

Methodology

Committee Formation

The Family Violence Task Force in each participating community forms a multi-disciplinary Fatality Review Team to function as a sub-committee of the local Family Violence Task Force. Representatives from the following systems are invited to join the teams: community and prosecution-based advocates, corrections, prosecution, judicial, law enforcement, Family Violence Intervention Programs, Department of Family and Children's Services, faith-based organizations, mental health, alcohol and drug counseling providers, employers, culturally specific organizations, animal welfare and control agencies, hospitals and medical care providers and school systems, and others.

Case Selection

The Teams select domestic violence-related homicide cases for review with three criteria in mind:

- All civil and criminal proceedings related to the victim and the perpetrator are closed with no pending appeals.
- The perpetrator has been identified by the criminal justice system.
- When possible, the date of the homicide does not extend beyond 3-5 years.

Homicides are defined as domestic violence-related if the victim and perpetrator were current or former intimate partners. Cases involving the homicide of a victim other than the intimate partner such as a friend, current partner, child or family member of the domestic violence victim are also considered domestic violence-related.

Case Information Collection

Once the case is selected, the Team gathers all public records pertaining to the case. The majority of the information is located in the prosecutor's file and/or the homicide file. Only information that can be obtained pursuant to the Open Records Act is collected.

Family & Friends Interviews

When applicable and appropriate, the Project Coordinators and Teams work with a trained trauma therapist to seek out interviews with surviving family members and friends of the victim, who in turn provide incredible insight not gleaned from the public documents. The discussions are open-ended, with family members and friends invited to share what they want the Team to know about their loved one, the steps the victim took to try to be safe, and the victim's perceptions of the options available to them in their community.

Case Chronology Development

With assistance from the Project Coordinator, a chronology for each case is developed by the Team with a focus on all prior significant events leading up to the death. These include prior acts of violence perpetrated by the person who committed the homicide (whether against this victim or another), previous attempts by the victim to seek help, previous criminal and civil history, etc. A completed chronology is distributed to each Team member.

Fatality Review Meetings

The Teams, after signing a confidentiality statement, having a moment of silence for the victim(s), and conducting an oral reading of the chronology, go line by line through the chronology to see where the community could have stepped in, and how the system response could have been stronger. With a strong trust in each other and a commitment not to blame one another, each Team identifies gaps in

local response, areas where practice did not follow protocol, and innovative ideas to make the system response more effective in increasing victim safety and offender accountability.

Development and Implementation of Findings and Recommendations

The Teams then make findings about the factors in each case that appeared to contribute to the death, or conversely, actions which, if taken, might have prevented the death. Teams are always focused on reviewing the systems' response: what types of resources were available in each system for victims and offenders, what the policy and protocol for response were, whether they were followed or not, and what monitoring, training and accountability existed in each system for workers who respond to families. From the findings, each Team makes recommendations for changes to system responses that will improve victim safety and offender accountability with the goal of preventing future homicides.

Data Analysis

Data is entered into an electronic database designed for this project and adapted from the work of data collection tools used around the country. The data is then aggregated and comprises the data findings in this report.

Near Fatality Methodology

For more information on the Project's near fatality methodology, please contact us info@georgiafatalityreview.com.