



COMMISSIONERS COURT
COMMUNICATION

COURT ORDER NUMBER _____

PAGE 1 OF 12

DATE: 10/1/2024

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE AND FILE THE 2023 TARRANT COUNTY DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW REPORT**

COMMISSIONERS COURT ACTION REQUESTED

It is requested that the Commissioners Court receive and file the 2023 Tarrant County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Report by Assistant Criminal District Attorney Emily Kirby and Kathryn Jacob, CEO of Safe Haven.

BACKGROUND

On November 6, 2012, the Commissioners Court, through Court Order #114077, approved a resolution establishing a Tarrant County Adult Fatality Review Team in accordance with Chapter 672 of the Texas Health and Safety Code.

On January 10, 2017, the Commissioners Court, through Court Order #124265, approved the designation of the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney to oversee the Adult Fatality Review Team.

The Tarrant County Adult Fatality Review Team prepares an annual report as a component of a coordinated community response to intimate partner violence.

The Criminal District Attorney's (CDA) Office is requesting to present the 2023 Tarrant County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Report to the Commissioner Court. Prosecutors from the CDA's criminal division will be present to answer any questions from the Court regarding the report's contents.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item.

SUBMITTED BY	Criminal District Attorney	PREPARED BY:	Polly Maxwell
		APPROVED BY:	Mark Kratovil



TARRANT COUNTY INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

FATALITY REVIEW REPORT

2023 | 5TH PUBLISHED REPORT

WHAT IS FATALITY REVIEW?

The Tarrant County Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Adult Fatality Review Team was reaffirmed by the Tarrant County Commissioners Court in 2016. The Fatality Review team is led by the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's Office in partnership with SafeHaven, Tarrant County's only state designated Family Violence Program.

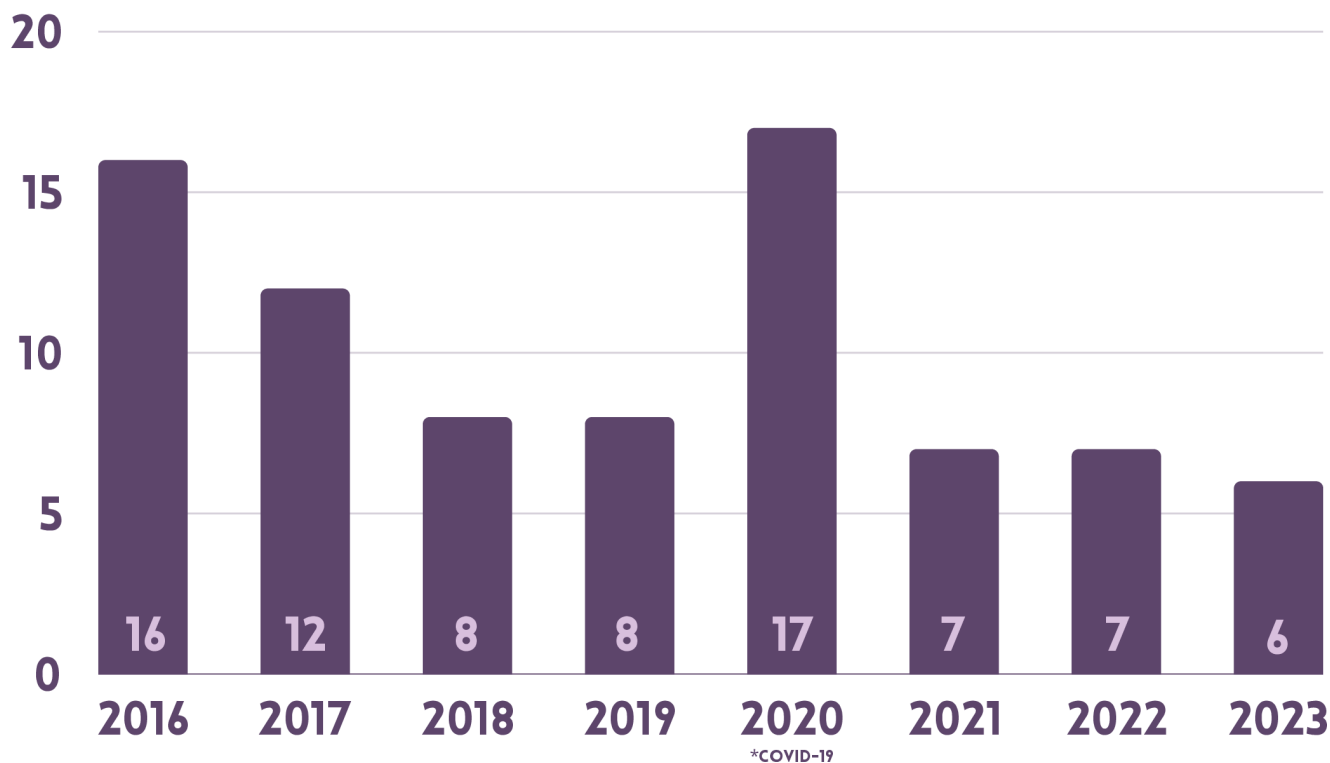
The team consists of appointed collaborators who conduct in-depth case analysis. Each collaborator provides relevant information to both gather data and paint a picture of the couple's relationship prior to the homicide. Each collaborator is also independently doing critical, life-saving work in the field of IPV.

Through the review process, the team seeks to determine the details around each IPV homicide, and to explore possible systemic, policy, and practice improvements in our county and beyond. A combination of research and the passion of our community indicates a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to IPV in Tarrant County is the most effective way to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable. A reliable, trustworthy Adult Fatality Review Team is a critical component of an effective CCR. The team aims to initiate changes in our community's response based on our findings identified in this report.

FATALITY REVIEW CONTRIBUTORS



HOMICIDES BY YEAR



DEFINING IPV HOMICIDE

Solely for purposes of reviewing homicides in the Fatality Review Team, the agreed upon definition of an IPV homicide is: “An ongoing pattern of abusive behavior that can include physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological aggression (including coercive control) by a former or current intimate partner that is motivated by the offender’s desire for power and control over the victim, where the relationship ends in homicide.”

It is important to note that this is not the legal definition, nor does this serve as a standard definition in healthcare, education, social services, or other industries. This definition is solely for purposes of this specific review and was agreed upon when the team was formed in its current iteration in 2016. It stems from a combination of the definitions offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Hofstra University’s Law School. This definition is intentionally more broad than the legal definition of Family or Dating Violence in the State of Texas.

2023 VICTIMS



FEMALE, 37 | ARLINGTON

"[She] had a generous, kind heart. She aspired to help people, even when she had no way to help them."



FEMALE, 41 | HALTOM CITY

"I miss you so much. I wish you were still here. Nobody can replace you. Now you aren't able to see your first grandchild grow up. Why you, mama?"



FEMALE, 36 | GRAPEVINE

"She loved to be with people, to laugh, and to have fun. She was not afraid of a challenge, and she often looked for ways to help others."



FEMALE, 58 | FORT WORTH

"[You were a] good grandma to (redacted). You guys had a lot of fun playing Play-Doh and water balloon fights! [You] will be missed!"



FEMALE, 56 | FOREST HILL

"She loved kids. What she did is who she was. She always made sure everybody felt secure, loved."



FEMALE, 52 | HALTOM CITY

"The best mom in this world - strong, hard-working, and eager to get ahead. Her great love was her children and grandchildren."

2023 BY THE NUMBERS

2023 OVERVIEW



2023 saw **six women** die at the hands of their intimate partner.

6

The six homicides in 2023 were the **lowest number** since the Fatality Review Team's reaffirmation in 2016.

HOMICIDES BY CITY

HALTOM CITY



ARLINGTON



FOREST HILL



FORT WORTH



GRAPEVINE



AGE OF VICTIMS



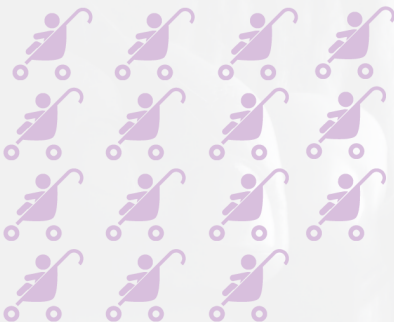
The average age of 2023 victims is 46.7 years old. The youngest victim was 36 and the oldest was 58.

METHOD OF HOMICIDE



All six homicides in 2023 were committed **using firearms**.

DEPENDENT CHILDREN



Eight underage **children lost one or both parents** due to these homicides, and at least seven adult children lost a parent. One homicide was witnessed by four young children.

NO

victims **filed for a protective order** or **contacted SafeHaven** prior to the homicide.

MURDER-SUICIDES AND IPV

FOUR OF THE SIX HOMICIDES WERE COMPLETED OR ATTEMPTED MURDER-SUICIDES.

This continues a recent local and national trend of murder-suicide numbers rising in intimate partner violence. The FBI reports that 65% of all murder-suicides involve intimate partners.

DIGGING DEEPER

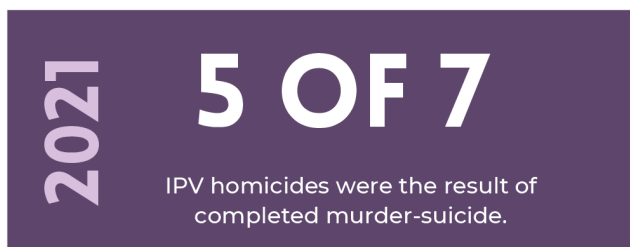
MURDER-SUICIDE AND IPV

The prevailing notion for many years within the work of intimate partner violence was this: when an offender threatens suicide, the purpose is a manipulative tactic with the end goal of keeping the victim in the relationship. We know from our research that murder-suicide is a prevalent form of abuse, and over the past several years, we have seen murder-suicide on the rise in Tarrant County within abusive relationships. In 2021, of the seven homicides identified through the 2021 fatality review, five were in this category. This year continued the trend with 67% of IP homicides being completed or attempted murder-suicides.

Advocates and others working with victims and offenders can no longer assign suicidal threats into the sole grouping of 'controlling tactics' – in Tarrant County, this is no longer the case. These threats have very real consequences in our community, to the tune of at least nine lives in the past three years. In 2022, the F.B.I. reported 65% all US murder-suicides involve intimate partners, and 81% occur in the home (Salvatore, 2022).

MURDER-SUICIDE AND IPV BY THE NUMBERS

In recent years, over half of all local IPV homicides have ended in murder-suicide.



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MURDER-SUICIDE AND IPV

As far back as 1782, there was a recorded domestic violence-related murder-suicide in Connecticut, when William Beadle murdered his wife Lydia and their four children and then died by suicide. Her headstone read, “Fell by the hands of William Beadle, an infatuated man who closed the horrid sacrifice of his wife and children with his own destruction.”

Thomas Joiner, in his book *The Perversion of Virtue*, describes the act of murder-suicide as often a perversion of justice and mercy, where offenders are playing a sort of mental recording that states, “Soon I’ll be dead. But is it fair that I suffer that end while those who have deeply wronged me go unpunished and happily live on? Certainly not. But that is what will happen unless I deliver justice myself” (Joiner, 2014).

The sentiment continues today, over 200 years later. Of course, those outside an abusive relationship easily see the impossibility of a victim ‘wronging’ an offender, but offenders regularly view themselves in a victim role, regularly being ‘wronged’ by their partner. It is gaslighting to the one-hundredth power.

Systems involved in the Fatality Review Team have taken on this issue and are developing new perspectives to address the issue of murder-suicide, starting with approaching offenders who have suicidal ideation in addition to approaching victims who have a high danger risk. There is more work to be done, and the team collaborators are dedicated to finding untapped interventions in an effort to save lives – both victims and offenders

The local suicide awareness experts can be found at The Jordan Elizabeth Harris Foundation. If you are experiencing suicidal ideation, dial 988.

WORKS CITED

- Joiner, T. (2014). *The perversion of virtue: Understanding murder-suicide*. Oxford University Press.
- Salvatore, T. (2022, October 5). Domestic murder-suicide: A compound tragedy. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*.

DIGGING DEEPER

FIREARMS IN IPV RELATIONSHIPS

Firearms significantly escalate the lethality of domestic violence situations.

We know from research that a woman is five times more likely to be murdered when her abuser has access to a gun. The accessibility of firearms for abusers creates an environment that furthers the power and control they have on a victim, and the threat of death is pervasive.

The identified domestic violence homicides in Tarrant County this year underscore the grim reality of this research, as **all six homicides were due to gunshot wounds.**

The recent Supreme Court ruling in US vs. Rahimi, which upheld the prohibition of firearm possession by domestic violence abusers under Protective Orders, marks a significant victory for the safety of survivors. This decision reinforces what we know to be true - Protective Orders provide a buffer of safety for those escaping abusive relationships.

As a county dedicated to keeping victims safe and holding offenders accountable, we are heartened by the Supreme Court's decision. This ruling acknowledges the severe danger that firearms pose in the hands of abusers and upholds the necessity of legal protections to prevent further tragedy. We remain committed to advocating for the rights and safety of survivors, and this decision strengthens our resolve to continue this work.

If you are a victim seeking a protective order, you can call our hotline at 877-701-7233, fill out an application at protectiveorder.tarrantcounty.com, or by contacting Legal Aid of Northwest Texas.

WORKS CITED

- Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S. A., Manganello, J., Xu, X., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Laughon, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control study. *American journal of public health, 93*(7), 1089–1097.

DIGGING DEEPER

WHEN IPV MOVES BEYOND HOME

Domestic violence is not confined to the private lives of a home; it spills over into our communities, affecting workplaces, schools, and public safety.

In 2023, we saw this devastating impact close to home as a Tarrant County cafeteria worker was murdered in the parking lot of the elementary school where she worked. This tragedy underscores what we know - domestic violence poses a dangerous threat, not only to victims but to everyone around them.

The presence of domestic violence in our community means that the threat of violence can emerge anywhere, at any time. Law enforcement officers responding to domestic violence calls face significant risks, often entering volatile and unpredictable situations where weapons are present. Workplaces can become the backdrop for violence, as seen in the tragic incident at the elementary school. Schools, intended to be safe places for children and educators, can become scenes of trauma that affect students, educators, and their families for years to come.

A recent research study found that more than two-thirds of mass shootings are domestic violence incidents or are perpetrated by a shooter with a history of domestic violence. The study found that IPV-related mass shootings are associated with higher fatality rates than mass shootings unrelated to IPV.

The ripple effects of domestic violence extend beyond the immediate physical harm to victims. Children who witness domestic violence may suffer long-term psychological effects, impacting their development and future relationships. The community as a whole bears the emotional burden - knowing we are never completely safe when domestic violence exists in our neighborhoods. This impact underscores the urgent need for community-wide efforts to address and prevent IPV.

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WHEN IPV MOVES BEYOND HOME

Ending domestic violence requires a collective commitment from the entire community. At SafeHaven, we are dedicated to providing resources, support, and advocacy for victims and survivors, but we can't do it alone. By fostering awareness, supporting local organizations, and advocating for policies that protect victims and hold abusers accountable, we can all have a hand in creating a safer, more supportive Tarrant County for all.

WORKS CITED

- Geller, L.B., Booty, M. & Crifasi, C.K. The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014–2019. *Inj. Epidemiol.* 8, 38 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0>



SAFEHAVEN

WE SEE YOU.

**WE HEAR
YOUR STORIES.**

**WE ARE STRIVING TO
CREATE A BRIGHTER,
SAFER FUTURE.**

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE, CALL SAFEHAVEN'S 24-HOUR HOTLINE AT 1-877-701-7233.**