

*The 2002 Annual Report of the*

KNOX COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

*Presented by*

Randall E. Nichols, District Attorney General, Committee Chairperson

**BACKGROUND**

On August 29<sup>th</sup> 2000, an agreement was entered into between The Community Coalition on Family Violence, Knox County District Attorney's Office, Knox County Circuit Court, Knox County Criminal Court, Knoxville Police Department, Knox County Medical Examiner's Office, Knox County Health Department, Tennessee Department of Children Services, Tennessee Department of Human Services, Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole, Child & Family Tennessee, University of Tennessee Medical Center, St. Mary's Health System, Baptist Health System, Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, East Tennessee Children's Hospital, TWCA, Knox Area Rescue Ministries, Salvation Army, Rural/Metro EMS, Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, University of Tennessee College of Social Work, Police Advisory And Review Committee and Knoxville Legal Aid Society. (The Knox County Sheriff's Department was invited to participate, however, to date the Sheriff's department has not signed the cooperative agreement.) These participants, acknowledging their role in promoting and protecting the well being of children, families, and the public health, sought to review domestic related fatalities in order to make future recommendations for intervention and prevention. This cooperative agreement was made possible through legislation effective on May 22, 2000. Tenn. Code Ann. 36-3-624.

**GOALS**

The agreed objectives of the Knox County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee, hereinafter KCDVFRC, were as follows:

- 1) To describe trends and patterns of domestic violence deaths in Tennessee.
- 2) To identify and investigate the prevalence of a number of risks and potential risk factors in the population of domestic violence descendents.
- 3) To evaluate the service and system responses to families who are considered at risk, and to offer recommendations for improvement in those responses.
- 4) To characterize high-risk groups in terms that are compatible with the development of public policy.
- 5) To improve the sources of data collection by developing protocols for autopsies, death investigations, and complete recording of cause of death on the death certificates.

**GUIDELINES**

The KCDVFRC established its own operating guidelines. Before each scheduled meeting face sheets containing pertinent information about the cases to be reviewed were forwarded to each participant. Using the information from this sheet, participants gathered any records they might have in their possession to bring to the scheduled meeting. Of utmost concern to the KCDVFRC was confidentiality. Each participant

signed a sheet setting forth the confidentiality agreement before every case reviewed. These sheets were witnessed and collected at every meeting. All face sheets were also collected and destroyed at the end of every meeting.

At each meeting, the KCDVFRC sought answers to the following questions:

1. Do all criminal justice system and social service agencies in the City of Knoxville have specific policies and procedures related to domestic violence?
  - a. Which agencies had contact with the victim and perpetrator in the identified case?
  - b. What services were provided to each?
  - c. Were all current policies and procedures followed in the handling of criminal/civil matters involving this case?
  - d. Did any criminal justice and/or civil system agency have contact with the victim and/or perpetrator related to an Order of Protection or Restraining Order?
  - e. Are the current protocols adequate for the handling of domestic violence cases?
  - f. If not, what recommendations could be made to improve the response of the system agencies?
2. What other local, state, or federal agencies had direct contact with the victim and/or perpetrator related to prior domestic violence?
3. What was the involvement of the Knox County Criminal and Civil Court Judges in the cases up for review?
4. Is there sufficient information sharing among all agencies involved in domestic violence cases?
  - a. What information was available to each agency involved with the parties in the case?
  - b. How accessible is available information to interested agencies?

The purpose of this review was not to assign blame or to challenge difficult decisions made by any participant. The review was intended to refine, improve and coordinate a response toward intervention and prevention in domestic violence cases.

## **THE FIRST YEAR**

Meetings were held quarterly on the first Wednesday of the month. Cases still pending resolution in the Criminal Justice System were not reviewed. The dates of the reviewed fatalities ranged from May 1998 to June 2000. Ten cases were reviewed, and from these ten cases, eleven suspects and twelve victims were identified. Three of the Ten cases were identified as murder-suicides. In nine of the ten cases the victims and suspects were of the same race. In the only interracial case the victim was Caucasian and the Suspects were African American.

### **Victim Profiles**

Caucasian	5	42%
African American	7	58%

Male	4	33%
Female	8	67%
Minors under 10	2	17%
Adults 18-20	1	8%
21-30	2	17%
31-40	2	17%
41-50	4	33%
51-60	0	0%
61+	1	8%

#### **Suspect Profiles**

Caucasian	4	36%
African American	7	64%
Male	9	82%
Female	2	18%
Minors 10-17	1	9%
Adults 18-20	1	9%
21-30	4	36%
31-40	3	27%
41-50	0	0%
51-60	1	9%
61+	1	9%

#### **Geographical Location of Fatality – Knoxville City Limits**

East District	6	60%
Central District	3	30%
West District	1	10%

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Several cases reviewed were directly linked to child custody disputes. As such, several participants got together to create a sheet listing risk factors and resources. This sheet could then be provided to all parties involved in any child custody dispute. Judge Swann agreed to provide the sheet through his court, with arrangements being made so that the sheet would also be available in Juvenile and Chancery Courts.

A severe lack of mental health and alcohol and drug resources were also identified. Obviously, more funding is needed in this area.

The necessity for promptly and accurately entering information in the National Crime Information Center database, hereinafter, NCIC, was also identified. All Knox County NCIC operators receive training in order to effectuate that goal. Furthermore, the Knox County District Attorney's Office has a system in place that allows for the prompt approval of entries for outstanding arresting instruments and extradition requests. Further, it is imperative that the Tennessee Department of Probation and Parole conduct a pre-sentence or post-sentence investigation for all felony pleas in Criminal Court.

Please review the attached directory. Several listings are incomplete. Please e-mail complete addresses, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address changes and any corrections to [debbie.herron@knoxcounty.org](mailto:debbie.herron@knoxcounty.org) . Also, if you find someone has been left out. Please e-mail that information as well. Thanks for your cooperation.

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Our next meeting will be Wednesday October 9, 2002 at 1:00 p.m. at the Moses Center. In the interim we need nominations (volunteers) for a new chair or chairs. Please submit your nomination by September 1. As a suggestion, other jurisdictions have co-chairs. One involved in the criminal justice system and the other more involved with social services. Please talk with each other and seriously consider taking on this new role.