry Morton, 23, took out an emergency restraining order against her boyfriend Sean Seabrooks, 24, after an incident in which a friend of the family physically prevented Seabrooks from breaking a lamp over Morton's head. However, Seabrooks convinced Morton to reconcile and to have her restraining order vacated for the good of their son. On January 11, 1993, after another attempt by Morton to end the relationship, she and her 18-month-old son Cedric Seabrooks were stabbed more than 50 times by Sean Seabrooks in her Northampton apartment.

When a plane crashes, there is, appropriately, a rush to investigate what occurred in order to ensure that any flaw in systems or procedures that might cause a similar catastrophe can be addressed. When intimate partner violence leads to death, we cannot simply turn our backs because the tragedy has not been averted. We must make some sense of the tragedy by learning from it. We owe this to both the victims who have died and those who are struggling to survive.

In summary, we recommend the following steps for improving our measurement and understanding of intimate partner violence, as well as system response:

- **Establish a comprehensive system of data collection for all deaths related to intimate partner violence, including those involving individuals other than the partner. Such a system should be centralized, prospective and uniform.**
 - Pilot domestic violence death review as a means for establishing routine surveillance and encouraging greater interagency coordination of services. (See Appendix A for a further description of death review.)
 - Generate and disseminate annual reports on intimate partner violence related homicides statewide.
- **Implement a public education campaign about the risk that intimate partner violence presents to children and others in addition to partners. Messages must be tailored to be accessible to specific audiences, including cultural and linguistic minorities and those in same-sex relationships.**

This campaign should address the following conclusions from this report:

- Domestic violence is a public safety issue that presents a risk to people outside the intimate partner relationship.
- Knives present a serious and under-recognized risk for intimate partner homicide. Safety planning with victims needs to include both a discussion of whether or not the abuser has access to guns, and also the risk associated with knives and strategies for reducing this risk.
- Threats of suicide by an abuser need to be re-emphasized as a marker for homicide risk. Public awareness campaigns can help to make relatives, friends and co-workers aware that suicidal statements by a man, particularly an individual with a prior history of violence, may mean that his partner and other family members are at risk. Education and awareness is also especially important for the mental health community.
- Homicide risk can extend for months or even years beyond the break-up of a relationship. While the period immediately following a break-up is especially risky for victims, there also appears to be recurring risk at times when the victim is taking steps that signal greater independence from the abuser (e.g., filing for divorce, obtaining custody of children, getting a job, dating a new partner).

- **Appropriate more funds for service programs to provide safety planning for women and their families (especially children), including follow-up planning at times of recurring risk.**

- Ensure that all women seeking 209A protective orders in all courts have available to them an advocate who is fully trained in safety planning and domestic violence issues. These advocates must be independent of the district attorneys' offices in order to provide women with complete confidentiality.
- Expand the availability of safety planning and related services for cultural and linguistic minorities.
- Educate service providers who have frequent contact with abused women and their children to make appropriate referrals to advocates with training and experience in safety planning.

- **Due to the negative effects that witnessing domestic violence has on children, we recommend further dissemination of both awareness and counseling programs that address the impacts of witnessing fatal and non-fatal domestic violence.**

- All individuals working with abused women and their children, including service providers who primarily address 'ancillary' needs such as child care, job training and housing, should be knowledgeable about the effects of witnessing on children and how to make referrals to appropriate programs.
- Individuals who work predominantly with children (e.g., daycare providers, teachers, pediatricians) should know how to identify signs that a child may be witnessing domestic violence and how to make appropriate referrals for both these children and their mothers.

- **Educate criminal justice personnel to take full advantage of criminal history and restraining order data in determining how best to hold batterers accountable.**

- Judges should routinely review the restraining order and criminal history of defendants, whether in civil 209A hearings or criminal cases.
- Efforts should be made to assess alternative sentencing strategies that may have a greater impact on batterers who violate restraining orders, especially those who do so repeatedly.

**Mary Ann, Daniel,
and Amy Seguin**

Kenneth Seguin, 35, had threatened suicide in the months preceding the murder of his wife, Mary Ann Seguin, and their two children Daniel and Amy, aged 7 and 5. On April 29, 1992, after bludgeoning his wife to death and dumping her body in the Sudbury River, he slashed the throats and wrists of his two children and left their bodies in a Franklin pond. He was found wandering in the woods with self-inflicted wounds to his wrist and neck.

Appendix A

What is a Domestic Violence Death Review?

Domestic violence death review teams, which are beginning to be formed in some states, are modeled after child death review teams. Death reviews bring together individuals from multiple agencies and disciplines to share information during confidential discussions of the background and circumstances of a case. The death review team does not do field investigations that retrace or duplicate investigations by individual agencies. Instead, the team pools previously collected information that might not otherwise be shared across agencies. This pooled information often sheds more light on the cause of death and the context of the incident. The focus also goes beyond the review of individual cases to examine patterns across deaths, including potential risk factors and implications for how systems may need to be changed to improve the response to domestic violence. At least one state, California, has passed enabling legislation to address some of the potential barriers to interagency cooperation in death review processes.

The National Center on Child Fatality Review has developed three standards that must be met for a group to be considered a death review team:

1. The team must bring together representatives from the medical examiner's office, law enforcement, the district attorney's office, health experts, and the state's child protection agency.
2. No single agency controls the death review process. Each team member must be allowed to share information from his or her agency that could improve the understanding of the cause and circumstances of the death.
3. There must be a protocol, or decision rule, for determining which deaths are selected for review. No single team member or agency determines which cases will be reviewed.

Currently, every state in the country except Massachusetts has one or more child death review teams that meet these standards.

We propose that Massachusetts meet these standards for child death review (which would include the review of children killed in incidents involving intimate partner violence), and that appropriate state agencies be given the necessary funds to work collaboratively to pilot a similar process of domestic violence death review.

Appendix B

Definition of Terms

Intimate partner violence related homicide - a homicide in which one current or former intimate partner kills another, or where another individual outside the intimate relationship is killed in the context of partner violence (see Other Victims, below). A homicide between current or former intimate partners is counted as an 'intimate partner violence related homicide' whether or not there is a known history of other partner violence in the relationship.

Intimate partner violence - the threat or actual use of physical force intended to cause harm or fear of harm in a current or former intimate partner (spouse or ex-spouse, current or former boyfriend/girlfriend, same-sex partner).

Partner Victims - individuals who were killed by their current or former intimate partner (spouse or ex-spouse, current or former boyfriend/girlfriend, same-sex partner).

Other Victims - individuals other than the abused partner who were killed in the context of intimate partner violence. Examples include: a child who is killed at the same time as his/her abused mother; a child who is killed as an act of spite or revenge against an abused women (even if she is not killed); a brother who is killed while trying to defend his sister from her abusive ex-partner.

Safety plan - a plan constructed by an abused person that lays out steps that can be taken to help reduce the risk of future harm from the abuser. These steps might include putting away cash, extra car keys and important documents in case it is necessary to flee on short notice; removing guns from the home; relocating knives so that they are less accessible; identifying relatives, neighbors or friends who can provide short-term refuge; or making a plan to reduce the riskiness of situations that necessitate some contact with the abuser (e.g., child visitation, divorce proceedings). Battered women's advocates and other service providers are often trained to assist individuals with the development of safety plans.

Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) - a database that compiles homicide reports sent voluntarily to the Federal Bureau of Investigations by local and state police departments across the U.S.

Domestic Violence Death Review - (see Appendix A)

Notes

- ¹ Stephen Gruning, 28, shot and killed his ex-girlfriend's brother; Richard Stuart, 25, and her new boyfriend, Nelson DeOliviera, 23. Gruning also shot his ex-girlfriend, but she survived her wounds.
- ² Thuong Nguyen, 21, was killed by his brother-in-law Nghia Van Vy, 29, when he intervened in an argument he was having with her sister.
- ³ Three brothers, Visal Men, 15, Virak Men, 12, and Sovanna Men, 9, were killed by their mother's ex-boyfriend, Vuthy Seng, 34 as retaliation against her for breaking up with him.
- ⁴ The study database is victim-based, in that it has one record for each victim. In three cases there were two offenders: a female partner and another male offender. Because this is a study of intimate partner homicide, the offender is considered to be the female partner in these analyses. In two of the cases the female partner was not present during the homicide but was considered by law enforcement agencies to be central to the planning and implementation of the murder.
- ⁵ The study database is intended to capture all cases of Massachusetts residents killed in intimate partner violence related incidents from 1991 through 1995. Five out-of-state residents were killed in intimate partner violence related incidents in Massachusetts during the five-year study period, and these cases are excluded from the present analysis. Our sample does include four Massachusetts residents killed in adjacent states. There may have been Massachusetts residents killed in intimate partner violence related incidents in more distant locations, but we did not identify any cases of this nature.
- ⁶ In the three cases with a single source of information, there was enough elaboration in that source (e.g., repeated news articles) that we could confidently judge the case to be intimate partner violence related. In some instances, especially with Other Victim cases, information was insufficient to determine whether a case was intimate partner violence related. For example, there were a few cases we excluded in which we knew the male perpetrator and the male victim had both dated the same woman, but no additional information was available to indicate whether the homicide was related to intimate partner violence between one of the men and the woman. Therefore, the study database represents a conservative estimate of intimate partner violence related homicides.
- ⁷ Because our methodology did not include a review of every female homicide in the state, and due to known errors in the victim-offender relationship information available through the Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR), it is not possible to say with accuracy how the other 57% of female homicide victims were killed.
- ⁸ Greenfeld LA et al. *Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends*. U.S. Department of Justice. NCJ-167237; March 1998.
- ⁹ Ethnicity (Hispanic/Non-Hispanic) is reported separately from race (White, Black, Asian) in 1990 census data. In order to achieve mutually exclusive categories for this analysis, individuals were categorized by their reported race regardless of their ethnicity.



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