

Recommendations of the New Jersey Domestic
Violence Fatality – Near Fatality Review Board

2016 Annual Report

**A LOOK AT THE IMPACT
OF TEEN DATING VIOLENCE**

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History of the New Jersey Fatality & Near Fatality Review Board

The precursor to the current New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board (NJDFNFRB), the New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board, was created in 2000 pursuant to Governor's Executive Order No. 110. The New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board project was charged with identifying and understanding the circumstances surrounding fatal acts of domestic violence in the State of New Jersey. At that time, the New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board focused its review exclusively on homicide-suicide domestic violence-related fatalities that were closed cases, because the perpetrator was known and deceased.

In 2004, the New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board's scope, purpose and membership was expanded under *N.J.S.A. 52:27D-43.17* (see Appendix), and was permanently established as the Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board (hereinafter referred to as "the Board"). The purpose of the Board is to study domestic violence-related fatalities and near fatalities in an effort to understand and prevent such deaths in the State of New Jersey through systems changes, education and public policy.

After the completion of its study of homicide-suicides, the Board decided to shift its focus to domestic violence homicides and do a more in depth review of fewer cases. The Board is currently examining intimate partner homicide cases that represent the majority of domestic violence-related fatalities and present more complex and varied issues.



The Case Review Process

In its effort to prevent future domestic violence homicides, the Board conducts systematic reviews of domestic violence-related homicides examining the action, or lack thereof, of both governmental and nongovernmental service delivery systems that impact upon the lives of domestic violence victims or perpetrators. This review process is similar to the mortality/morbidity review utilized by medical and public health professionals to assure provision of quality services. The purpose is to see how, where and when systems change can be effected to help prevent domestic violence homicide, homicide-suicide, suicide and attempted homicide. The Board reviews all available facts and circumstances of domestic violence-related fatalities to identify and develop a process for change in policies, procedures and protocols that can lead to fatality prevention.

The Board identifies cases for review through its partnerships with the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) and the New Jersey Violent Death Reporting System (NJVDRS). The NJSP reports on domestic violence homicides and homicide-suicides in its annual Uniform Crime Report (UCR). The NJSP provides data used in these reports to the Board. The NJVDRS combines information from multiple sources to create a detailed database on all violent deaths. Primary source information includes death certificates, medical examiner and law enforcement reports. The Board's Steering Committee reviews data provided by the NJSP and the NJVDRS and other sources to determine what cases will be selected for in-depth review. Additionally, the Board amasses as comprehensive a case file as possible including, but not limited to: documentation from the involved county prosecutor's office, health-care providers, and the judiciary. Board members review a select number of cases per year focusing on one case at a time, and employ Board expertise to review each system's impact upon the case.

Teen Dating Violence

Most recently, the Board reviewed cases that address teen dating violence. Teen Dating Violence (TDV) is defined as (a pattern of) physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional violence within a dating relationship including stalking, (harassment,) and financial abuse (that is often expressed to coerce and control the victim, isolating her/him from friends and family while degrading them and depriving them of the right to act autonomously and independently without fear of reprisal or harm). It can occur in- person or electronically and might occur between a current or former dating partner.

According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 22% of female and 15% of male adult survivors of sexual assault, physical violence and/or stalking at the hands of an intimate partner reported their first experience with intimate partner violence occurred between the ages of 11 and 17 (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, & Merrick, 2011). Teens often perceive certain behaviors as harmless, such as teasing and name calling, as normal parts of a relationship. However these relationships can develop into more abusive

relationships including serious forms of violence. TDV affects youth from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds and also impacts those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, or Questioning.

Quick Facts on Teen Dating Violence

- Only 1/3 of teens involved in an abusive relationship will confide in someone about the violence because they are hesitant to expose themselves. (Hattersley –Gray, 2014)
- Both perpetrators and victims of other forms of peer violence such as physical and sexual assaults are more likely to be at risk of experiencing violence within dating or romantic relationships (Oudekerk, Blackman-Demner, & Mulford, 2014).
- Nationally, among high school students who are romantically involved, 21% of females and 10% of males experienced physical and/or sexual dating violence (Vagi, Olsen, Basile, Vivolo-Kantor 2015).
- It is estimated that nearly 1.5 million high school students (male and female) have admitted to being intentionally physically hit or harmed in the last year by someone with whom they were romantically involved(The NO More Project, 2014).
- A study specific to NJ, NY and PA middle and high schools found that youth who were victims of teen dating violence were more likely to become a victim of TDV in college. (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003).

Another aspect of TDV is sexual violence. According to NISVS most female victims of a completed rape (78.7) experienced their first rape before the age of 25 with (40.4) experiencing their first rape before age 18 (28.3%) between 11-17 and 12.1% at or before the age of 10) (Breiding, Smith, Basile, Walters, Chen & Merrick 2010).

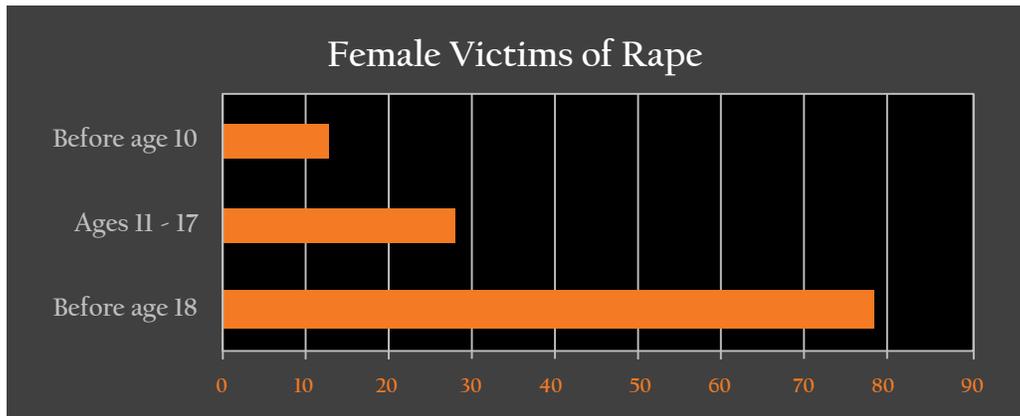


Figure 1. Age of Female Victims of Rape (Breiding et al., 2010).

TDV can impact a victim's well-being in a number of domains including physical and mental health, academic and work performance, and interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, TDV can also lead to fatality, and was thus a focus of the NJDVFNFRB case review.

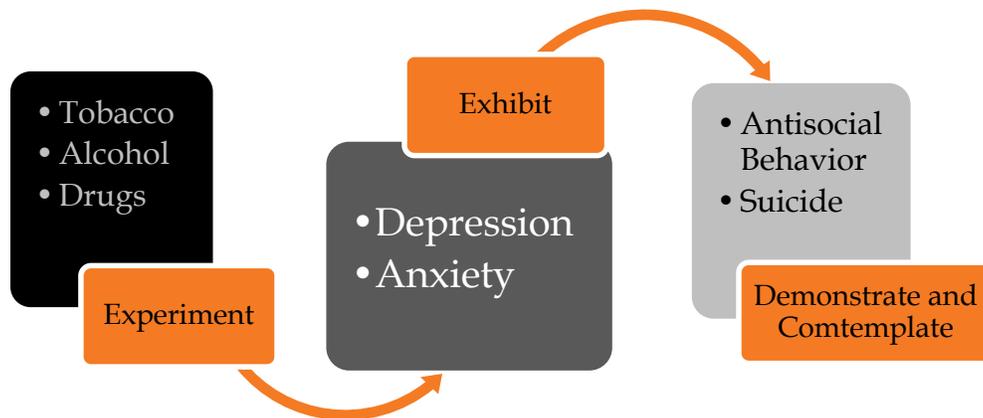


Figure 2 Impact of Teen Dating Violence (Roberts, Klein, & Fisher, 2013)

TDV Recommendations of the Board

The Board continues to systematically review cases to explore how domestic violence impacts New Jersey residents and what systematic recommendations could influence lead to change. The following recommendations were developed from a sample of cases where the focus was on teen dating violence, falling under the general categories of Education and Training. All recommendations were related directly to the cases that were reviewed.

Education

- The Board recommends that the NJDVFNF Board and/ or the Department of Education survey a small sample of NJ school districts on their current DV awareness/prevention curriculum and research the requirements mandated by law. If A-2920 does not appear to be fully implemented in the manner intended by the Legislature, then invite a representative of Department of Education to serve as Resource Member of the DV Board to work together to explore ways to fully implement the law.
- The Board recommends that all NJ Boards of Education require mandatory training on indicators of dating violence to teachers and other school staff (nurses, coaches, etc.) and that professional development hour credits be provided for training.
- The Board recommends that all NJ Boards of Education provide additional training on dating violence to teens/young adults and their parents, including what to do if they or a friend are in a violent/controlling relationship.
- The Board recommends that the NJ Department of Education evaluate the implementation of the current status of the N.J.S.A. 18-1: 35-4.23a, which required schools to develop dating violence policies and provide education for all students' grades 7-12. The Department of Education should report to the Board how many schools are implementing the statute and the types of intervention are being utilized.

Training

- The Board recommends the Attorney General's office develop uniform statewide guidelines in domestic violence homicide cases and address when to contact Department of Child Protection and Permanency to assess the safety and well-being of the victim and/ or the perpetrator The Board recommends that the Administrative Office of the Courts provide

DV training for juvenile probation officers with a specific focus on the dynamics of dating violence.

- A recommendation that NJCEDV provide DV training for security guards with a specific focus on the dynamics of dating violence.
- The Board recommends that State legislature pass a law requiring private physicians' offices, hospitals, clinics, planned parenthood centers, prenatal healthcare facilities and FQHC provide training on and implementation of DV screening and protocol.
- The Board recommends that State licensures boards require all health care professionals to develop ongoing continuing education programs to help identify and care for DV victims.
- The Board recommends that the Administrative Office of the Courts implement procedures for improving the rate of compliance for batterers with court ordered mental health evaluations and participation in the batterers' intervention programs.
- The Board recommends that the Administrative Office of the Courts mandate DV education as an additional requirement whenever families are required to complete court-ordered parenting education courses.
- The Board will identify and work with an intern to research appropriate bystander interventions especially as it relates to teen/young adults and publish their findings.
- The Board recommends that Department of Community Affairs include the National and State DV Hotline telephone numbers in their Truth in Renting Booklet, which by law is distributed to all NJ multi-unit renters.
- The Board recommends that the DVFNFRB create a subcommittee to study the benefits and feasibility of establishing an anonymous avenue for reporting DV and a concern for a victim's welfare. (Possible linkage with Crime stoppers)
- The Board recommends that the Attorney General ensures all police stations have a DV liaison and access to DVRTs.
- The Board recommends that the Department of Children and Families hire additional DV Liaisons so that each of the 47 local offices can hire their own DV Liaisons in order to increase the availability of the DV Liaisons to Division of Child Protection & Permanency families.
- The Board recommends that the Attorney General and judiciary implement an evidence based danger assessment process to identify high risk DV offenders before downgrading indictable charges to municipal charges or dismissing charges.

- The Board recommends that DCP&P workers incorporate additional standardized DV screening questions during routine interactions with families at multiple stages throughout the life of the case for the purposes of better identifying DV victims and offering appropriate services.
- The Board recommends that the Office of the Attorney General, in collaboration with NJCBW, develop a unified statewide policy on DV Crisis Intervention Teams to include criteria requiring a mandatory activation of the DVRT and require the Law Enforcement Officer responding to DV incident to document in the officer's incident report that DVRT was activated and the response.
- The Board shall identify and work with an intern to produce informational resources for high school and college administrators and educators on dating violence and distribute throughout NJ school districts and universities. Such resources should include information on the differences between dating violence and bullying.
- The Board shall identify and work with an intern to research and compile information on available smartphone applications for bystanders and victims of domestic violence and distribute this information throughout NJ school districts and universities.
- The Board recommends that the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence, the Rutgers Center on Violence Against Women and Children, and the Division on Women post information, resources, and links on dating violence on their respective websites.

Conclusion

As the State of New Jersey continues to bring domestic violence to the forefront of public awareness, the case and literature review processes clearly show that teen dating violence affects our youth from early stages of adolescence into young adulthood or college years. To reduce and hopefully eliminate this prevalent social problem it is important that we continue to develop ideas and begin to implement these ideas into practice whether it be through the education system, training our community partners or creating resources and tools accessible to both professionals and the community who have witnessed or are aware of domestic violence impacting our youth.

Structure of the NJDVFNFRB

The Board is comprised of twenty-three (23) government and non-government members who represent various agencies and organizations that intersect with or impact upon domestic violence-related cases in New Jersey. The list of membership below reflects the following appointments or their designee: the Attorney General; the Commissioners of the Departments of Human Services, Children and Families and Health and Senior Services; the State Medical Examiner; the Superintendent of the State Police; the Director of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency, the Chairperson(s) of the New Jersey Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board; the New Jersey Public Defender; and, the Coordinator of the New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board. In addition, the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts has appointed a retired judge with an expertise in family law.

The non-government members appointed by the Office of the Governor include representation from the following: the County Prosecutors Association of New Jersey; the New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women; law enforcement community; county probation; a professional working with a batterer's intervention/treatment program; a psychologist; and a licensed social worker. Individuals selected to serve on the Board all have an expertise in the area of domestic violence and are working with and for victims of domestic violence and their families.

Government Representatives:

Chair: Associate Professor and Associate Director, Center on Violence Against Women and Children, Rutgers University School of Social Work, Sarah McMahon, LSW, Ph.D.,

Co- Chair: Retired Superior Court Judge with Expertise in Family Law, Honorable Thomas Dilts, J.S.C.

Coordinator of the New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board
John Nardi, Office of Performance Management and Accountability

Commissioner Department of Children and Families Representative: Vilma Ramos, Assistant Director, Division of Child Protection and Permanency

Commissioner Department of Health and Senior Services Representative: Bretta Jacquemin, New Jersey Violent Death Reporting System

Commissioner Department of Children and Families Representative: Charmaine Thomas, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Family and Community Partnerships

Office of the Attorney General Representative: Jennifer Stonerod, and Marie Pirog Deputy Attorney General

Office of the Public Defender Representative: T. Gary Mitchell, Deputy Public Defender

New Jersey State Police Representative: First Sergeant Brian Miller, New Jersey State Police Victim Services Unit

Office of the State Medical Examiner Representative: Laura Cerminara, Forensic Administrator

Supervisor of the Fatality Executive Review Unit: Lisa Kay Hartmann, Office of Performance Management and Accountability

Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board Representatives Dr. Judy Postmus, Dr. Martin Finkle, Dr. Karen Wells, Dr. Kathryn McCans, Thomas Ercalano Esq., and Lisa vonPier

Public Members:

New Jersey County Prosecutors Association Representative
Camelia Valdes, Assistant Prosecutor, Middlesex County

Community Partner Representative
Asia D. Smith, Purple Reign- Batterer's Treatment and Intervention Provider

County Probation Officer Representative
Susanne E. Wilson-Flagg, Master Probation Officer, Camden County

Healthcare Professional
Carolyn (Ryn) Fernandez, Nurse Practitioner RN, MSN, APN-BC, CCRN, CEN

Resource Members:

William Zaorski, Retired Deputy Attorney General

Sue Rovi, Ph.D. Retired, Rutgers University School of Medicine

Nicole Morella, New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women

Acknowledgements:

Sandy Clark, Former Chair of the NJDVFNFRB

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Resources and Links

As a result of reviewing Teen Dating Violence cases, the NJDVFNFRB, in collaboration with a number of partners, created a series of “Teen Dating Violence Factsheets” for educators. These are available from Center on Violence Against Women and Children, Rutgers School of Social Work. Teen Dating Facts Sheets <https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/...violence.../teen-dating-violence-factsheets>

New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence www.njcedv.org

New Jersey Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline www.nj.gov > [Home](#) > [Women](#)