

**SHATTERED LIVES II:**

**A REPORT  
OF  
2007 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-RELATED  
FATALITIES  
IN  
LUCAS COUNTY, OHIO**

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**SHATTERED LIVES II: A REPORT OF 2007 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-RELATED FATALITIES  
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In 2008, the Lucas County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team issued its first report of local domestic violence-related homicides and associated fatalities. The initial report covered the period 2003 to 2006 and documented that domestic violence-related deaths increased in each year of the study period. The initial study also found that confirmed domestic violence-related homicides tripled in Lucas County from four cases in 2003 to twelve cases in 2006.

In 2007, domestic violence-related deaths were down slightly from their 2006 high; however, domestic violence was the leading cause of murder in Lucas County, representing at least nine of the 17 known homicides for the year. This supplemental report summarizes the findings of the 2007 follow-up study conducted by the University of Toledo College of Law and the Lucas County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team.<sup>2</sup>

**Method**

As in the past, this study is based on data extracted from public records and media sources. Researchers began by reviewing coroner verdicts and autopsy reports for every homicide and suicide that occurred in Lucas County in 2007. Researchers initially categorized the deaths into three sample data sets based on certain articulated criteria.

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<sup>2</sup> The Lucas County Fatality Review Team is a sub-committee of the Lucas County Domestic Violence Task Force and includes representatives from Bethany House, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, the Family & Child Abuse Prevention Center, Family Service of Northwest Ohio, Independent Advocates, Lucas County Children's Services, the Lucas County Domestic Relations Court, and the YWCA Battered Women's Shelter.

The sample data sets included: a) domestic violence-related deaths; b) non-domestic violence-related deaths; and c) possible domestic violence-related deaths. Based on this preliminary classification, researchers identified 23 deaths in 2007 that appeared to be associated with domestic violence.

Researchers then examined public records and media sources related to each of the 23 deaths using a standardized data collection tool. Public records included case files from local municipal, common pleas and appellate courts; police reports; 911 run sheets; booking reports; county real estate records; and similar records maintained in the public domain. Researchers consulted media sources as well, including newspapers, broadcast media, electronic databases and internet resources. In addition, participating agencies provided limited access to certain background data, including criminal histories, interaction with child protective services, and contact with shelter, victim advocacy and batterer intervention services.

Based on information extracted from these sources, each case was assigned to a specific data set. Researchers identified 15 domestic violence-related deaths in 2007. In addition, they identified 8 other deaths that were indicative of domestic violence, but whose relationship to domestic violence could not be definitively established. This report summarizes the main descriptive findings of the study.

## **Findings**

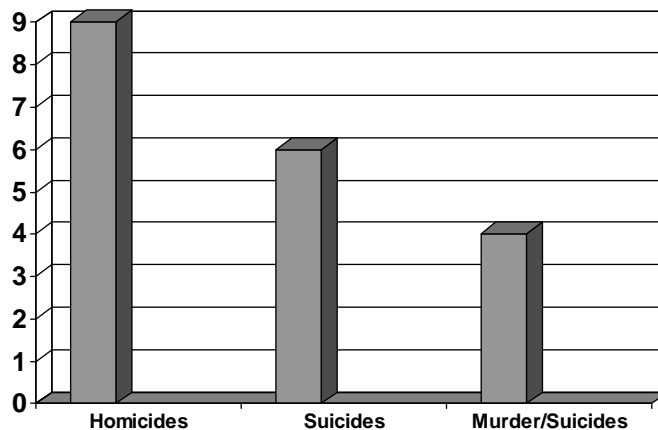
### **A. Domestic Violence-Related Deaths.**

For purposes of this study, domestic violence-related deaths were operationally defined as: a) any homicide in which the perpetrator and the victim were current or former intimate partners, household members or immediate family members; b) any

homicide in which the victim was an intervener or bystander to a domestic violence event; and c) any suicide that was closely associated in time or circumstance with a domestic violence event.

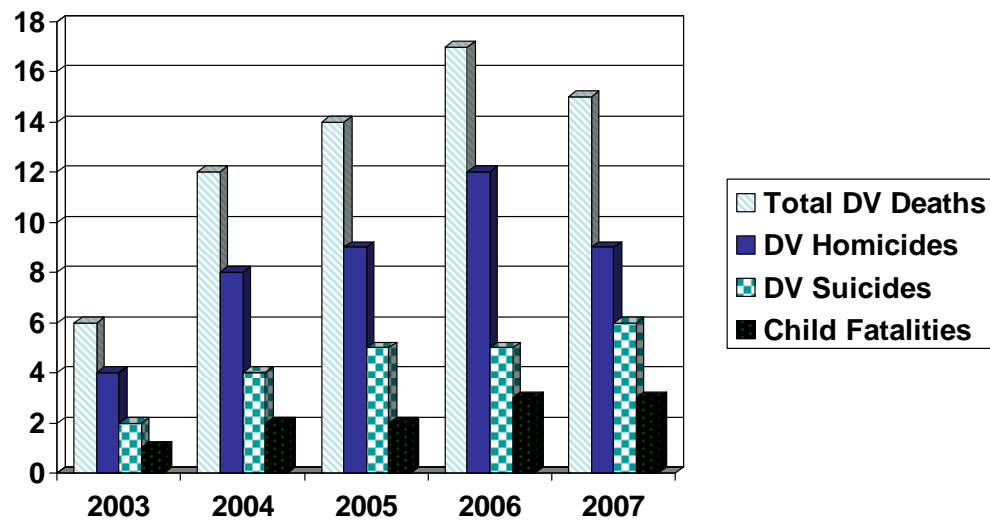
Of the 15 domestic violence-related deaths identified in 2007, there were 9 homicides (60%) and 6 (40%) suicides. Four of the homicides (44.44%) and four of the suicides (66.67%) were committed in the context of a murder/suicide, which is a subset of both the homicide and suicide categories. The following chart depicts the nature of domestic violence-related deaths in the study:

## Total Domestic Violence Deaths in 2007



Confirmed domestic violence-related deaths decreased slightly in 2007 and roughly correspond to the figures reported for 2005. The following chart represents domestic violence-related deaths from 2003 to 2007:

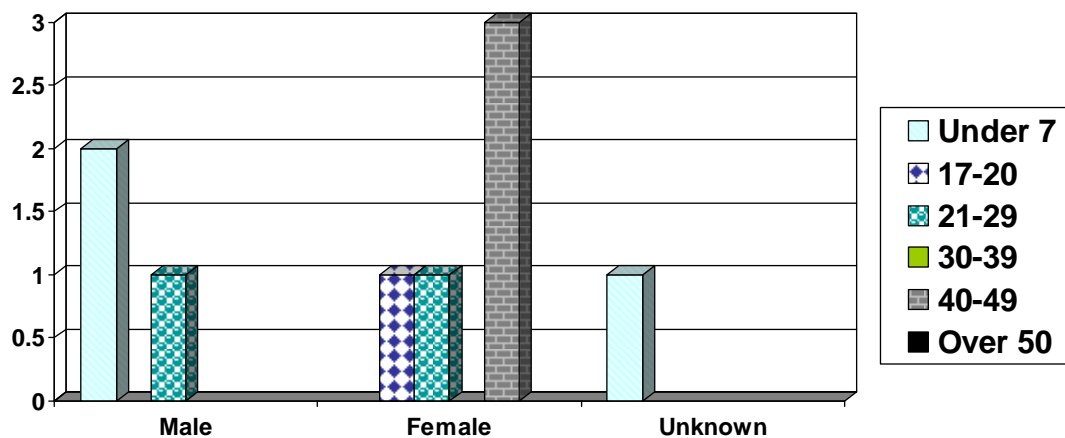
## Domestic Violence Deaths by Year



### B. Age.

Age continues to be a significant consideration in local domestic violence-related homicides. Children represented one-third of all domestic violence murder victims in 2007. Three of the nine domestic violence fatality victims (33.33%) were younger than 3 years old. Two of the three male homicide victims (66.67%) were 2 years old. Since 2003, twice as many young boys ( $n=6$ ) as young girls ( $n=3$ ) were killed in connection with domestic violence. By contrast, three of the five female homicide victims (60%) were in their forties. The following chart depicts the age distribution of male and female homicide victims in 2007:

## Age of DV Homicide Victims by Gender



Unlike male homicide victims who died before they reached the age of 3, most of the female homicide victims in 2007 were killed much later in life.<sup>3</sup>

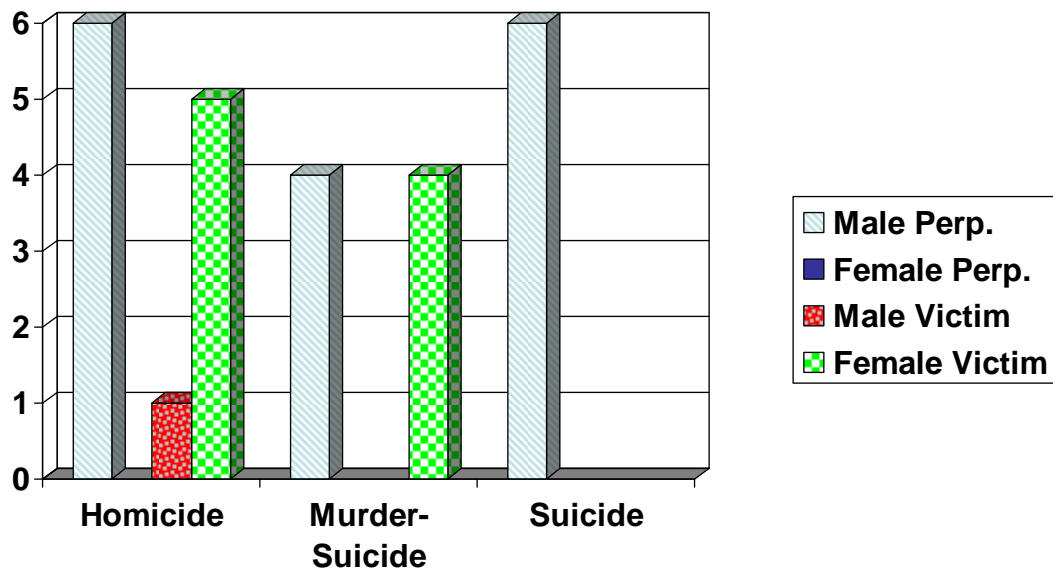
### C. Gender.

This supplemental study demonstrates that adult domestic violence-related fatalities continue to be gendered phenomena. In 2007, local adult domestic violence-related killings were perpetrated exclusively by men (100%) against women (83.33%). Local domestic violence murder-suicides were perpetrated exclusively by men (100%) against women (100%). Documented domestic violence-related suicides were all committed by men (100%). Since 2003, the rate of confirmed domestic violence-related suicides by males is 21 times higher than female domestic violence-related suicides. This is partly attributable to the fact that it is often much easier to discern that a suicide is domestic violence-related when it is committed in the context of a murder-suicide, which is a distinctly male-perpetrated phenomenon. Consequently, it is quite likely that

<sup>3</sup> Child fatalities are formally reviewed by a separate child fatality review team. They are included here for purposes of context only.

domestic violence-related suicides by women are under-reported in this study. The following chart depicts the gendered nature of adult domestic violence-related deaths in 2007:

## Gendered Violence



In 2007, the rate of adult domestic violence homicide (that is, the number of men murdered in connection with domestic violence, compared to the total number of men murdered in 2007) was roughly 12%; whereas the rate of adult domestic violence femicide (that is, the number of women killed in connection with domestic violence, compared to the total number of women murdered in 2007) was nearly 7 times higher, or 83%.

### C. Relationships.

In 2007, five of the six adult domestic violence-related murders (83.33%) were perpetrated by current spouses or intimate partners, though half of the killings (50%)

occurred in the context of an actual or threatened separation. Three of the four murder-suicides (75%) were also perpetrated by current spouses or intimate partners. All of the homicides were committed at the victim or perpetrator's home.

#### **D. Manner of Death.**

In 2007, all of the four murder-suicides (100%) were committed with a handgun. Only one of the five homicides that were not associated with a suicide (20%) was committed with a gun. These findings are consistent with the earlier study, which found that 88.89% of the murder-suicides were committed with a handgun while only 25% of the homicides that were not associated with a suicide involved a gun. As in prior years, most of the child fatality victims had been beaten or kicked to death under circumstances suggestive of extreme or excessive discipline.

#### **E. Prior Arrests.**

Unlike the results of the earlier study, most of the perpetrators of domestic violence-related homicides in 2007 (83.33%) had at least one prior arrest for domestic violence or other violent offense. However, only two of the perpetrators (22.22%) had a substantial criminal history consisting of five or more prior arrests. Only two of the perpetrators (22%) had a prior arrest for domestic violence against the person he killed. Only one perpetrator (11.11%) had a documented pattern of domestic violence against the person he killed.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, six perpetrators (66.67%) had a documented history of domestic violence against someone *other than* the person he killed.

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<sup>4</sup> A documented pattern of domestic violence is defined as two or more prior arrests for domestic violence.

## **F. Protection Orders.**

As in prior years, only a fraction of the people killed in connection with domestic violence in 2007 (11.11%) sought or secured a protection order before they were murdered.

## **G. Employment and Military History.**

Eighty-nine percent of all domestic violence-related killers in 2007 were known to have been employed, although one of them had recently been laid off from an automobile factory and one was only working part-time. All of the other perpetrators were full-time employees. Nearly 80% of the perpetrators were blue-collar workers. Three were factory workers (33.33%); two were truck drivers (22.22%); one was a railroad engineer (11.11%); and one was a used car dealer (11.11%). Half of the murder-suicide perpetrators had been in the military. One was a U.S. Marine Corps veteran and one was a U.S. Army veteran.

## **Recommendations**

Overall, the findings of the 2007 study mirror the results of the initial 2003 through 2006 study in almost every respect. In both the initial study and this follow-up study, researchers found that the vast majority of perpetrators had very little formal contact with the criminal justice system and, what little contact they had would not necessarily raise tremendous concern if considered in isolation of other indicators of lethality. Since the absence of a documented criminal history does not preclude the possibility of considerable unreported violence, risk assessors must look beyond the criminal justice system to determine whether there is a history of undocumented

domestic violence. In accordance with Ohio law<sup>5</sup> and best practice guidelines, judges, prosecutors and other risk assessors are also encouraged to consider the full range of lethality factors, in addition to documented criminal histories, when evaluating levels of dangerousness in violent relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Both the initial study and this follow-up study reveal that most fatality victims had little or no contact with formal domestic violence intervention resources. This finding suggests a need to expand access to victim services beyond the criminal justice system. Systematic training on risk assessment and safety planning should be provided in hospital and healthcare settings, at educational institutions, in human resource departments, at community centers, among faith communities and elsewhere so that comprehensive and individualized safety planning is available and accessible to women who need it, wherever they are.

In addition to expanding access to victim services both within and outside the criminal justice system, programs and services for batterers must be enhanced as well. A recent internal assessment of one local batterer intervention program revealed that offenders who complete the program are far less likely to recidivate than those who do not complete the program.<sup>7</sup> Given these promising results, programs and services for batterers ought to be available and accessible outside the criminal justice system, by referrals from physicians, employers, union representatives, teachers and school

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<sup>5</sup> Ohio Rev. Code Ann. §2919.251.

<sup>6</sup> Campbell, J.C., Webster, D.W., & Glass, N. (2009). The Danger Assessment: A Validation of a Lethality Risk Assessment Instrument for Intimate Partner Femicide. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 24(4), 653-674.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Carol (2008). Report of the Family Service of Northwest Ohio Batterer Intervention Program (on file with author).

administrators, social service providers, clergy and others who are in a position to safely intervene.

Finally, the results of this supplemental report reinforce the need for greatly enhanced prevention efforts that get to the root of gender violence. Consequently, the research team supports the call from the Lucas County DELTA Project to implement a comprehensive violence prevention plan<sup>8</sup> that involves a full spectrum of initiatives including: a) raising knowledge and awareness about gender violence; b) transforming social norms that perpetuate gender violence; c) training providers to recognize and respond appropriately to gender power dynamics; d) building violence prevention collaborations and networks; e) changing institutional practices that promote and perpetuate gender violence; and f) establishing sound public policy and effective legislation based on reliable qualitative and quantitative data.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This supplemental study is part of a continuing community-based effort to better understand and respond to domestic violence-related fatalities in Lucas County. It represents an ongoing attempt to quantify the problem and challenge widely held assumptions about local domestic violence-related deaths. This study continues to establish baseline statistics to support longitudinal research focused on developing and assessing comprehensive long-term strategies to reduce domestic violence-related fatalities throughout Northwest Ohio.

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<sup>8</sup> Pisano, Cindy (2008). Lucas County IPV Prevention Plan (on file with author).

<sup>9</sup> Davis, R., Parks, L.F., & Cohen, L. (2006). *Sexual Violence and the Spectrum of Prevention: Towards a Community Solution*. Enola, PA: National Sexual Violence Resource Center.