

2019
Annual Report

Domestic Violence Homicide in Nashville

Domestic Abuse Death Review Team
Nashville - Davidson County, TN





The events and incidents described within this report are derived from the following sources: the Metro Nashville Police Department homicide report relating to the homicide in question; interviews with church leadership; and additional police reports related to the victim and/or perpetrator. These details and descriptions do not reflect the opinions of the Domestic Abuse Death Review Team, the Metro Nashville Office of Family Safety, or the City of Nashville.

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Metro Office of Family Safety

Nashville – Davidson County, TN 2019 Annual Report

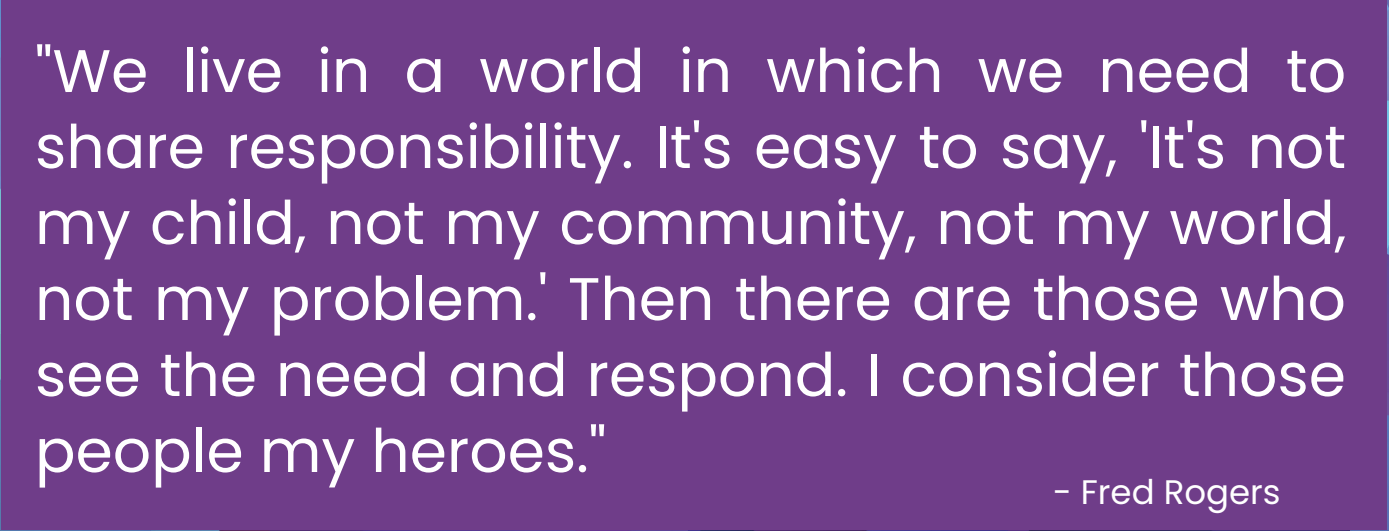
PREPARED FOR

The Honorable Mayor John Cooper,
The Davidson County Metro Council,
& The Metropolitan Government Office of Family Safety
Advisory Committee

PREPARED BY

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Office of Family Safety

**Domestic Abuse
Death Review Team**



"We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes."

- Fred Rogers

This report is dedicated to the fifteen 2019 victims of domestic violence homicide in Nashville and those who mourn their tragic loss of life. These individuals were family members, neighbors, and friends of our community. We will continue to remember their experiences and learn lessons from their abuse histories that will help others. To those still living in fear, we hope to introduce you to a supportive community dedicated to helping survivors each day.

You are not alone.



Dedication

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Nashville Domestic Abuse Death Review Team (DADRT or Team) would like to thank Nashville's Mayor John Cooper and Metro's Council members for their support of the Team's work in examining domestic violence fatalities. The Team would also like to express its gratitude to the Metro Government Office of Family Safety's (OFS) Advisory Committee for its guidance and support.

We are incredibly grateful for the many Team members who dedicated time out of their busy schedules to review the selected 2019 case thoughtfully. The dedication and expertise that DADRT members bring to each meeting are invaluable in identifying the gaps in domestic violence homicide prevention.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all individuals that volunteered their time identifying and providing insight into warning signs and possible points of intervention. We are especially grateful to those family and friends who suffered a painful loss but were willing to share their loved one's story with the Team to help us better serve future victims of domestic violence.

Our Team hopes that this report will lead to a better understanding of domestic violence in our community, the strengths and weaknesses in our response systems, and the steps that we must take in the future to improve victim safety and offender accountability.



Meet Us at the Bridge, 2018



Dear Mayor Cooper,

The Nashville-Davidson County Domestic Abuse Death Review Team (DADRT) would like to share our 2019 annual report. DADRT is managed by the Metro Office of Family Safety (OFS) and meets monthly at Nashville's Family Safety Center (FSC) with partners from criminal justice and victim services agencies.

Under the authority of Executive Order 022 (2016) and following National Fatality Review best practices, the Team performed an in-depth review of a domestic violence murder-suicide. In this case, a man murdered his long-time partner with a firearm before taking his own life. Not only did the relationship between the victim and perpetrator include an extensive history of domestic violence, but this case is also one which highlights the significant impact of violence across generations. At least five generations of the victim's family have experienced or been impacted by violence in their homes.

The Team hopes that this report will highlight areas of potential improvement in Nashville's domestic violence response and prevention services. Ultimately, our goal is to identify ways to reduce domestic violence homicides in our community and make Nashville the safest city for women and families.

Sincerely,

Diane Lance

Department Head, Office of Family Safety

Bonnie Beneke

DADRT Chair, TN Dept. of Children's Services

Deputy Chief Michelle Richter

2019 DADRT Sub-Chair, Metro Nashville Police Department

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Tennessee Code Establishing Death Reviews

Mission, Responsibility, & Authority of Team

References

Executive Summary

Tennessee currently ranks 9th in the nation for the rate of women killed by men and has been in the top 10 of this ranking for 19 out of the last 23 years. In 2019 Nashville accounted for 13% of all domestic violence incidents and 17% of domestic violence homicides in Tennessee, according to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's 2019 crime in Tennessee report. Nashville's domestic violence crime rate of 1403.7 per 10,000 people is much higher than the estimated national average of 916.9. In 2019, 27% of Nashville's domestic violence homicides were murder-suicides or attempted suicides; this is the third-highest rate of domestic violence murder-suicides in the last decade.

In 2019, DADRT reviewed a murder-suicide case in which a 43-year-old mother of 4 and grandmother of 8 was shot to death by her long-time partner, who then completed suicide. The DADRT's research into this case revealed two families deeply impacted by transgenerational domestic violence. At least five generations of women and children in the victim's family experienced or witnessed violence within their homes.

"Children who witness domestic violence grow up to have a greater risk of living in violent relationships themselves, whether as victims or as perpetrators. Without more awareness of this problem and help for these families, the burden of domestic violence will continue to be passed from one generation to the next."

- Domestic Violence: An Unwanted Family Legacy, Urban Child Institute, 2014

The Domestic Abuse Death Review Team identified four finding areas that may have contributed to the victim's level of risk or impacted the support that she and her family received before her murder:

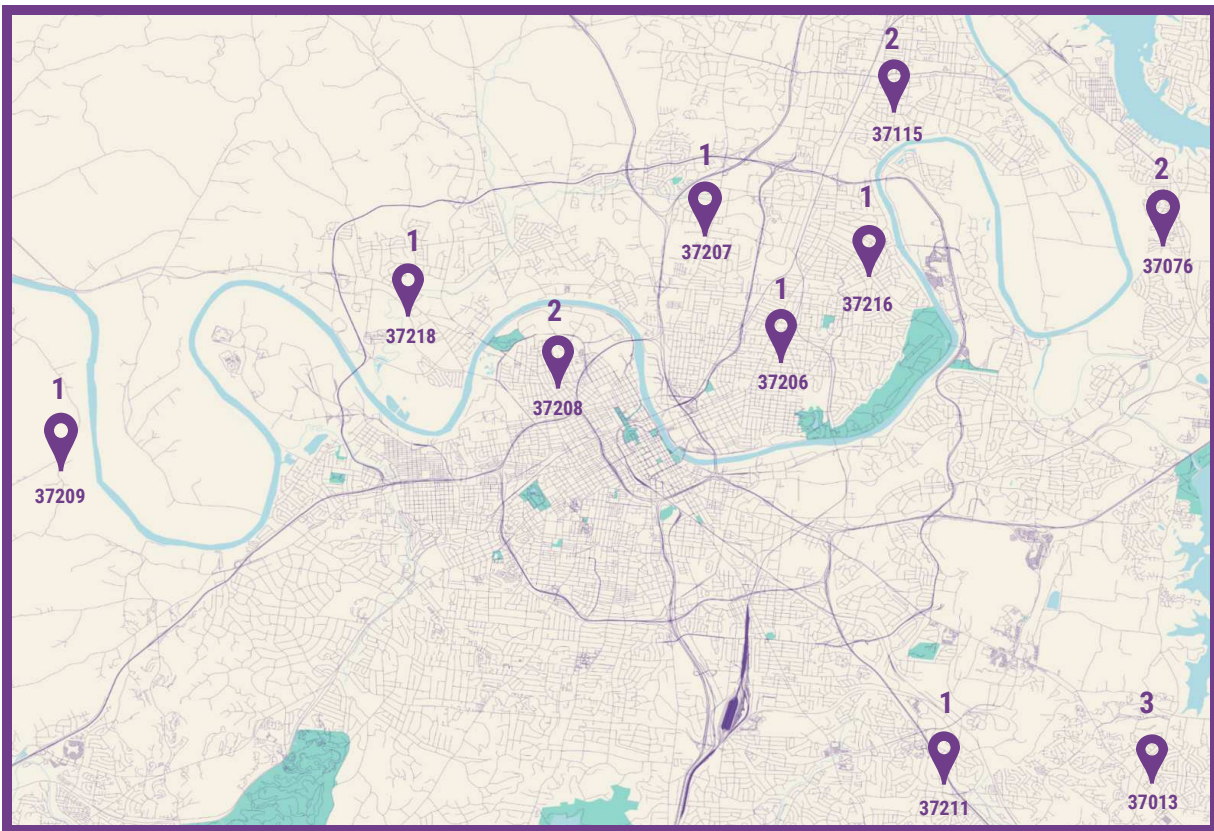
- 1. Firearm Dispossession:** The perpetrator was a convicted felon who was not permitted by state or federal law to possess a firearm. Firearm dispossession procedures failed in this case, and the victim was murdered using a gun.
- 2. Transgenerational* Violence:** Families in Nashville who have been impacted by violence across generations are at a much greater risk of homicide without assistance and intervention.
- 3. Efforts to Identify Children Impacted by Violence in the Home:** Related to the finding of transgenerational violence, Nashville children experiencing violence in their homes have unmet needs for identification, intervention, and education.
- 4. Faith Community Education:** The lack of understanding of domestic violence within faith communities is an ongoing challenge that can leave victims feeling trapped within abusive relationships.

In addition to performing a 'deep dive' review into the case discussed above, Nashville's DADRT collected data regarding each of the 15 domestic violence-related homicides that occurred in Nashville throughout 2019. The DADRT was able to identify striking trends among those homicides, which echo the findings above and those of past reports. These trends will be discussed under 'Emerging Issues' in this report's Data & Statistics section of this report.

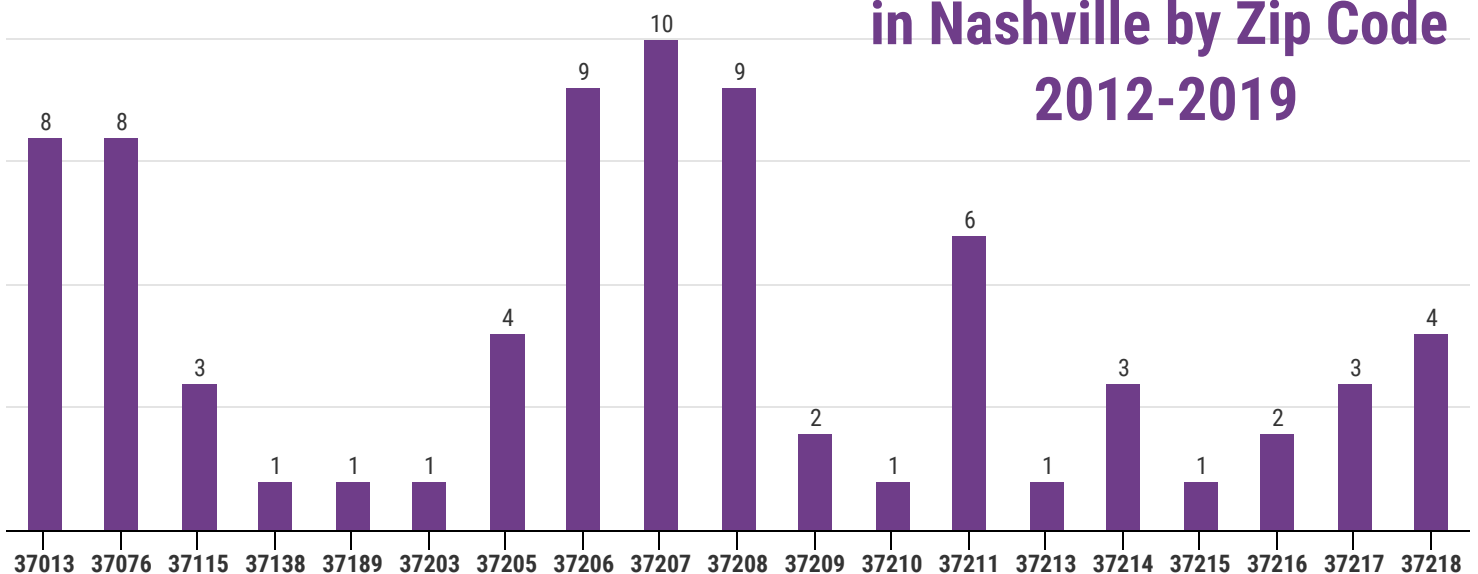
*A term used to indicate violence involving and affecting several generations within families, also known as intergenerational violence.

Data & Statistics: Location

Map of 2019 Nashville Homicides

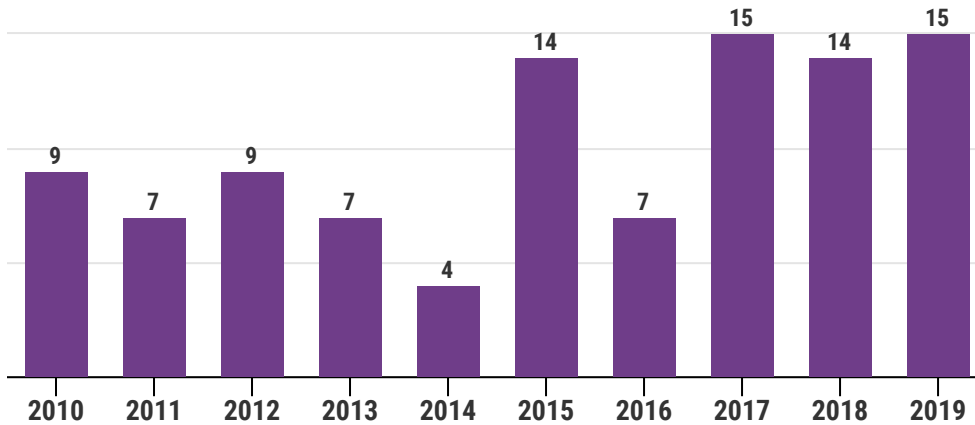


Domestic Violence Homicide in Nashville by Zip Code 2012-2019



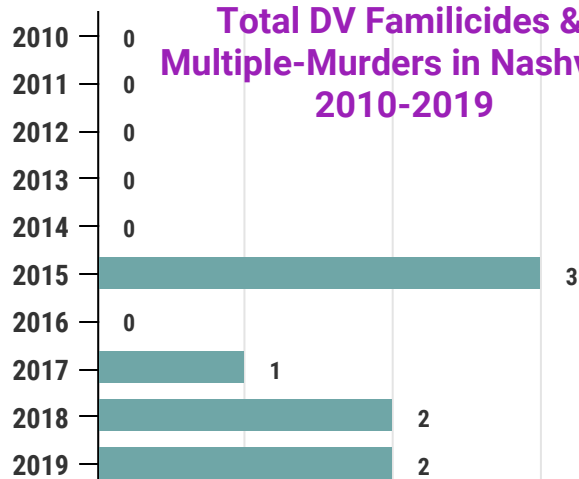
Data & Statistics: Homicide Types & Rates

Total Domestic Violence (DV) Homicides in Nashville 2010-2019

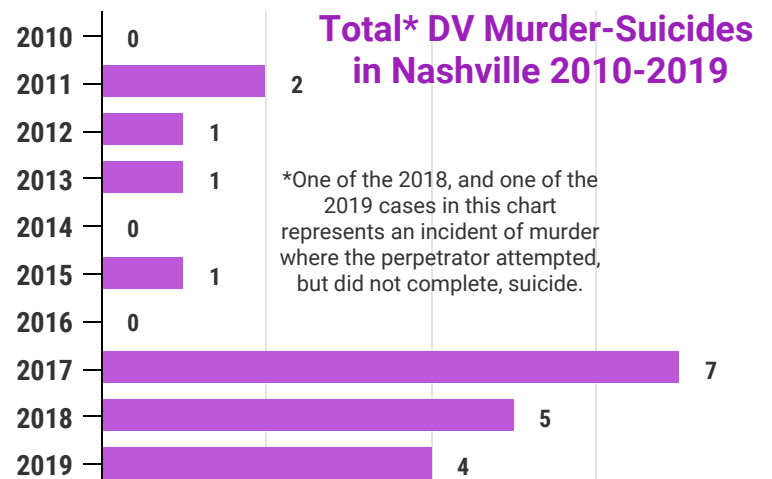


The spikes in DV homicides in 2015, 2017, 2018 & 2019 coincide with spikes in DV multiple-murders and murder-suicides.

Total DV Familicides & Multiple-Murders in Nashville 2010-2019

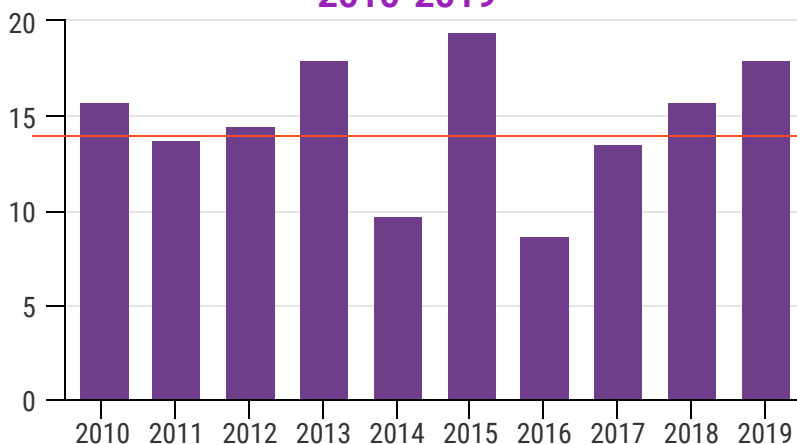


Total* DV Murder-Suicides in Nashville 2010-2019



Deadly incidents are now involving more victims, including children.

Percent of Nashville's Total Homicides that were Related to DV 2010-2019



The red line in the chart represents the average fourteen percent of Nashville's homicides that were related to domestic violence (DV) across the decade.

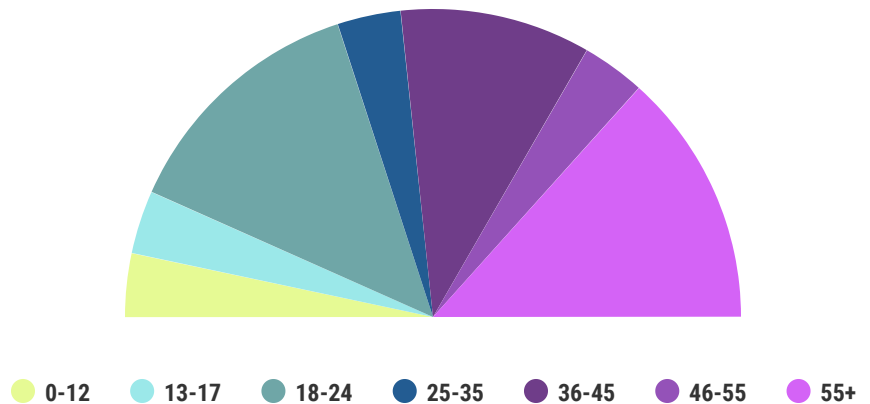
Domestic violence continues to make up an increasing percent of Nashville's homicides, a percent that has been rising since 2016.

Data & Statistics: Victims

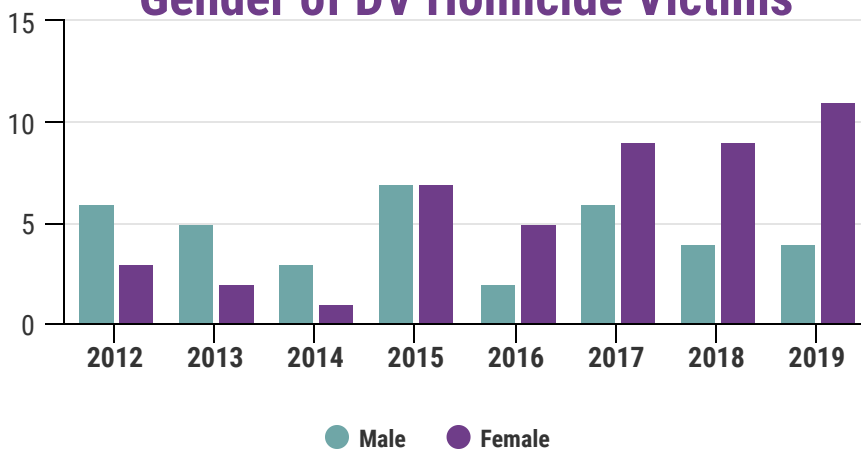
Child Victims



Victim Age 2019



Gender of DV Homicide Victims



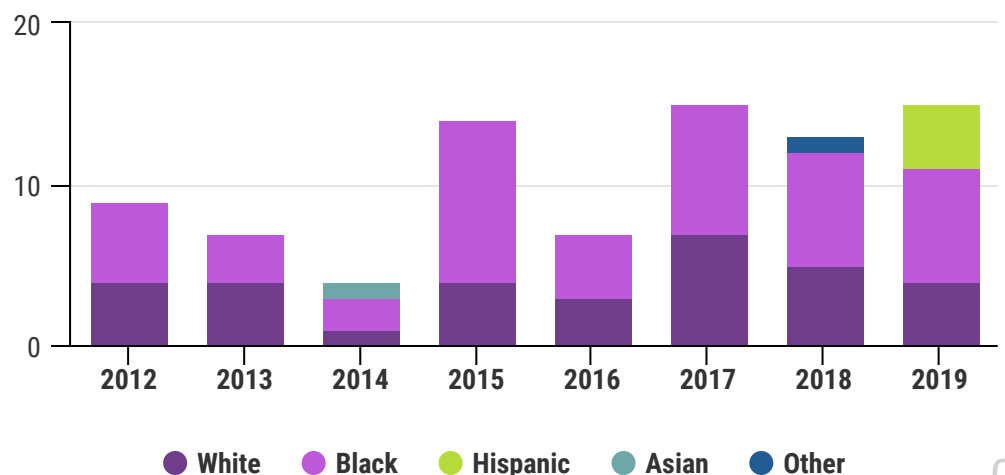
Women are far more likely to be killed by an intimate partner, while men are more likely to be victims of non-intimate domestic violence.

In 2019 73% of all DV homicide victims were women, much higher than the 60% average in the last decade.

Victim Race

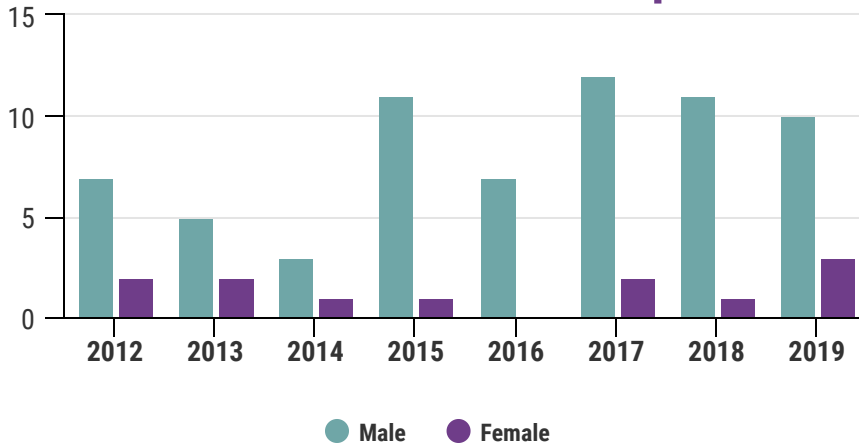
Despite making up only 28% of Nashville's population, black people account for over 50% of Nashville's DV homicide victims.

Black women are at a greater risk of DV homicide than any other population in Nashville and across the US.



Data & Statistics: Perpetrators

Gender of DV Homicide Perpetrators

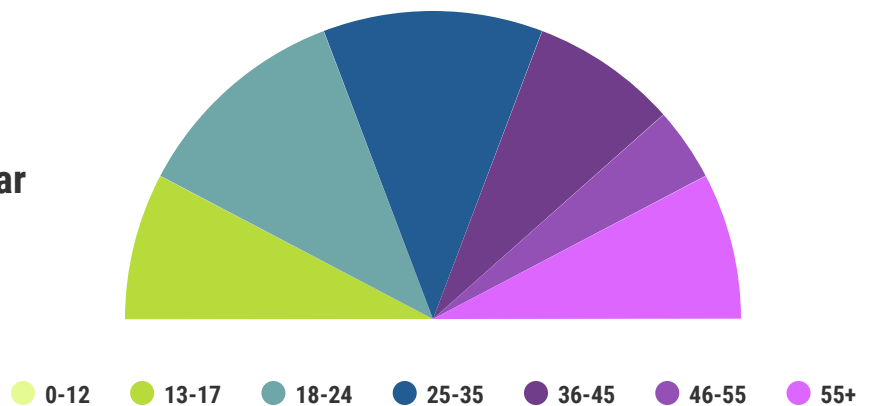


In Nashville, men perpetrate domestic violence homicides at far higher rates than women.

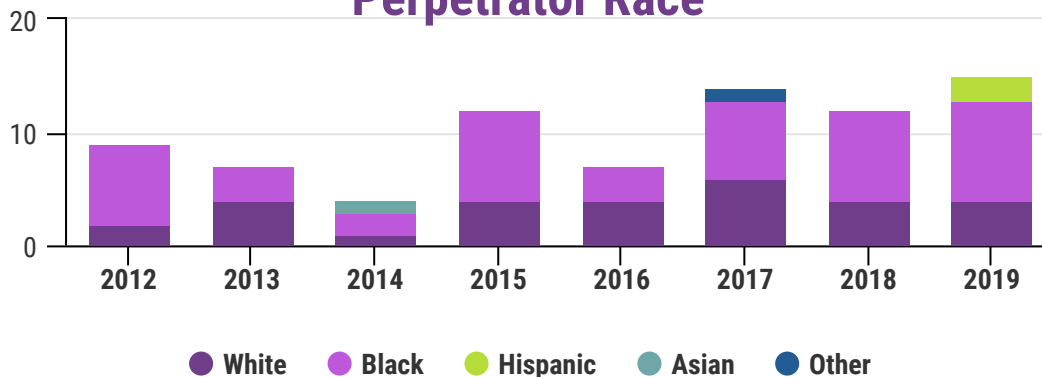
Men have perpetrated 95% of intimate partner homicide cases in Nashville since 2012.

Perpetrator Age 2019

2019 saw more DV homicide perpetrators under 20 than any year in the past decade.



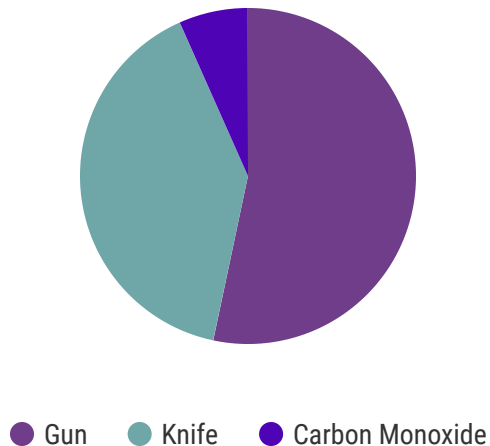
Perpetrator Race



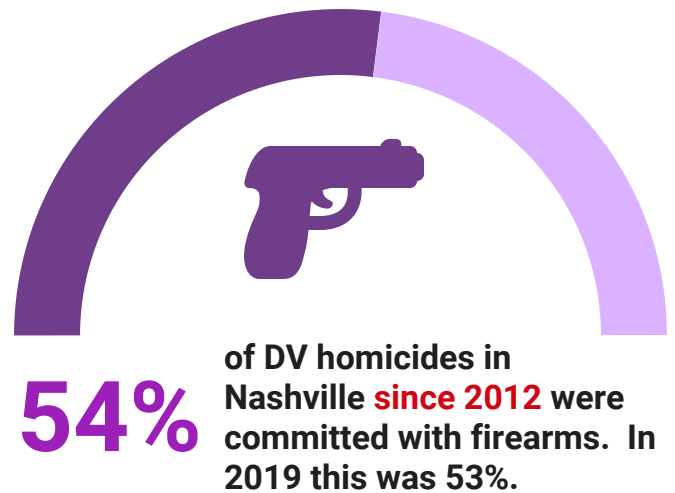
The majority of Nashville's DV homicide perpetrators murder victims of their own race.

Data & Statistics: Nashville DV Homicides

Weapons Used in 2019 DV Homicides



Firearm Use



Orders of Protection

In one of these cases where an ex-parte Order of Protection was in place, the perpetrator murdered the victim with a firearm. If the full Order of Protection had been granted the murderer would have been forbidden from owning or possessing firearms.

OFS Firearms and Strangulation Flagging

Beginning on **June 24, 2019**, the Office of Family Safety began reviewing the criminal affidavits, LAPs, defendant case histories, and Order of Protection (OP) petitions of all defendants and respondents whose cases were being heard in Nashville's DV or OP Courts. Each case was screened for the use of strangulation and the possession or use of firearms against a victim.

Of the 6,490 cases screened from June 24, 2019 – December 31, 2019:

- 3,362, or 52%, were flagged for either strangulation or owning or having used a firearm.
- 2,430, or 37%, were flagged as owning or having used a firearm.
- 2,263, or 35%, were flagged as having strangled the current victim or a past victim.
- 1,332, or 21%, were flagged for both owning or having used a firearm and being stranglers.

Emerging Issues: Nashville DV Homicides

Lethality Assessment Program (LAP)

The Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) is a lethality screening tool for intimate partner violence victims. The Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPd) administers the 11 question assessment to victims of each domestic violence report they receive.

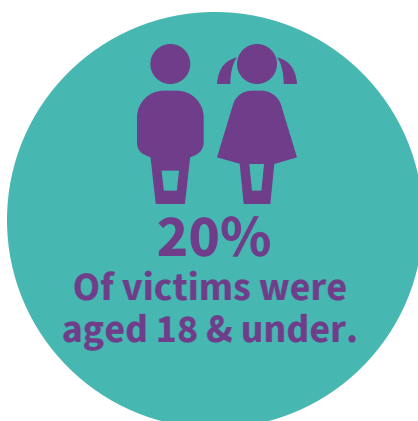


75% of the 2019 intimate partner homicide victims who received a LAP screening were screened multiple times, related to multiple domestic violence incidents reported to the MNPd.

The two most common high risk indicators among these victims were, "Is [the perpetrator] violently or constantly jealous or does [the perpetrator] control most of your daily activities?" and "Does [the perpetrator] follow or spy on you or leave threatening messages?"

This indicates that stalking behaviors are very common among the perpetrators of these murders.

Nashville's Domestic Violence Homicide Trends from 2019.



8% of victims were 18 & under in the decade from 2010-2019.



55% of victims were murdered by intimate partners in the decade from 2010-2019.



60% of victims were women in the decade from 2010-2019.

Case Review

The Victim

Although the Domestic Abuse Death Review Team (DADRT) reached out to several of the victim's family members, the DADRT did not receive a response and could not include them in the background interviews. The DADRT was able to interview leaders of the victim and perpetrator's faith community, but they were unable to provide information about the victim's upbringing and life before meeting the perpetrator. What is known about the victim's early years has been pieced together from available government records and Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPD) reports.

The victim's paternal grandmother was the victim of 5 reported assaults perpetrated by her son (the victim's uncle). Several protection orders appear to have been filed against this uncle by various members of the victim's extended family, including her father.

The victim's mother also experienced and witnessed domestic violence in her childhood home. These compounding traumas were evident throughout the victim's childhood when her mother was arrested at least 9 times for charges including aggravated assault with a weapon, simple assault, and aggravated burglary. The victim's mother was also arrested on several prostitution and prostitution-related charges that may indicate sexual exploitation or sex trafficking. However, there was not enough information available to the DADRT to confirm this suspicion. If these crimes had been committed today, the victim's mother may have been recognized as a trafficking victim in need of help, rather than a perpetrator to be arrested. While the victim has no history of similar charges, children's exposure to this type of violence within the home has been shown to normalize sexually abusive behaviors and increase the likelihood of future victimization. [1]

At the age of 17, the victim gave birth to her first child (C1), and she was assaulted barely a month later. The perpetrator of this assault is unknown, but it may have been the father of the victim's child. The victim's second child (C2) was born a year and a half later.

The Perpetrator

Although DADRT reached out to the perpetrator's family members, the DADRT did not receive a response and could not include them in the background interviews. The perpetrator grew up with two siblings, but little more is known about the perpetrator's childhood. The perpetrator was arrested for the first time at age 20 and received probation for assault. From that time until his death, the perpetrator would be arrested 74 times. Twelve of the perpetrator's arrests were for assault, eight of those against the victim. The perpetrator struggled with drug use for most of his life and was charged with 9 drug offenses from ages 23 to 48. Many of the perpetrator's other charges, 18 in total, stemmed from the commission of robberies.

The Relationship

The perpetrator was 28 when he met the victim, age 20. By this time, the perpetrator had 4 drug-related charges and had committed 5 burglaries or robberies and 3 assaults, for which he had been arrested and convicted.

The victim was 4 months pregnant with their first child together (C3) the first time she reported that the perpetrator assaulted her, biting and hitting the victim. Their second child together (C4) was born four years later.

Case Review

According to the World Health Organization, partners who batter pregnant women are often particularly more dangerous and more likely to kill their partners.

When interviewed by MNPD in their investigation of the homicide, or later by the DADRT, those in the community who knew the couple overwhelmingly described their relationship as "rocky" and "volatile." The relationship was also depicted as "on-again, off-again," and it appears that in the aftermath of an assault, the victim would often leave the perpetrator. However, the victim and perpetrator reunited each time, sometimes weeks or months later.

"Everything is stacked against the victim - the relationship, the abuse, the traumatic bonding, the need for personal fortitude beyond most human ability, traditional societal values, public ignorance, the legal system, even the victim's own beliefs and desires. And therein lies your answer to the questions "why do they stay?" and "why abuse victims go back?"

– Kim Eyer, Domestic Violence Survivor and Educator

Over the course of their relationship, 8 domestic violence assaults were reported to law enforcement, none resulting in a conviction. Most of these assaults were witnessed by the victim and perpetrator's children. During one of these incidents, the victim was also cited for drug possession. Before this incident, she had no record of drug use. The drug charge was later dismissed.

As time went on, their home environment grew more chaotic and volatile. The perpetrator's violence escalated to strangling the victim. Child Protective Services were involved several times as the couple's children and grandchildren witnessed the perpetrator's abuse. In one incident, the perpetrator and victim were accused of assaulting C2, who was then 17 years old, though no charges were brought. One year before the murder, the perpetrator assaulted the victim and C4, aged 18. The perpetrator was also accused of sexually abusing at least one of the victim's children and grandchildren in a report made to Tennessee Child Protective Services, but no criminal charges were ever filed.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, children in violent households have a 45-60% chance of experiencing co-occurring child abuse. This is 15x the national average.

As they grew older, at least two of the victim's daughters experienced abuse by their own intimate partners. Many studies have shown that witnessing domestic violence as a child can increase women's risk of victimization in later life. [3] At the point of her murder, at least 5 generations of the victim's family had witnessed or experienced violence in their homes.

Case Review

The Murder

Before the murder, the victim and perpetrator had been separated for two weeks after an argument. The victim had been staying with one of her children during this time but had returned to the abuser's home on the day of the murder and attended church with him. After church, the victim and perpetrator got into a dispute. The victim called the perpetrator's sister for advice during this time. The phone was passed between the victim and perpetrator as the sister attempted to calm the situation. According to the perpetrator's sister, from the police report, the last thing her brother said to her before hanging up the phone was "...I'm tired of her f***ing with my head."

The perpetrator's sister was concerned about the escalating situation and drove to the home. When she arrived, she found the victim and perpetrator were already dead. According to police, the perpetrator shot the victim through the eye with a .38 revolver before turning the gun on himself.

Lethality Assessment

The Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) is a lethality screening tool for intimate partner violence victims recognized by the US Department of Justice as a "promising practice" in intimate partner homicide prevention. The LAP was implemented in Nashville by the Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPd) in late 2016. Under MNPd LAP Protocol, "It shall be the policy of the [MNPd] to use the Lethality Screen at the scene of all intimate partner domestic violence incidents." MNPd administers the 11 question assessment. When a victim screens in as "high risk," they are immediately connected with a YWCA hotline crisis counselor.

Depending on their risk level, a victim's answers on the LAP may also cause their case to be reviewed by Metro's High Risk Intervention Panel (HRIP), a multidisciplinary team. In 2019, there were 6,976 total LAP forms collected. Of those cases, 35% percent were labeled high risk. This is an average of 19 LAP screenings per day, 7 of those high risk.

Unfortunately, the LAP was implemented 2 months after the victim made her final report to law enforcement about the perpetrator's abuse, so she was never able to benefit from the screening.

The Team determined that if the LAP had been available, at a minimum, the victim would likely have answered "yes" to all the statements in purple below. This would have resulted in a finding that she was at high risk of being murdered or seriously harmed. In that case, the victim would have been immediately connected with crisis intervention services and safety planning.

1. Has he ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a weapon?
2. Has he threatened to kill you or your children?
3. Do you think he might try to kill you?
- 4. Does he have a gun or can he get one easily?**
- 5. Has he ever tried to choke you?**
- 6. Is he violently or constantly jealous or does he control most of your daily activities?**
- 7. Have you left him or separated after living together or being married?**
- 8. Is he unemployed?**
9. Has he ever tried to kill himself?
- 10. Do you have a child that he knows is not his?**
11. Does he follow or spy on you or leave threatening messages

The Timeline of the Murder







On the following page you will find a timeline of the relationship between the perpetrator and his homicide victim. It is important to note that the perpetrator subjected his victim to significant and prolonged abuse. That abuse is reported in greater detail in previous pages of this report.

However, the timeline you see here is a reflection of those incidents which the Team could place firmly on a specific date based on the evidence presented in the law enforcement homicide report and other official reports.

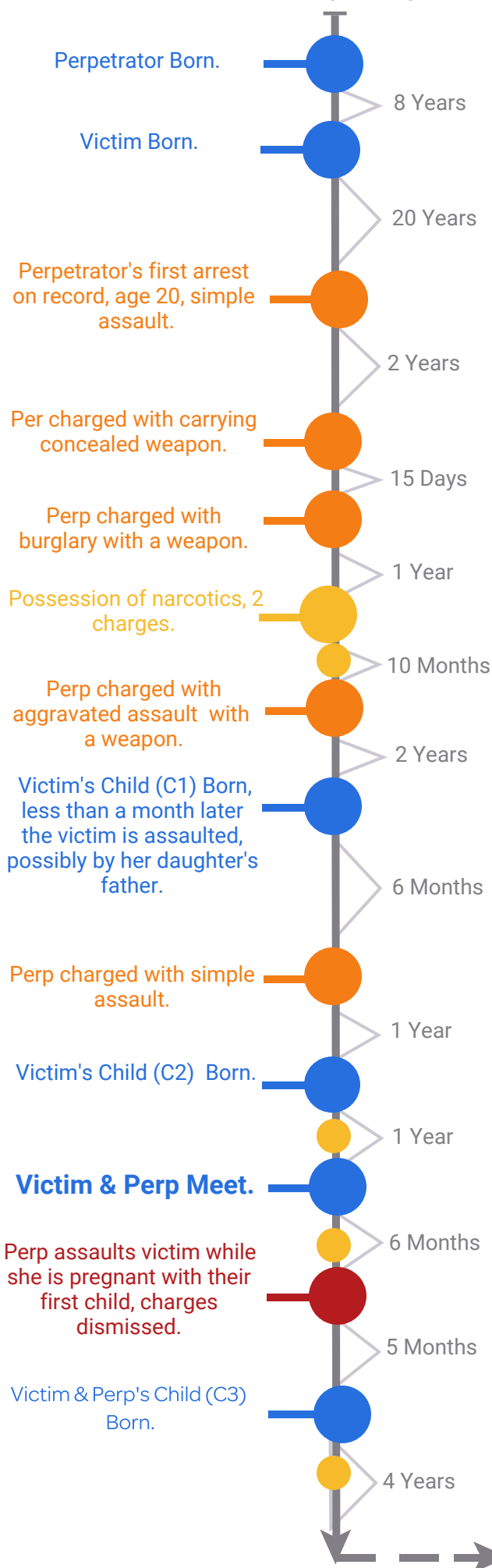
Therefore, the incidents of abuse presented on this timeline do not reflect a complete picture of the abuse suffered by the victim.

The perpetrator received his first drug charges on record at the age of 23, this initial charge is marked on the timeline in yellow. Throughout his life he would receive a total of 9 drug charges, primarily for the possession of cocaine or narcotics with intent to sell. In the timeline, these additional drug charges will be marked with a smaller yellow circle.

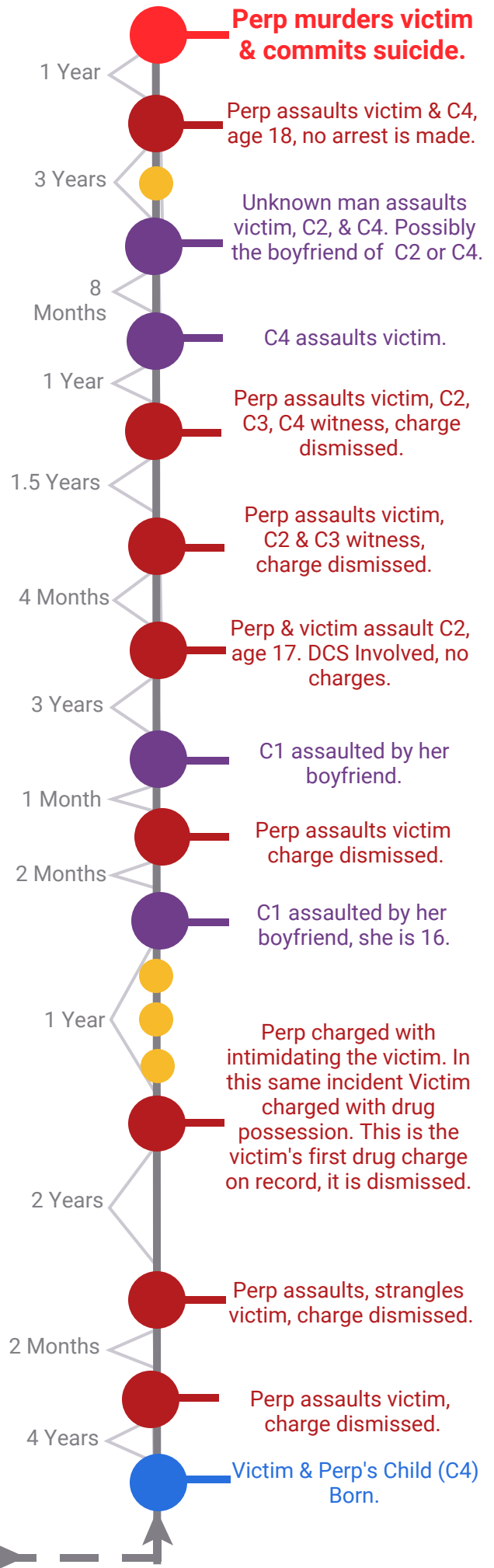
Timeline Key

-  Births & Significant Milestones
-  Incidents Only Involving the Children
-  Incidents of Abuse
-  Perpetrator's Drug Charges
-  Perpetrator's Other Crimes & Convictions
-  The Homicide

The Beginning



The Homicide



Nashville's Domestic Abuse Death Review Team (DADRT) identified four Findings during their 2019 case review. The Findings address 1) Firearms Dispossession, 2) Transgenerational violence, 3) Efforts to identify children impacted by violence in the home, and 4) Faith community education.

The Team has made specific recommendations to address each finding and remove associated barriers to victim safety. The recommendations are assigned to various agencies and organizations in Nashville, both within and outside the Metro government.

Color-coded labels identify what progress that has already been made on each recommendation:

- **No Progress**
- **Some Progress**
- **On Target to Complete**
- **Complete or Active**

SUCCESS/PROGRESS: Items identified as successes or progress made toward goals are coded in teal. These are things already being implemented throughout Nashville that address some aspects of the findings in this report.



Finding: Firearms Dispossession

The perpetrator was a convicted felon and should not have possessed a firearm under state and federal law.

CASE FACTS RELATED TO THIS FINDING

The perpetrator was convicted of at least five separate felony charges beginning at age 23. These charges included two separate incidents of aggravated assault and felony possession of narcotics with intent to sell. The perpetrator was in possession of cocaine at the time of the homicide. In Tennessee, persons convicted of any "felony involving the use or attempted use of force, violence, or a deadly weapon," or felony drug offenses are prohibited from possessing any firearm per Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-17-1307(b)(1). This is also a part of federal law. Given the perpetrator's use of a firearm to kill the victim and himself, we know that firearms dispossession laws and processes failed in this case.

THIS FINDING'S IMPACT ON NASHVILLE

Fifty-three percent of Nashville's domestic violence homicides and 50 percent of intimate partner homicides have been committed by firearms over the last decade. In 2019, 60 percent of intimate partner homicides were committed using firearms. From 2018 to the present, **in 33 percent of domestic violence homicide cases where the perpetrator used a firearm, the perpetrator had a previous felony or domestic violence conviction, which legally barred them from possessing a firearm.** In June of 2019, the Office of Family Safety (OFS) began reviewing the histories of each case being seen in Nashville's two Domestic Violence and two Order of Protection Court Dockets. Each defendant in these cases was screened for the use of strangulation and the possession or use of firearms, two risk markers that increase a victim's risk of being killed exponentially. From the beginning of this project to December 31st of 2019, OFS screened a total of 6,490 cases and **flagged 2,430, or 37%, as owning or having used a firearm against the victim.** The presence of a firearm in a household increases a victim's risk of homicide by 500 percent.

RECOMMENDATION: Metro courts must follow the current laws on firearms dispossession to the fullest extent. Legislation to close safety gaps in the current law is needed.

- A process needs to be in place to ensure that perpetrators who are not allowed to possess a firearm complete and file the required firearm dispossession forms.
- When there is a history of firearm possession and/or threats with a firearm, courts need to pursue the truth on if the perpetrator has a firearm rather than trusting the perpetrators' word.
- The option for perpetrators to dispossess their firearm to a third party (e.g., family member or friend) poses the risk that the firearm will be returned to the perpetrator and should be eliminated.
- If the third-party option for dispossession cannot be eliminated legislatively, Courts should require the third party to swear under oath, either in person or via affidavit, that the firearm has been dispossessed to them. This would make certain the third party is aware of the legal consequences of returning that firearm.
- A clear process for dispossession to a certified firearm dealer needs to be created.

Finding: Firearms Dispossession

- A clear process for dispossession to law enforcement and a process for storage, disposal, or return needs to be created.
- Upon conviction, or granting of an OP, courts should ensure that all defendants/respondents are informed that they are no longer allowed to possess a firearm and are questioned under oath about whether they own a firearm.
- Courts should include victims in this process where appropriate to provide their knowledge of the perpetrator's firearm possession and access.
- Follow-up, such as a compliance hearing, is needed so courts can identify when offenders fail to comply with dispossession laws.
- A model dispossession procedure should be implemented in Nashville-Davidson County to evaluate these procedures in preparation for state-wide roll-out.
- Appropriate funding should be provided for Metro staff responsible for identifying firearms cases, processing dispossession paperwork, facilitating return dockets, and other tasks outlined above.



PROGRESS

- Metro's Office of Family Safety (OFS) has coordinated a multidisciplinary domestic violence and firearms task force that has researched best practices on dispossession and created a draft dispossession protocol for all relevant agencies.
- OFS has coordinated with Everytown for Gun Safety to train independent court monitors in Nashville's courtrooms to study the level of implementation of Nashville's current firearms dispossession procedures. Nashville is awaiting the results of that study from Everytown.
- The domestic violence and firearms task force worked to present legislation strengthening Tennessee's third-party dispossession procedures with Safe Tennessee Project. Unfortunately, the bill did not receive a second in Tennessee's state legislature judicial committee and was not heard.
- OFS has provided training to Nashville's judges on firearms dispossession, and the danger firearms pose to domestic violence victims. OFS has also provided Nashville's judges with a bench card detailing current dispossession procedures.
- In June of 2019, the Office of Family Safety (OFS) began reviewing the histories of each case being seen in Nashville's Domestic Violence and Order of Protection Court Dockets. Each defendant in these cases was screened for the possession or use of firearms against their victims. This information is sent out daily to the District Attorney's Office, the Office of Probation, Law Enforcement, Legal Aid, the US Attorney General's Office in middle Tennessee, and advocates working with domestic violence victims.

Finding: Transgenerational Violence

The DADRT recognized a need for greater identification and intervention efforts for families in Nashville who have been impacted by violence across generations.

CASE FACTS RELATED TO THIS FINDING

At least 5 generations of women and children in the victim's family experienced or witnessed violence within their homes, including her grandmother, her parents, her own relationship with the perpetrator, her children, and grandchildren. The DADRT was unable to discover information about the perpetrator's history of exposure to violence.

THIS FINDING'S IMPACT ON NASHVILLE

"Early intervention helps children understand what a healthy relationship is and helps them gain a mastery of the environment because, ultimately, domestic violence is about loss of power."

- Beth Silverman-Yam, DSW, LCSW, clinical director at Sanctuary for Families

All of the 'deep dive' cases of domestic violence the DADRT has reviewed since 2016 have shown **transgenerational violence in the victim and/or perpetrator's backgrounds**. While very little data exists on the prevalence of transgenerational violence, and none for Nashville specifically, we can look at two other predictive factors that may give us a greater understanding of the problem of transgenerational violence in Nashville.

Transgenerational Violence & ACE's

Adverse Childhood Experiences/Adverse Community Environments (ACEs) are traumatic experiences that disrupt child development. The more exposure to trauma, the more likely there will be negative long-term consequences. ACEs include exposure to abuse, neglect, mental illness, substance abuse, family separation, poverty, discrimination, bullying, witnessing violence, or having an incarcerated parent.

– The Family Center, Nashville

Tennessee Young Child Wellness Council and the state's Department of Health found that 52% of Tennessee residents experienced at least one ACE, and 21% have experienced three or more. These higher ACE scores can lead to adult-onset of chronic disease or mental illness. Higher ACE scores also lead to a higher risk of perpetrating violence and being a victim of violence. According to the United States Department on Women's Health, a boy who sees his mother being abused is 10 times more likely to abuse a female partner as an adult. [4] Many studies have also shown that witnessing domestic violence as a child can increase women's risk of victimization in later life. [5]

Transgenerational Violence & Poverty

"Living in a violent household or one where there is ongoing emotional or psychological abuse can have a profound impact on children and is associated with the intergenerational transmission of poverty." [6] Tennessee ranks above the national average of 16 percent, with a child poverty rate at 16.8 percent. [7] **Davidson County's child poverty rate is higher than the state average, at 22%.** [8] This suggests that children in Nashville have a higher-than-average risk of experiencing co-occurring transgenerational violence and poverty, in which the presence of one increases the risk of the other.

Finding: Transgenerational Violence

"Effective prevention programs can start in schools, providing education to kids about healthy relationships and conflict resolution. Programs can also target at-risk couples and parents, giving them training in conflict management and connecting them with services to alleviate other sources of family stress, which can increase the risk for domestic violence."

- Domestic Violence: An Unwanted Family Legacy, Urban Child Institute, 2014

RECOMMENDATION: There is still a gap in resources addressing transgenerational violence as a specific risk factor for domestic violence. The OFS and its partners should work to bridge this gap with the creation of educational opportunities such as community events, materials, and/or educational videos that will explore the following topics related to transgenerational and domestic violence:

- The normalization of violence within family systems
- The impact of transgenerational trauma and violence on the perpetration and victimization of domestic violence
- How to recognize unhealthy relationship cycles and foster healthy relationships



PROGRESS:

The following organizations in Nashville are addressing aspects of transgenerational violence, including:

Adverse Childhood Experiences:

- ACE Nashville
- The Family Center
- Oasis Center

Generational Poverty & Community Violence:

- Gideon's Army

Racial Violence:

- We Remember Nashville
- Gideon's Army

Finding: Identifying Children Impacted by Violence in the Home

The DADRT identified a need for more resources to support the identification of and intervention with children experiencing violence in their homes and a significant need to increase education regarding healthy interpersonal relationships.

CASE FACTS RELATED TO THIS FINDING

In this case, almost every incident of reported abuse by the perpetrator was witnessed by one or more of the victim's children or grandchildren. Child protective services were contacted several times as the children and grandchildren not only witnessed abuse but were allegedly abused by the perpetrator themselves.

THIS FINDING'S IMPACT ON NASHVILLE

In Nashville during 2019, 21% of domestic violence homicides involved victims 18 years old and under being killed along with their caregivers or as a result of an incident of domestic violence. Concerningly, this number has increased by 54% over the past three years, and 2019 showed the highest number of children killed in a domestic violence incident in a decade. Additionally, in 2019 42% of the domestic violence homicides were witnessed by children in the home. According to the CDC, children in violent homes witness up to 80% of domestic violence incidents.

When [children] see violence used as a way of coping with conflict in a relationship, they may learn to see this as normal. And when exposure to domestic violence happens earlier in life, children have had less time to build positive expectations about relationships that might help them see violence as unusual or unhealthy.

- Domestic Violence: An Unwanted Family Legacy, Urban Child Institute, 2014

RECOMMENDATION: Metro Nashville should consider mandating implementation of the Handle With Care program in all public schools in the district. Currently, the choice to implement this program is left up to the principal of each school. Handle With Care is a partnership between MNPd and Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) that identifies students who have witnessed or have been victims of traumatic events. This allows administrators to "handle with care" at-risk students by providing needed support and intervention.

RECOMMENDATION: MNPS should mandate the implementation of age-appropriate healthy-relationship curricula in all public schools.

RECOMMENDATION: MNPS should expand implementation of the "BeWell In School" program that is currently being piloted at the Warner Arts Magnet Elementary School, or a similar model, to all schools in the district as a way to teach children healthy emotional regulation and communication skills in a safe, supportive environment.

Finding: Identifying Children Impacted by Violence in the Home

RECOMMENDATION: MNPS, coaching leagues, summer camps, and other organizations that interact with children as part of their mission should partner with Nashville's Office of Family Safety and partner agencies to provide additional in-service training opportunities for staff on family violence and the resources available at the Family Safety Center.

RECOMMENDATION: A safe, trauma-sensitive space within the Family Safety Center should be designated for children removed from parental custody by DCS to provide a trauma-reducing environment. The child(ren) should be monitored and supported by a staff member who has been trained in trauma-informed intervention and practices. The child will be given a tour and introduction to space and professionals working with them. The child will not be closed or locked into the space. Opportunities for physical movement (i.e., walking around) will be monitored and supported by staff. Snack and drink will be provided to the child (with allergies monitored).

RECOMMENDATION: A trauma-informed debriefing must be provided to children who have experienced or witnessed abuse and neglect by a licensed mental health clinician from an appropriate agency, such as the Nashville Children's Alliance, Family & Children's Services, or the Metro Nashville Family Intervention Program (FIP).

RECOMMENDATION: A trauma-informed debriefing must be provided to all professionals involved in interacting with the child (while at the FSC) removed from parental custody to assess for secondary trauma and self-care processes.

RECOMMENDATION: Children accompanying a caregiver to the Family Safety Center to meet with an Advocate or MNPD counselor should be provided with trauma-informed play opportunities and support from OFS staff and Family Safety Center Partners in a trauma-informed environment. This environment will promote calming and behavioral de-escalation opportunities for the child.

- It should be assumed that these children have sensed, heard, seen, intervened, and/or directly experienced some form(s) of abuse just by their proximity to and dependence on a caregiver seeking abuse services.
- Trauma-informed practices should be utilized by all staff interacting with the child. Trauma-informed play opportunities should be provided to children in the Play Pyramid and/or another appropriate area within the FSC. Children should be given the choice of space they would like to be in if possible.
- Referrals for child therapy should be improved and facilitated with more direct warm hand-offs by FSC partners, i.e., providers coming to meet children while first visiting the Center. FSC staff should attempt to obtain a release of information while the caregiver is present at the FSC.
- Child safety planning should be incorporated for every child whose parent consents after explaining the importance of child safety planning. Child safety planning should be conducted in a developmentally appropriate manner, and the caregiver should also be involved. Crisis contact numbers and possible behavioral changes handout sheet should be given to caregiver.

Finding: Identifying Children Impacted by Violence in the Home

- A video for children on safety and safe people and places should be developed for children to watch during their time at the FSC and wider community distribution.
- A resource sheet should be developed and given to caregivers for child-friendly trauma-informed resources in the community.
- FSC staff should ensure that other community supports have been made aware of the child's visit to the FSC (i.e., Handle with Care).



SUCCESS: OFS has dedicated a new grant-funded position to address children's needs at the Family Safety Center. This Child Trauma Specialist will ensure that all staff and interns interacting with children at Nashville's community and court-based FSCs are appropriately trained and supervised on appropriate trauma-informed child therapeutic play and ensuring that children are "Safe, Seen and Soothed."

PROGRESS: OFS is currently developing a child safety plan for use within the Family Safety Centers.

SUCCESS: OFS has worked with MNPS to create informational flyers and messaging that includes information about the family safety centers in Nashville and resources on seeking help for victims. These info blasts will be sent out to all MNPS staff and families starting in 2021.

Finding: Faith Community Education

The DADRT believes that there is an ongoing need to address the lack of understanding of interpersonal violence within faith communities, leaving victims feeling trapped within abusive relationships.

CASE FACTS RELATED TO THIS FINDING

The victim and perpetrator were long-time members of their local church, along with many members of their family. In his interview with the DADRT, the church pastor revealed that although he was aware of the "on-and-off" nature of their relationship, he never believed that the relationship was abusive or would escalate to murder. He expressed a wish that the church community was given access to more resources and support to learn how to better identify domestic violence within their congregation and respond to it appropriately. This desire echoed the sentiments of the church leaders interviewed for the DADRT's 2018 case.

THIS FINDING'S IMPACT ON NASHVILLE

Faith communities often provide a primary support system for individuals experiencing all types of interpersonal violence. Victims involved in faith communities seek out their faith leaders as one of the first points of contact to disclose their experiences and find help. However, faith leaders are as susceptible as the general public to holding false and even detrimental beliefs about the causes and dynamics of interpersonal violence. For example, although couples counseling can be a useful tool for many relationships, it is an inappropriate and even dangerous recommendation for domestic violence victims.

"Sometimes, clergy believe that domestic violence is simply not happening in their community because they never hear about it. In reality, if victims are not talking about their experiences, it can be because faith leaders have not created an atmosphere in which it is safe to disclose. After the silence surrounding domestic violence has been broken, faith-based leaders often begin to hear the stories of abuse that had been occurring in their congregations all along." [7]

Because faith leaders are important partners in helping interpersonal violence victims reach safety, it is paramount that victims service providers offer them support, education, and a 'seat at the table' when working on community engagement strategies and prevention of domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATION: The Office of Family Safety and Nashville's victims' service agencies should foster relationships with local church communities and offer leadership and church members training on interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, elder and child abuse, and human trafficking.

RECOMMENDATION: The Office of Family Safety should create a certificate program for faith leaders on domestic violence response. This program should include training on:

- High-risk domestic violence
- Recognizing red flags
- Combatting myths and stereotypes about domestic violence and perpetrators

Finding: Faith Community Education

- Improving prevention and awareness among church members
- Appropriate responses to victims and perpetrators
- The impact of abuse in the home on children, and recognizing children impacted by violence

RECOMMENDATION: OFS should partner with local divinity school programs to provide students with training events on the above topics.

Implementation Plan

On the following pages you will find the collected recommendations listed in the previous findings. Each recommendation has a **suggested "Entity for Implementation"**. Each Entity for Implementation is encouraged to see the pages associated with their recommendations for more details on implementation. Each Entity for Implementation has been color-coded* as follows:

Overall No Progress on Recommendations

Overall Some Progress on Recommendations

Overall On Target to Complete Recommendations

Overall Recommendations are Complete or Active (Such as Training Programs)

*This color code is not intended to “grade” a particular agency but merely to show progress toward implementation.

Implementation Plan

Entity for Implementation – Metro Office of Family Safety (OFS)

- Create educational opportunities such as community events, materials, and/or educational videos related to transgenerational violence.
- Provide children accompanying a caregiver to the Family Safety Center with trauma-informed play and support from OFS staff and Family Safety Center Partners. For a full list of recommendations related to this finding, see page 20.
- Partner with MNPS to provide family violence resources for staff and caregivers.
- Foster relationships with local church communities and offer training for leadership and church members on domestic violence.
- Develop a certificate program for faith leaders on domestic violence response.
- Partner with local divinity school programs to provide training events for students.
- Partner with Metro Nashville Courts through existing Firearms Taskforce to provide guidance and assistance on firearms dispossession. For a full list of recommendations related to this finding, see page 14.

Entity for Implementation – Metro Nashville Courts

- Follow the current laws on firearms dispossession to the fullest extent. Implement new policies or legislation to close safety gaps in current dispossession processes. For a full list of recommendations related to this finding, see page 14.

Entity for Implementation – Nashville Department of Children's Services (DCS)

- A space within the Family Safety Center should be designated for children removed from parental custody by DCS to provide a trauma-reducing environment. For a full list of recommendations related to this finding, see page 19.

Entity for Implementation – Family Safety Center Partners providing services to children (including Nashville Children's Alliance, Family & Children's Services or the Metro Nashville Family Intervention Program (FIP))

- Provide a trauma-informed debriefing to children who have experienced or witnessed abuse and neglect.
- Provide children accompanying a caregiver to the Family Safety Center with trauma-informed play and support from OFS staff and Family Safety Center Partners. For a full list of recommendations related to this finding, see page 19.

Entity for Implementation - Coaching leagues, summer camps, and other organizations that interact with children as part of their mission

- Partner with Nashville's Office of Family Safety and partner agencies to provide additional in-service training opportunities and referral resources for staff, parents, and families of the children served.

Implementation Plan

Entity for Implementation – Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS)

- Consider mandating implementation of the Handle With Care program in all public schools in the district.
- Mandate the implementation of age-appropriate healthy-relationship curricula in all public schools.
- Expand implementation of the "BeWell In School" program to all schools in the district.
- Partner with Nashville's Office of Family Safety and partner agencies to provide family violence education and resources for staff and caregivers.

Entities for Implementation – Vanderbilt Divinity School, Lipscomb Hazelip School of Theology, Belmont College of Theology & Christian Ministry, Trevecca Christina Ministry Program, and other colleges and universities in Nashville offering seminary, ministry, or theology degree programs

- Reach out to Metro OFS for training on interpersonal violence.
- Attend Metro OFS's certificate program for faith leaders on domestic violence response.

Entity for Implementation – Faith Leaders in the Nashville Community

Reach out to Metro OFS for training for leadership and church members on Interpersonal violence.

- Attend Metro OFS's certificate program for faith leaders on domestic violence response.

Conclusion

This report's findings and recommendations highlight areas for continued growth and improvement in Nashville's domestic violence prevention services and response that can be addressed within our government, non-profit, and for-profit sectors. The Metro Nashville Office of Family Safety (OFS) and the Domestic Abuse Death Review Team (DADRT) are committed to working on the recommendations and implementation plan from this review in conjunction with our partner agencies. The DADRT will continue to review each domestic violence homicide in Nashville Davidson County and conduct its annual in-depth case review to glean further information on how to improve our work. The OFS will work with partner agencies to implement the report recommendations that we hope will provide solutions to identified gaps and increase community awareness. The OFS Statewide Fatality Review Coordinator will continue to develop domestic violence fatality review teams throughout the state and convene Tennessee's first-ever state-wide Team. This state-wide Team will amplify the impact of Nashville and other jurisdictions' recommendations throughout the state.

The DADRT and Metro Nashville Office of Family Safety (OFS) are incredibly grateful for the support we have received from Metro Nashville-Davidson County Government, the Mayor, our Advisory Council, our state and federal funders, and our committed partner members for the support they have contributed to this report. Above all, we are grateful to the survivors of domestic violence homicide that shared their experiences and insight with our Team and helped form these recommendations.

Appendix

2010 Tennessee Code

Title 36 - Domestic Relations

Chapter 3 - Marriage

Part 6 - Domestic Abuse

36-3-624 - Death review teams established Protocol Composition of teams Disclosure of communications Authority to subpoena.

- (a) A county may establish an interagency domestic abuse death review team to assist local agencies in identifying and reviewing domestic abuse deaths, including homicides and suicides, and facilitating communication among the various agencies involved in domestic abuse cases.
- (b) For purposes of this section, "domestic abuse" has the meaning set forth in § 36-3-601.
- (c) A county may develop a protocol that may be used as a guideline to assist coroners and other persons who perform autopsies on domestic abuse victims in the identification of domestic abuse, in the determination of whether domestic abuse contributed to death or whether domestic abuse had occurred prior to death but was not the actual cause of death, and in the proper written reporting procedures for domestic abuse, including the designation of the cause and mode of death.
- (d) County domestic abuse death review teams may be comprised of, but not limited to, the following:
- (1) Experts in the field of forensic pathology;
 - (2) Medical personnel with expertise in domestic violence abuse;
 - (3) Coroners and medical examiners;
 - (4) Criminologists;
 - (5) District attorneys general and city attorneys;
 - (6) Domestic abuse shelter staff;
 - (7) Legal aid attorneys who represent victims of abuse;
 - (8) A representative of the local bar association;
 - (9) Law enforcement personnel;
 - (10) Representatives of local agencies that are involved with domestic abuse reporting;
 - (11) County health department staff who deal with domestic abuse victims' health issues;
 - (12) Representatives of local child abuse agencies; and
 - (13) Local professional associations of persons described in subdivisions (d)(1)-(10), inclusive.
- (e) An oral or written communication or a document provided by a third party to a domestic abuse death review team is confidential and not subject to disclosure or discoverable by a third party. Notwithstanding the foregoing, recommendations of a domestic abuse death review team upon the completion of a review may be disclosed at the discretion of a majority of the members of a domestic abuse death review team.
- (f) To complete a review of a domestic abuse death, whether confirmed or suspected, each domestic abuse death review team shall have access to and subpoena power to obtain all records of any nature maintained by any public or private entity that pertain to a death being investigated by the team. Such records include, but are not limited to, police investigations and reports, medical examiner investigative data and reports, and social service agency reports, as well as medical records maintained by a private health care provider or health care agency. Any entity or individual providing such information to the local team shall not be held liable for providing the information.

[Acts 2000, ch. 788, § 1.]

Appendix

Domestic Abuse Death Review Team Mission, Responsibility & Authority

Team Mission

In accordance with Executive Order No. 016 authorized by Tennessee Code Annotated §36-3-624, the Metropolitan Government of Nashville-Davidson County created the Domestic Abuse Death Review Team or DADRT to “establish an interagency domestic abuse death review team to identify and review domestic abuse deaths, including homicides and suicides, and to facilitate communication among the various agencies involved in domestic abuse cases in order to recommend improvements in the system of services to domestic abuse victims and their families, and to provide accurate information related to domestic abuse issues to the community.” Metro Government's Office of Family Safety is tasked with leading this team.

Responsibility and Authority of the Team

It shall be the responsibility of the Team to identify, review, and analyze fatal or near fatal incidents of domestic violence to better understand the dynamics of these fatalities or near fatalities and to facilitate communication among the various agencies involved in domestic abuse cases. It shall also be the responsibility of the Team to conduct an in-depth review of a minimum of one domestic violence fatal or near-fatal incident(s) per year. Selected cases must be considered “closed cases” by both the Police Department and the District Attorney’s Office. A minimum period of six months must have elapsed from the time of death in order to interview family members and other close associations of the victim and/or perpetrator.

Report References:

- [1] Ehrensaft, M. K, Cohen, P., Brown, J., Smailes, E., Chen, H., & Johnson, J. G. (2003). Intergenerational transmission of partner violence: a 20-year prospective study. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 71(4), 741-753.
- [2] Payne, B., Triplett, R., and Higgins, G. (2011). The relationship between self-control, witnessing domestic violence, and subsequent violence. *Deviant behavior*, 32: 769-789. DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2010.538317.
- [3]<https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/effects-domestic-violence-children#8>
- [4] Payne, B., Triplett, R., and Higgins, G. (2011). The relationship between self-control, witnessing domestic violence, and subsequent violence. *Deviant behavior*, 32: 769-789. DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2010.538317.
- [5] The intergenerational transmission of poverty: An overview, Katie Bird, Overseas Development Institute & Chronic Poverty Research Center
- [6] Safe Sacred Space: A Training Guide for Family Violence Task Forces, Georgia Commission on Family Violence and the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2016
- [7] 2019 Census Data on Income & Poverty in Tennessee, Mandy Pellegrin and Bryce Tuggle, Sycamore Institute, 2020
- [8] <https://wpln.org/post/childhood-poverty-drops-in-nashville-but-analysts-worry-its-moving-to-the-suburbs>



If you have any questions about the report, please contact Becky Bullard (beckybullard@jishnashville.gov), the Senior Director of Programs or Heather Herrmann (HeatherAHerrmann@jishnashville.gov), Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Coordinator at the Metropolitan Government of Nashville-Davidson County Office of Family Safety.

2019 MEMBERS OF THE DOMESTIC ABUSE DEATH REVIEW TEAM (DADRT)

Bonnie Beneke - TN Dept of Children Services, DADRT Chair

Whitney Blanton - Office of Family Safety

Chris Buford - District Attorney's Office

Becky Bullard - Office of Family Safety, DADRT Staff

Allison Cantway - OFS

Tracy DeTomas - Citizen Member

Nichelle Foster - Metro Public Health Department

Cathy Gurley - You have the Power

Susan Kay - Citizen Member

Susan Tucker-Smith - DA's Office Victim Witness Coordinator

Lee Kendall - LT of MNPd DV Division

Diane Lance - Office of Family Safety

Melanie Lutenbacher - Vanderbilt University School of Nursing

Peter Macdonald - Citizen

Katie Stone - Davidson County Sheriff's Office

Rachel Herman - AGAPE/Morning Star Sanctuary

Michelle Richter - Deputy Chief Metro Police, DADRT Sub-Chair

Kristi Steel - YWCA

Mikki Cisco - Legal Aid Society

Heather Herrmann - OFS

Megan Lopez - OFS

Ashley Cathey - OFS

Additional individuals may be invited to attend DADRT Meetings when they had involvement working with any of the parties in the case being reviewed.



Metro Office of Family Safety