Domestic Violence-Related Deaths of Women in Eastern North Carolina: A 10-year Retrospective Study

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Background

• Domestic violence is abuse (emotional, sexual, or physical) that is inflicted on another person (male or female) by a significant other or family member.
  - Encompasses intimate partner violence, elder abuse, and child abuse.
• Domestic violence effects more than 10 million people a year, with 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men having experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.
• Domestic violence has been shown to increase during stressful situations, like COVID-19.
• In current literature domestic violence-related deaths increased during COVID-19 and then started to decline after COVID-19 was sustained.
• This study looks to see if a similar trend of domestic violence-deaths was seen in the 28 counties covered by the Eastern Regional Autopsy Center.

MATERIALS & METHODS

• A retrospective study of female deaths autopsied at the Eastern Regional Autopsy Center from 2012 to 2022 was conducted, finding 182 cases.
• Demographics, cause of death, weapon type, and perpetrator were recorded.
• Group Classifications
  - Female homicides were classified into two groups
    1. Other homicides (74 cases)
    2. Domestic violence-related homicides (108 cases)
  - Domestic violence-related homicide inclusion criteria:
    - Greater than 15 years old
    - The perpetrator was a significant other or a family member
    - Bystander killed in a domestic violence-related incident.
  - Domestic violence-related homicides were reclassified into two groups
    1. Intimate partner homicide (88 cases)
      - Female killed by significant other or bystander killed in an intimate partner incident.
    2. Family-related homicide (20 cases)
      - Female killed by a family member or a bystander killed in a family-related incident.

RESULTS

Domestic Violence-Related Deaths 2012-2022

- DV-Related Homicides
- Intimate Partner Homicide
- Family Related Homicide

Cause of Death

- **Firearm Injuries**: Handgun (56), rifle (1), and shotgun (9).
- **Sharp Force Injuries**: Knife (21) and broken alcohol bottle (1).
- **Blunt Force Injuries**: Unknown (8), hammer (1), and tire iron (1).
- **Asphyxia**: Manual strangulation (6), smothering (1), and ligature strangulation (2).

Additional Findings

• 9 cases involved multiple injury types
  - Combination of sharp force injuries, blunt force injuries, firearm injuries, or asphyxia
  - 7 cases were intimate partner homicides
  - 2 cases were family-related homicides
  - 4 cases involved women that were pregnant at the time of their death.
  - 22 case involved domestic violence-related deaths followed by perpetrator suicide.
  - 3 case were classified as “murder killing” by the perpetrator.
  - 3 cases involved bystanders killed during a domestic violence-related incident.

Conclusions

• COVID-19 brought about many repercussions around the world, including increases in violence, including domestic violence.
• Our study aligns with the current literature on increased domestic violence during COVID-19.
• This study highlights the continued increase of domestic violence following COVID-19 in Eastern North Carolina, which maybe due to increased economic uncertainty and mental health problems in the region.
• This study also highlights the need for on going funding and support for victims of domestic violence.

References