

**2021-2022**

NEW JERSEY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY-NEAR  
FATALITY REVIEW BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

# **When Intimate Partner Violence Ends in Homicide/Suicide**

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# Introduction

In the 1990's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Boards (DVFRB) were formed to investigate fatalities associated with domestic violence (DV) generally and intimate partner violence (IPV) in particular. Their mission, more or less, was the review of domestic violence related deaths with the objectives of preventing them in the future, preserving the safety of battered women, and holding accountable both the perpetrator of domestic violence and the multiple agencies and organizations that come into contact with the parties (DVFRB). Throughout the collection and review of data on DV deaths, DVFRBS documented cases, identified problems, and recommended ways to improve systems to better understand, prevent and intervene in incidents of domestic violence in diverse communities. New Jersey's DVFRB was created by an Executive Order in 2000 and began reviewing cases of DV homicide-suicides. In 2004, the Board expanded its scope, purpose, membership and was renamed to the New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality-Near Fatality Review Board (DVFNFRB aka "the Board") with the focus of reviewing IPV homicides and near-fatalities. For, 2022, the Board decided to revisit our original focus by reviewing IPV homicide-suicide cases.

# Terminology Distinction

The following terms are used synonymously however they are not interchangeable and have notable differences.

## **Domestic Violence versus Intimate Partner Violence:**

*Domestic Violence is violence and/or the pattern of coercive control that takes place within a household and can be between any two people within that household to gain or maintain power and control over another including a partner, parent, child, siblings or even roommates. Intimate Partner Violence specifically occurs between current or past romantic partners who may or may not be living together in the same household. Domestic Violence can be seen as an umbrella term that includes Intimate Partner Violence.*

## **Homicide versus Murder:**

*Homicide refers to the broad act of killing a human being. Homicide has different levels or degrees which incorporate an individual's specific intentions or circumstances. In contrast, the act of murder includes a specific intent to take another human being's life.<sup>1</sup>*

*Homicide" and "Murder" are often used synonymously, but reports of Homicide-Suicides are often Murder-Suicides*

In the early days of DVFRBs, there was a dearth of data on DV-related deaths in the U.S. The Board's initial data collection methods largely relied on newspaper articles to identify cases, and hence the 2001 and 2003 annual reports were known as the "Newspaper Headlines Reports."<sup>2,3</sup> The Board then requested and began receiving prosecutors' case files, medical examiners' autopsy and toxicology reports, death certificates and other data. And the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) began providing annual DV homicide data which facilitated the Board's case identification. Notably, the NJSP has reported on Domestic Violence as part of its annual Uniform Crime Reports since 1990.

For the 2001 and 2003 DVFRB reports, 67 cases of homicide-suicide were identified between 1994 and 1999, of which 58 were reviewed and reported on by the Board. (It is important to note that the Board's focus on DV murder-suicides at that time, was largely because they were 'closed' cases, meaning

1 <https://criminal.laws.com/murder/murder-vs-homicide>

2 2001 NJ Domestic Violence Fatality Near Fatality Review Board Annual Report

3 2003 NJ Domestic Violence Fatality Near Fatality Review Board Annual Report

the offender was known and dead.) The total number of fatalities were 125: 58 primary victims, 58 perpetrators and 9 secondary victims. Key findings the 2001-03 reports of DV homicide-suicide cases, found:

- the majority were women killed by men (86%),
- most victims and offenders were White (75%), "This is not intended to infer proportionality, however according to the 2000 Census for NJ, 77.4% of the adults (over 18 yrs.) population was White. US Census (2001)"
- most cases involved intimate partners (83%),
- of intimate partner cases, most victims were planning on separating or already had
- left the relationship (67%)
- and lastly, a firearm was used in a majority of the cases (86%).

However, information on these homicide-suicide cases was especially limited because the offender was known and dead and police investigations were understandably truncated. These cases also represented only a subset of all DV fatalities. With the process for review and data collection established, the Board was prepared to start reviewing IPV homicide-only cases which it has done for nearly 20 years. Therefore, and with reflection, for 2022, the Board decided to look at Intimate Partner Murder-Suicides with an eye to seeing what's changed.

# Data Collection & Reporting

Today, the number of yearly murder-suicides in the U.S. continue to be approximated at 500-600, resulting in 1000-1500 deaths annually. Some suggest that number is an underestimate and that the number of murder-suicides may be increasing. The Gun Violence Archive reported 670 murder-suicides for 2022.<sup>4</sup> While there is no longer a lack of data, there is “no comprehensive national data collection system” of murder-suicides according to the Violence Policy Center’s latest edition of “American Roulette: Murder-Suicide in the United States.”<sup>5</sup> Relying still on media reports, the VPC analyzed news articles for the first six months of 2019, finding 280 murder-suicides, resulting in 620 deaths. Of the murder-suicides, 65% involved intimate partners, of which nearly all (95%) of the victims were women killed by men, and 92% involved a firearm.

Several federal databases have the potential to shed light on murder-suicides. The most promising is the CDC’s National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) which has data from 48 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. However, a recent surveillance report of violent deaths based on the NVDRS did not provide any information about homicide-suicides.<sup>6</sup>

In one of the earliest analysis of the NVDRS in which 17 states participated, 408 homicide-suicide incidents for 2003-2005.<sup>7</sup> Homicide-Suicide incidents included intimate partner, familicide, filicide and extrafamilial. The researchers found that:

- Perpetrators were mostly male (91.4%), median age of 43 years, of white race (77%),
- and of non-Hispanic ethnic status (89.5%).
- Most incidents were committed with a firearm (88.2%).
- Most incidents (74.5%) involved a current or former intimate partner.
- Among incidents with male perpetrators, the majority of victims were current or former female intimate partners (77.7%)

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<sup>4</sup> [Gun Violence Archive](#)

<sup>5</sup> American Roulette: Murder-Suicide in the United States. The study analyzes news reports Violence Policy Center-<https://vpc.org/studies/amroul2020.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Liu GR, Nguyen BL, Lyons BH, et al, Surveillance of Violent Deaths- NVDRS, 48 States 2023;72 (5)). National Violent Death Reporting System | NVDRS | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC

<sup>7</sup> Logan J, Hill HA, Black ML, Crosby AE, Karch DL, Barnes JD, Lubell KM. (2008) Characteristics of Perpetrators in Homicide-Followed-by-Suicide Incidents: National Violence Death Reporting System-17 US States, 2003-2005. Am J Epidemiol 2008;168:1056-1064.

The researchers reported on not only the demographics of different types of homicide-suicide perpetrators, but also health characteristics, mental health service use, and life-event factors which includes intimate partner conflicts, other relationship problems and job or financial problems. Among the significant findings was that intimate partner violence was the most common preceding life-event factor among perpetrators (53.9%) regardless of the type of homicide-suicide.

More recently, there have been a number of publications in which the VDRS is used to improve our understanding of IPV homicide-suicides in particular but IPV related violent deaths in general including IPV related suicides.<sup>8, 9,10,11,12</sup> Reports continue to be consistent with previous research in finding similar trends in types of homicide-suicides and proportions of correlates (e.g., gender, race, age, etc), but also that IPV contributed to more violent deaths than previously reported.

In one of these articles, Jordan and McNiel, present analyses showing the heterogeneity of homicide-suicides and even the distinctions among IPV murder-suicides. (Simply, heterogeneity refers to the diversity in a group, whereas homogeneity refers to the sameness.) The researchers analyzed the NVDRS for 2003-2017 in which 27 states participated. Prior to this study, typologies of homicide-suicide were developed theoretically, but here it was developed empirically. They identified 8 subtypes of homicide-suicide, which were distinguished by demographic and other characteristics<sup>13</sup>.

The 8 Homicide-Suicide subtypes for N=2,447 from largest percentage (in parens) to smallest.

1. Intimate partner -relational (54% to 58%) Nearly all decedent perpetrators had relationship problems with multiple individuals (intimate partner, family, and other relationships).

8 Chatfield SL, DeBois KA, Evans SD. (2022) Mixed Methods Secondary Analysis of Older Adult Homicide-Suicides from National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) Data. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*. 2022, 6(2):115-132. 2013-2016, 32 states, older adults

9 Jordan JT and DE McNiel. Homicide-Suicide in the United States: Moving Toward an Empirically Derived Typology. *J Clin Psychiatry* 82:2, March/April 2021. NVDRS 2003-2017, 27 states.

10 Shawon RA, Adhia A, DeCou C, Rowhani-Rahbar A. (2021) Characteristics and Patterns of Older Adult homicides in the United States. *Injury Epidemiology* 8(5). NVDRS 2003-2017, 27 states, older adults.

11 Kafka JM, Moracco KE, Graham LM, AbiNadir MA, Fliss MD, Rowhani-Rahbar A. (2023) Intimate Partner Violence for Fatal Violence in the US. *JAMA Network Open* 2023;6(5). NVDRS 2015-2019, IPV homicides + IPV legal intervention deaths + IPV related suicides. Found IPV contributed to more violent deaths in the US than previously reported.

12 Kafka JM, Moracco KE, Taheri C, Young B, Graham LM, Macy RJ, Proescholdbell S. (2022) Intimate Partner Violence victimization and perpetration as precursors to suicide. *SSM - Population Health* 18 (2022).

13 Jordan JT and DE McNiel. Homicide-Suicide in the United States: Moving Toward an Empirically Derived Typology. *J Clin Psychiatry* 82:2, March/April 2021. NVDRS 2003-2017, 27 states

"This group had the highest rate of relationship strain and the lowest prevalence of a known mental health problem/depressed mood. They were more likely to have a recent history of intimate partner violence. There was a higher proportion of African Americans in this group."

*\*\*Please note the above research statement specifically indicates "known" mental health problem. This should not be used to infer whether individuals within the studied African American population did or did not have a mental health problem, as support seeking within that population has historically been negatively impacted by multi-system injustices.*

2. Extrafamilial (10% - 13%) Friends, acquaintances, and strangers only.
3. Intimate partner distress (6% - 8%) Other stressors in addition to relationship Problems including mental health, job/financial, alcohol/substances, criminal/civil and legal problems.

Decedent perpetrators in this group "were more likely to be male, Caucasian, and in their forties; to have a history of mental health treatment; to disclose intent...and to be suspected of using alcohol at the time of the incident."

4. Other family (6% - 8%)
5. Intimate partner - physical health (5% - 7%)

Decedent perpetrators in this group were more likely to have a mental health problem/depressed mood and less likely to have a relationship problem. They were more likely to be male, Caucasian, over 50 years of age, and married."

6. Filicide (5% - 6%) Only killed children before self.
7. Familicide (3% - 5%) Multiple victims, including a child, half included an Intimate Partner.
8. Indiscriminate/rage (3% - 4%) Multiple victims and almost always an Intimate Partner.

One example illustrates the significance of Jordan and McNeil's research: Relationship problems (intimate partner, familial and other relationships) "precipitated 60%-92% of Homicide-Suicide across subtypes, while mental health problems were recognized in 7%-72% of decedents [i.e., perpetrators] across subtypes." To illustrate what this large range in mental health problems



indicates: Among Group 1 (intimate partner - relational), mental health problems were lowest (7%), but they were highest (72%) for Group 5 (Intimate partner - distress). By identifying the differences in precipitating characteristics of perpetrators, such findings can inform intervention efforts.

There are limitations in using the NVDRS.<sup>14</sup> Data collection relies heavily on the same sources that the Board uses (i.e., law enforcement and medical examiner reports) and that means that useful information is too often unknown and/or not collected because it is not relevant for prosecution investigations, especially when the perpetrator is known and dead. Other limits include misclassification of relationships, and even race/ethnicity and gender, which can result in undercounts and misleading assessments of rates and risks.

In 2009, the Board collaborated with the NJ VDRS to publish a brief on "Deaths Associated with Intimate Partner Violence, New Jersey, 2003-2007."<sup>15</sup> In regard to murder-suicides, we reported: "One type of intimate partner homicide is dominated by the use of firearms. Firearms were used in 70% of murder-suicides perpetrated by intimate partners. Of the 43 victims killed by their intimate partners who then completed suicide, 30 were shot. All but one of the 43 victims of intimate partner murder-suicide were women killed by men."

In sum, data collection and reporting are important for the work of the Board because violent deaths are preventable. In the last two decades since the Board began reviewing cases, more is known about DV related fatalities, however, more research, practice and policy are needed. Improvements in data collection and analyses can enable better descriptions of DV/IPV related deaths and enhance our understanding of how to prevent them. States and communities can use this information to guide public health policy and action.

<sup>14</sup> Messing JT, AbiNadir M, Bent-Goodley T, Campbell J. (2022) Preventing Intimate Partner Homicide: The Long Road Ahead. *Homicide Studies* 26(1): 91-105.

<sup>15</sup> Deaths Associated with intimate partner violence, New Jersey, 2003-2007. (2009) OISP Brief.



# Risk Factors

As to the research on risk factors for IPV murder-suicides, Jacqueline Campbell's pioneering work on risk assessment from the 1990s continues to provide guidance for research, policy and practice. Identified risk factors are "an increase in the frequency or severity of violence, perpetrator gun ownership, recent separation, perpetrator unemployment, past use of threats with a weapon, threats to kill, avoiding arrest, presence of non-biological children of the perpetrator, forced sex, strangulation, perpetrator drug use, perpetrator alcoholism, coercive control, extreme jealousy, beating while pregnant, perpetrator suicide threats or attempts, survivor belief that the perpetrator could kill them, and stalking."

Like others, our Board continues to utilize these risk factors in reviewing cases. Importantly, Messing, Abi Nadir, Bent-Goodley and Campbell are now conducting research to update these risk factors by taking into account structural racism among other issues, for culturally appropriate risk assessments and the prevention of intimate partner homicide.

In 2021, the team of researchers presented their research at our February Board meeting. The study will look at six designated states with New Jersey being one of the states. Dr Campbell discussed the limitations from her original Danger Assessment study that was restricted to only women in 12 urban cities. The current research is more comprehensive looking both qualitatively and quantitatively at DV cases. The study is more expansive including women, men, LGBTQ+, a greater number of people of color, indigenous people, immigrant populations and individuals who reside not only in urban cities but also rural and suburban settings. They will also review contrasting gun laws between the six states.

The NJDVNFRB also known as the "Board" meets ten times a year. The Program

# Work of the Board

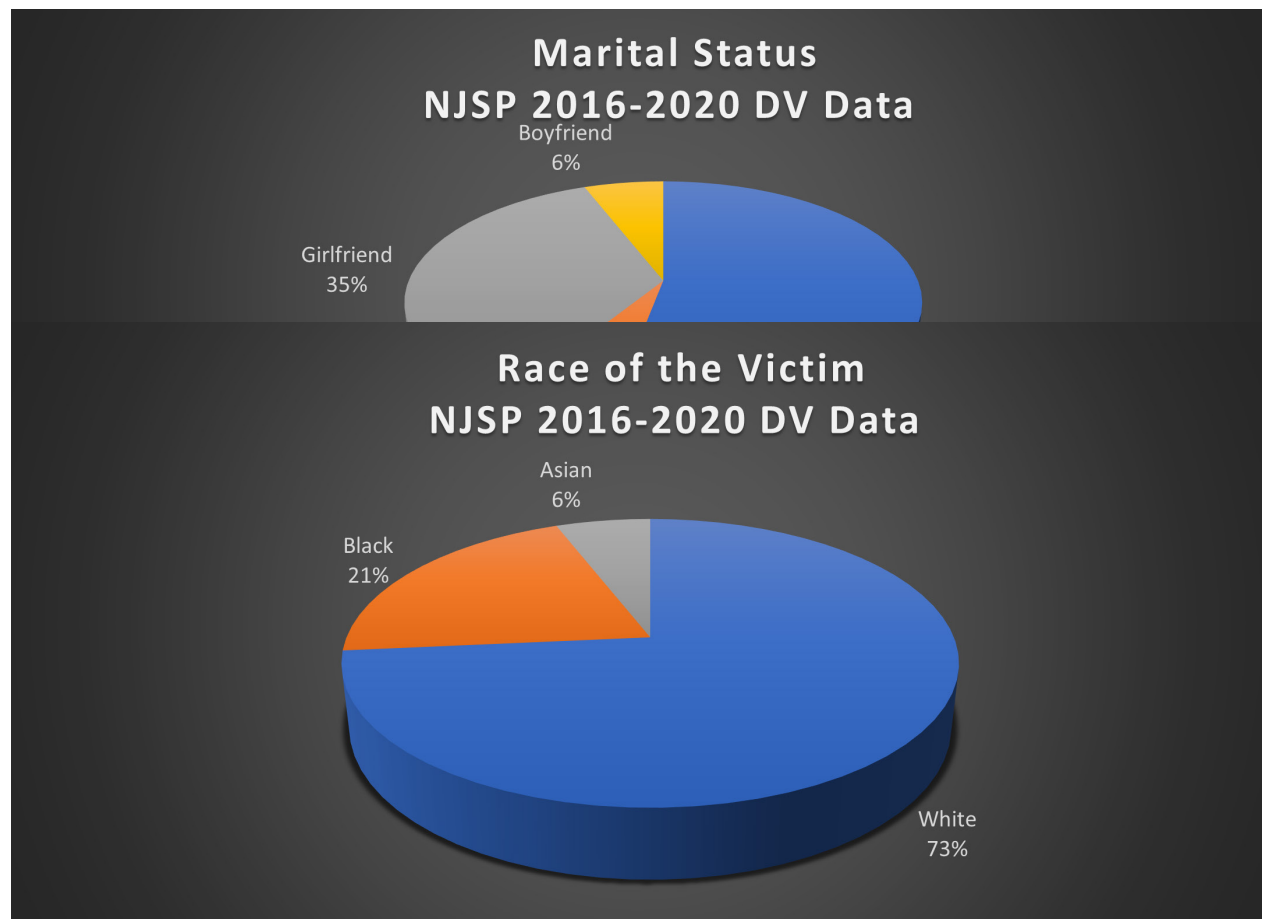
Coordinator of the Board collects and compiles all the case material and data on domestic violence fatalities. The Board closely examines law enforcement and prosecutor reports, medical examiner / autopsy reports, witness statements, and when available criminal histories and restraining orders. Typically, one case is selected for review and discussed per the monthly meeting. Prior to the meeting, Board members review the case material, frequently consisting of hundreds of pages, in order to prepare for discussion of the case. Members share their professional knowledge about the many aspects of domestic violence to analyze the cases and offer recommendations to various government and community-based systems designed to increase victim awareness and safety with the ultimate goal of preventing future intimate partner violence.

The Board's Steering Committee reviews data provided by the NJSP and the

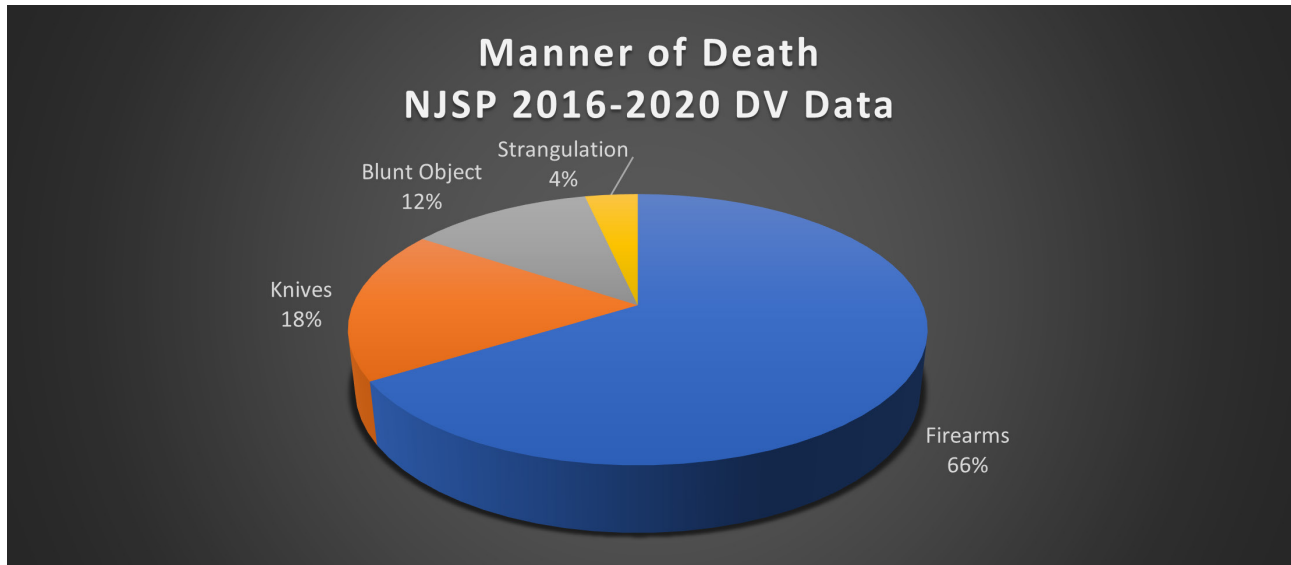
# The Case Selection Process

New Jersey Violent Death Reporting System (NJVDRS) to determine which cases to select for in-depth review by the full Board.

For this report, NJSP data from 2016 through 2020 provided 199 Domestic Violence (DV) fatality cases, of which 118 were Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Of the DV cases, there were 37 murder-suicide (MS) cases, of which 34 (91.8%) were IPV. According to these counts, murder-suicides in New Jersey appear more likely in IPV cases than other DV cases (28.8% v 3.7%). Women accounted for 32 of the 34 (94.1%) murder victims killed by men. Of the 32, 18 (56.25%) were listed in the UCR as wives, 12 were girlfriends (35.3%) and 2 were described as “common-law wives”. For the 2 male victims, there was one boyfriend and one husband. See Chart 1



Firearms were the primary weapon used in 22 of the 34 cases (65.7%), with knives or cutting instruments used in six cases (17.65%), blunt objects in four cases (11.76%), and strangulation in one case (3.4%). There is also one case in which the victim was not found for a year and no weapon was reported. Notably, firearms were used almost exclusively in 2016 and 2017 (13 of 15), but less so in 2018, 2019 and 2020 (7 of 18). See Chart 3.



In sum, like homicide-only IPV cases, in the murder-suicide cases reported here, it is nearly always men killing women. Unlike homicide-only cases, here the majority of victims and offenders are White. Our data are similar to other researchers' findings about murder-suicides.

For the 10 homicide-suicide cases reviewed by the Board, most had at least some of the risk factors that researchers have identified. Cases selected for review each year are NOT randomly selected or representative of all cases. They are selected based on the availability of the case file, the amount of data in the file, and sometimes if there are particular aspects of the case of interest for review. Nonetheless, the cases reflect the risk factors reported previously and by other researchers.

For 2022, the Board has continued to utilize Campbell's Danger Assessment tool as a guide in identifying risk factors. The Table below presents four risk factors, which have been presented in prior reports from annual Board reviews: For the 10 cases reviewed in 2022, these risk factors were found with the percentage of each in parens: leaving or ending the relationship (60%), histories of domestic and criminal violence (50% and 60%) and past or present restraining orders (40%). It is well known that the first factor, when a victim leaves, is considered

# Results of the Board's Review

the most dangerous time for a victim, typically a woman, because the man fears losing his power and control over her. As stated previously, these four factors were selected because they are most likely to be available in the data for review. Other factors, such as if the perpetrator owns a gun, has threatened to kill the victim, and/or uses illicit drugs, among others, are less likely to be consistently and reliably available in the review data. As you can see from the Table these four risk factors have been evidenced consistently in our case reviews over the three years (2020, 2021 and 2022) since we started tracking them.

2020, 2021, 2022 Risk Factors	20	21	22
Leaving or Ending the Relationship	89%	33%	60%
Criminal History	44%	44%	50%
Past or Present Restraining Order	44%	44%	40%
Domestic Violence History	89%	78%	60%

In New Jersey, as nationally, we continue to find that in domestic violence homicide-suicides, most decedent victims and perpetrators were in past or present intimate partner relationships, and nearly all victims are women, and the perpetrators are men.

Moreover, the Board's most recent case reviews continue to show that being in an intimate partner relationship in which 1) there is a history of domestic violence, 2) the perpetrator has a criminal history, 3) there's a need for a restraining order, or 4) the abusive relationship is ended by the victim, increases the possibility of becoming a victim of a domestic violence homicide. Risk factors identified years ago are still relevant today and need to be addressed to ameliorate the potential for fatal outcomes.

In the more than two decades since the Board was mandated, hundreds of cases have been reviewed. Beginning in 2000 with the Board's initial identification of homicide-suicide cases, intimate partner related fatalities in New Jersey have been enumerated, reviewed and reported on, resulting in hundreds of recommendations. However today, research for this report suggests that the number of homicide-suicides nationally may be on the rise. More research is needed to document and make sense of this likely increase and these heinous crimes. New Jersey's Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board's continuing efforts to provide guidance for domestic violence policies and practice demonstrates the state's commitment to reducing these deaths.

# Conclusion

1. The Board recommends the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence create and initiate a public awareness campaign highlighting what coercive control and abuse looks like outside of physical violence and how there is a connection of low and moderate risk factors to high-risk situations.
2. The Board recommends the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence train domestic violence advocates on the most utilized risk and safety assessments available such as the Danger Assessment, ODARA, etc. The training would allow the advocates to better educate survivors they are serving on their level of safety and risk. Completion of the training should be completed within a year of the 2022 annual report's publication.
3. The Board recommends the Administrative Office of the Courts work in conjunction with the Coalition to End Domestic Violence to provide judges of the Municipal and Superior Court-Criminal and Family Divisions more in-depth domestic violence trainings to advance procedural justice to allow for a more informed court decision for the victims and offenders.



# Recommendations

4. The Board recommends that the NJ Division of Criminal Justice, the County Prosecutor's Association of NJ, and the NJ Association of Chiefs of Police create a process for reviewing and evaluating police responses to domestic violence incidents resulting in homicide and/or suicide, where the death was caused by one of the domestic parties and not by a police officer involved use of force. A comprehensive review may assist in identifying areas that can enhance victim safety and promote improved responses to future calls for service.
5. The Board recommends the New Jersey Supreme Court require any newly admitted New Jersey attorney who takes the required New Jersey Family Law Practice core subject area, or experienced attorney certified in matrimonial law, complete Continuing Legal Education (CLE) courses in the concentration of domestic violence to gain better knowledge in identifying and safety planning for clients/survivors who have experienced violence.
6. The Board recommends the Administrative Office of the Courts provide all court appointed/contracted translators an introductory training in domestic violence to assist plaintiffs and defendants in having a better understanding of the terminology used in court cases involving criminal complaints, detention and restraining order hearings and family court proceedings.
7. The Board recommends Criminal, Family, and Municipal Court judges attend trauma-informed training to learn improved methods of communicating with victims and defendants. Being able to interact with the involved parties in a more empathetic manner could improve dialog with the parties involved, prevent re-traumatization, promote safety, and lead to increased satisfaction with the outcome of the judicial proceeding.
8. The Board recommends that the New Jersey Department of Health's Center for Health Statistics and Informatics (NJDOH-CHSI) examine data from the New Jersey Violent Death Reporting System and report on DV/IPV related deaths, including homicide-suicides and suicides, to support state and community efforts to reduce these deaths.
9. The Board recommends that the New Jersey State Police resume its annual reporting of Domestic Violence crimes. These reports provided counts and characteristics about DV murders, however, it did not indicate which were homicide-suicides and this would be important for prevention efforts. In addition, prior to 2017, the reports were more substantial, including

breakdowns by county, which would also be important for prevention efforts.

\*\*The Board would like to acknowledge the NJDOH-CHSI for our previous collaboration in the 2009 brief: "Deaths Associated with Intimate Partner Violence, New Jersey, 2003-2007."

\*\* The Board acknowledges the New Jersey State Police for providing the Board with annual lists of Domestic Violence homicides which has significantly helped the Board identify cases for review.

2022 Board Members		
NAME	AFFILIATION	POSITION

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