

**Too many deaths:
Domestic violence homicides
in Montgomery County Maryland
2000-2015**

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A Public Eye on Domestic Violence

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In Montgomery County, Maryland – as in much of the rest of the country – domestic violence remains a serious threat to public safety, especially for women. It is estimated that over 93,000 Montgomery County women will be attacked by an intimate partner at some time in their lives.¹

At times this violence results in death. In the last fifteen years, 51 offenders killed 60 Montgomery County residents as part of violent intimate partner incidents.¹ Fifteen of those killed (25%) were children, drawn into horrific situations beyond their control. Another 10 residents (all male) killed themselves after killing their partner, their children, or their partner's children. One offender was killed by police. Two bystanders also lost their lives, one while trying to protect his sister. More than 30 children were left without mothers as a result of these incidents.

Victims and their abusers came from all corners of the County and all walks of life. Victims were nurses, janitors, professors, flight attendants, stay at home moms, and students. Offenders were statisticians, criminals, doctors, plumbers and Spanish language teachers.

Court Watch Montgomery analyzed data gathered from media reports on domestic violence homicides in the County from 2000-2015 to assess the ongoing cost of domestic violence in Montgomery County and shed light on the most common types of cases.

Although domestic homicides are rare compared to less lethal assaults, it is important to study them to learn how to prevent these horrific events, which not only end lives but may perpetuate cycles of violence and create cascades of devastation in families and communities.

Child deaths

The 15 children killed in the context of intimate partner violence ranged in age from 1 to 12 years old. All but one child were killed in the context of separation between the parents. All but one child was



killed by their father or stepfather; one was killed by his grandmother's intimate female partner.

William McQuain (11) was beaten to death with a baseball bat by his father, Curtis Lopez in 2011. Lopez also stabbed his estranged wife Jane McQuain (51) to death.

One victim was a senior at Blair High School. Another was a senior studying engineering at Cornell University. Yet another was getting ready to start nursing school. One victim taught accounting at American University. Another taught first grade.

One third of children were killed during or after an incident that involved their mother. Two thirds of children killed were killed independently, usually in apparent attempts to punish ex-partners for leaving the relationship, or as part of murder-suicides related to the end of the relationship. Eight children appear to have been killed during court-ordered visits. Some mothers were obeying protective order provisions for visits. Others were ordered to provide visits in Circuit Court custody or divorce cases. None of the fathers that killed their children amid violent intimate partner relationships had criminal records.

Child witnesses

It was not uncommon for children to witness their mother's murder, be in the home at the time of the murder, or be the person who found the body.

- One 18 year old daughter tried repeatedly to pull her father off of her mother even though he was wielding a 12 inch knife.
- A 16 year old daughter was at a gas station when her mother's partner shot her mother and himself in the car at the pump.
- Children 6, 11 and 15 were found by police hiding behind a locked door. Police told the children there had been a fire and took them down a fire ladder so as to avoid having them see their mother's body. She had been stabbed 34 times.
- One father abruptly left home with his 3 children after stabbing his wife to death. Other family members at the home noticed the children were very upset and called the police. The perpetrator rammed several police cruisers before surrendering. All three children had "minor injuries."
- A nephew living with his aunt was shot repeatedly when the aunt's abuser shoved both of them into a bathroom and began firing. He watched his aunt die. A jammed gun saved the nephew's life.



Ana Alaya's young son fended off a knife attack by her estranged husband, Hector Granados at a bus stop. Granados, who was morbidly jealous, depressed, and an alcoholic, stabbed Ana (47) to death as she stepped out of her car about a month later. At Granados' sentencing her tearful son (15) told the judge, "I miss everything about my mom."

The long-term physical and mental health impacts of these devastating traumas in childhood are impossible to calculate, but injure both individuals and our community.

Causes of death	Adult victims	Child victims
Gunshot	38%	20%
Stabbed	38%	13%
Strangled/asphyxiated	7%	40%
Blunt force trauma	18%	7%
Drowned	0%	7%
Unknown	0%	13%

Blunt force trauma included being bludgeoned with a weight, baseball bat, hammer, and a metal carjack handle.

Separation: The deadliest period

73% of victims were killed after they tried to end their relationship with their partner. Some were involved in high conflict divorces. One offender whipsawed between denying paternity and refusing to pay child support, to filing for full custody. Numerous offenders obsessively stalked their victims, refusing to accept the end of the relationship. Although most murders were within a year of the end of the relationship, one victim was killed when a boyfriend she hadn't seen in five years pushed his way into the home, refused to leave, and ultimately stabbed her to death.



June Carlita Beale, 47 yrs old, was a program specialist at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). She previously worked for nine years at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Beale was beaten to death by her husband in 2014.

Gender of adult victims

89% of adult victims were female. Two of the 5 male victims were bystanders. Two men were killed by their partners but were violent toward their partners prior to their deaths. (One had abused the mother of his child multiple times, according to police. Another threatened to hit his girlfriend with a bottle. When she pulled out a handgun he attempted to wrestle it away from her before he was shot). The last male victim was stabbed with an ice pick by his former girlfriend and her new lover.

Protective orders

Only 3 out of 43 adult homicide victims (7%) had active protective orders when they were killed. One 21 year old woman was stabbed within 8 hours of taking out a protective order when her ex-boyfriend, who was served with the order while in jail for assault, was released. This would be the type of high danger case in which an advocate most likely would have recommended shelter as part of a safety plan; we do not know if the victim spoke with an advocate and shelter was offered and declined, or whether she was unaware shelter was available.

It was obvious early on for the other 2 homicide victims with protective orders that the civil order itself would not adequately protect them, given the offender's constant violations. Both of these offenders were repeatedly arrested, to no avail. Continued incarceration would appear to have been the only solution in these cases, short of victims fleeing the area, given that shelter is only a short term option and these cases went on for years. At least two homicide victims filed for protective orders but then dismissed the case.

Prior involvement with the courts

Approximately 37% of offenders had previous criminal charges or convictions, or had been the subject of 911 calls made by victims. The actual percentage who previously interacted with police and the courts is probably higher, as we only have information on 911 calls if that information was included in newspaper accounts. In numerous deaths there was a clear and escalating pattern of violence, criminal charges and, in some cases, incarceration.

In two cases offenders were released on bail after having been arrested for assaulting their partner, and killed their ex partners within 48 hours. Another offender (see box on

In one case, a gynecologist beat his wife to death. The perpetrator had made threats to kill a female stranger who honked at him from her car. He was also found guilty of assaulting a pregnant woman on her way to the hospital, when he became upset that her husband was driving erratically. The judge set aside the verdict, giving him "probation before judgment".

Johnnie Perkins case, pg. 6) was released on bail despite a long criminal history, new gun charges, and a warning by the prosecutor that he was a danger to the community. He murdered his partner less than a month after his release.

Preventing future deaths

It is impossible to say precisely what percentage of domestic violence deaths are preventable. Based on this preliminary examination of the most recent 60 domestic violence deaths in Montgomery County, we know that there are often warning signs and opportunities to identify women and children in danger and reach out to them with services and options for protection before it is too late.

Safe Visitation

All but one out of 15 child victims were killed during the period when an adult victim was attempting to safely end her relationship with the father of her children. Many of these children were visiting with their fathers under court-ordered visitation plans included in high conflict divorce or custody decisions.

Although protective orders regularly include "no contact" provisions, the great majority of domestic violence survivors who have children are actually required to have contact by the court to transfer the children for visits with their father. Thus **victims who go to court specifically because they fear physical assault are often court ordered to have ongoing -- and highly dangerous -- contact with those they are most fearful of in order to exchange children for visits.**

Homicides are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the safety threats that regularly occur during unsupervised exchanges of children from families experiencing domestic violence.



Gail Pumphrey (43), was a flight attendant. She and the couple's children, David (12), Meagan (10) and Brandon (7) were shot to death by Gail's ex-husband during an exchange for a visit on Thanksgiving Day, 2007 in Unity Park, Montgomery County Maryland.

Judges cannot order use of safe child exchange and supervised visitation services if they do not exist. Programs and facilities providing safe child exchange for visitation are clearly needed in Montgomery County for those with protective orders and those in high conflict custody or divorce cases, and are a critical piece of protecting public safety. Child exchange services need to be offered in numerous locations throughout the County to be useable and effective, given the enormous transportation difficulties faced by residents without cars. Supervised visitation services are essential for a smaller group of families who are at high risk for assault or abuse against mothers, their children, or both.

Johnnie Perkins had a history with the criminal justice system since 1992. He was on parole from a 2012 sentence for selling crack and out on bail in spite of 2 charges, one for assaulting an officer, which he had appealed, and one for felony possession of a firearm.

At the preliminary hearing the commissioner ordered Perkins held without bond. At the subsequent bond review, the prosecutor told the judge Perkins was a threat to the community and should not be released.

The judge set a \$100,000 bond. Mr. Perkins paid \$1,000 and the bail bondsman \$4,000.

Less than a month later, on Aug. 4, 2015, Perkins shot and killed his wife, Shamika Moody-Perkins, in their car at a Germantown gas station, with her sixteen year old nearby. He then turned the handgun on himself.



Guns

Over a third of all recent domestic violence deaths in our County are gun-related. We can be proud of Montgomery County's effective system of gun removal, through the Sheriff's Office, when protective orders are issued by our courts. There is, however, a need to strengthen the process of gun removal for

convicted domestic violence offenders, who automatically lose their right to possess guns as a result of certain domestically-related convictions.

The Montgomery County's Circuit Court, one of three Montgomery County courts, has recently clarified the information given to offenders convicted of crimes of violence regarding their disqualification from owning guns and the need to surrender their gun to law enforcement. The next critical step is legislation such as the Raskin-Smith bill, soon to be considered by the Maryland General Assembly, that would require every court statewide to notify offenders convicted of domestically-related crimes of violence that they are disqualified from having guns, require them to turn in guns within 48 hours and provide proof of transfer to the court within 5 business days.

Protective orders

The 60 deaths documented in this report underscore the importance of continued County funding for victim advocates who engage in careful safety planning with each abused person who seeks out any type of domestic violence related services. Advocates and therapists also provide needed emotional support and help survivors deal with a myriad of obstacles such as child care that make it possible for victims to file for protective orders and return to court as many times as necessary to obtain a final order.

Courts and the broader community

When courts use staggered exits, the Victim Information Notification Everyday system (VINE) , and other best practices, more victims may stick with the court process until they get their final protective order. (VINE allows survivors to avoid unnecessary court hearings and forewarns victims when offenders are going to be released from jail.)

When police officers, medical professionals, probation officers, and others use lethality screening tools to identify particularly high risk domestic violence victims, and follow up by advocates is funded, these women are more likely to engage in services.

Conclusion

There are many opportunities to prevent serious domestic violence cases from escalating into homicides. Judges, prosecutors, police officers, County officials, doctors, teachers and neighbors can all make a difference. Court Watch Montgomery will continue to collect and analyze data on domestic violence deaths in Montgomery County and statewide to identify patterns and possible solutions.

Footnotes

1. U.S. Census Bureau, DP-1. Profile of general demographic characteristics: 2010, Census 2010 Summary File, Montgomery County Maryland. also Tjaden, Patricia & Nancy Thoennes. National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence: findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey", 2000.

The most conservative population rate of domestic violence for women over 18 in the U.S. is 1.3%, (see NIJ and CDC report). The figure for numbers of women abused over their lifetimes in the county was arrived at by applying the national lifetime domestic violence rate, 22.1% (NIJ, CDC report).

2. Although we did our best to identify domestic violence cases based on media reports, our numbers should be viewed as carefully researched approximations. We may have missed cases that should have been included, particularly in the early years of the study when newspapers were less likely to cover domestic violence. Same-sex cases may well be underreported as well, as they are less likely to be identified as domestic violence in the media. We have also included some cases that have not been fully adjudicated by the courts but appear after careful study to be domestic violence related. Thanks to the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence for the use of their thorough collection of media reports on domestically related homicides in Maryland.