

# WEST VIRGINIA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITIES 2003 REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

## **Domestic Violence Fatalities (Source: WVDVFRT)**

- In 2003, 39 domestic violence related deaths in West Virginia were identified and reviewed by the West Virginia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT): 26 homicides and 13 suicides. Eleven (84.6%) of the suicides occurred following the commission of a homicide.
- Overall, there were 18 female and 21 male fatalities, with women more likely to be homicide victims and men more likely to be suicide victims. Seventeen (65.4%) of the 26 homicide victims were women; 9 (34.6%) were men. Twelve (92.3%) of the suicide victims were men; 1 (7.7%) was a woman.
- All of the homicide victims who were part of a homicide/suicide were women; all of the suicides that occurred as part of a homicide/suicide were men.
- Twenty-three (88.5%) of the 26 perpetrators of domestic violence homicides were men; 3 (11.5%) were women. None of the female perpetrators had a known prior history of domestic violence; all 3 of their male victims did. In contrast, 15 (65.2%) of the 23 male perpetrators had a documented domestic violence history, while only 3 (all male) of their victims did. Nearly half (46.2%) of perpetrators had a history of drug/alcohol abuse, while 9 (34.6%) had a diagnosed mental health condition.
- Twenty-eight (71.8%) of the 39 deaths were classified as intimate partner related fatalities, i.e., involving a spouse, ex-spouse, current or former girlfriend/boyfriend/same sex partner, or someone else who is involved as victim or perpetrator as the result of an intimate partner relationship. Eleven (28.2%) of the deaths were classified as family violence, i.e., involving a family member who is not an intimate partner. Nine of the intimate partner incidents and 2 of the family violence incidents were homicide/suicides.
- The perpetrators of intimate partner homicide were much more likely to take their own lives following commission of the crime than the perpetrators of family violence homicide. Nine (52.9%) of the 17 intimate partner homicide perpetrators committed suicide; 2 (22.2%) of the 9 perpetrators of family violence homicides killed themselves following the crime.
- Ten (55.6%) of the 18 female fatalities were due to firearms, 5 to violent assault without documented use of weapons, 2 to sharp instruments, and 1 to a blunt

object. Eighteen (85.7%) of the 21 male deaths resulted from firearm injury; the remaining 3 deaths were attributed to a vehicular collision, sharp-instrument-related injury, and being struck with a blunt object. Women were more likely to be killed by strangulation, striking or kicking, or use of sharp or blunt weapons than men.

- Firearm deaths were evenly divided between handguns (50%) and long guns, i.e., rifles (25%) and shotguns (25%).
- Most of the domestic violence homicides occurred at either the victim's or perpetrator's residence. The most frequent time of day for a domestic violence homicide or homicide/suicide was in the afternoon (noon to 6:00 PM).
- Minor children were present at the scene during 42.1% of the intimate partner homicides and 33.3% of the family violence homicides. Nearly half (45.5%) of the homicide/suicides occurred when minor children were present at the scene during the commission of the violence.

### **Domestic Violence Offenses (Source: WV State Police, *Crime in WV, 2003*)**

- According to *Crime in West Virginia, 2003*, compiled by the West Virginia State Police, there were over 10,000 domestic violence offenses reported to law enforcement agencies in that year. The rate of domestic violence offenses committed against females was three times that of offenses committed against males (8.4 offenses per 1,000 population vs. 2.8 offenses, respectively).
- Seven out of 10 (70.8%) reported offenses involved simple assault, followed by intimidation (12.5%) and aggravated assault (12.4%). Sexual crimes accounted for 3.3% of the offenses.
- Three-fourths (75.6%) of all domestic violence victims were women. Ninety-two percent (91.8%) were white; 6.8% were African American and 1.3% were of other or unknown race. More than two-thirds (67.7%) of the crimes were directed against intimate partners.
- Personal weapons (hands and feet) were the most commonly used (74.9%), followed by no weapon (13.8%). Firearms were used in 2.1% of the offenses and knives in 1.9%.

### **Domestic Violence Program Utilization (Source: WVCADV)**

- During FY 2003-2004, 18,579 individuals (adults and children) were served by the 13 licensed domestic violence programs operating at that time in West Virginia. A total of 1,470 persons received shelter for at least one night through one of the 13 programs. Shelter stays averaged 12.4 nights overall.

- Over 7,000 domestic violence petitions were filed through the 13 licensed domestic violence programs in 2003-2004. This does not include petitions filed directly by the petitioner.

## **DVFRT Recommendations**

- Assure police access to an active statewide DVP database.
- Increase public awareness that the threat of suicide by one party in an antagonistic domestic relationship should be perceived as a potential threat against the other party. If a person is considering taking their own life because of a domestic situation, they may attempt to take the life of the other person as well.
- Heighten public awareness that **all** threats of homicide and suicide should be taken seriously. Persons who threaten suicide in domestic violence situations often commit homicide prior to taking their own lives.
- Increase awareness of persons or agencies responsible for the welfare of the children who are impacted by domestic violence fatalities of the need to provide them with mental health counseling. Funding for these services is available through the Victims Compensation Fund.
- Increase public awareness about the illegality of firearm possession by a person who is the subject of an active DVP. Knowingly providing a firearm to such an individual, even if the firearm is that person's own property, may result in civil or criminal action.