

PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 5, 2011

Contact: Kelly Starr
Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
206-389-2515, ext. 210
kelly@wscadv.org

Thirteen-Year Study of Domestic Violence Homicides Illuminates Plan for Change

Legal system failed to keep victims safe

Nearly a third of homicide victims met abuser in their teens

Eleven goals identified to improve response to domestic violence

New research – a 13-year study of domestic violence homicides – was released today by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Since 1997, a total of 755 people have died in domestic violence fatalities in Washington. An in-depth analysis was conducted on 135 of these deaths. “These homicides showed us where the community response to domestic violence fell short,” said Jake Fawcett, the lead researcher on the study. “We have made recommendations for change based on our findings.”

Legal system failed to keep victims safe

Police responded to 157 reports of domestic violence prior to the murders in studied cases. Yet only 5 abusers spent more than 30 days in jail on domestic violence charges. Fewer than half of the incidents resulted in the abuser’s arrest. And abusers actually completed all the terms of their sentence in only 4% of the incidents.

The research documented failures at every point in the criminal legal system, from the 911 call to the police response, prosecution, sentencing, and probation. The study also found some examples of excellent responses from

police, prosecutors, and courts. But these model responses were not consistent practice. As a result, victims could not count on the fact that a call to the police would actually help keep them safe.

Nearly a third of homicide victims met abuser in their teens

Victims in 31% of studied cases were under 21 when they started dating the abuser. Researchers consistently found that local schools did not provide adequate education or resources to address dating violence. In their first experiences with dating, these victims did not get critical information about what a healthy relationship looks like, or practical tips on what to do if they were being abused.

Teen victims' parents also did not have the information they needed. Many tried to be helpful and intervene, but did not know about the supportive resources – like their local domestic violence program – that could help them in their efforts.

Eleven goals identified to improve response to domestic violence

The study puts forth eleven key goals for change. Achieving these goals would create more safe options for victims, effective responses to abusers, and prevent abuse before it happens. They range from improving how family courts address victims' and children's safety in divorces and parenting plans to increasing long-term, affordable housing options for victims of abuse.

The goals also address the key role domestic violence advocates play in helping victims plan for their safety. All professionals and community members are encouraged to contact their local domestic violence program to learn about the range of services available.

“We have learned so much from those who have lost their lives,” said Nan Stoops, executive director of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. “Now we must turn that knowledge into action.”

To learn about the domestic violence program that serves your community, call the Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-562-6025.

The complete research report, *Up to Us: Lessons learned and goals for change after thirteen years of the Washington State Domestic Violence Fatality Review*, is available at wscadv.org.

About the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Founded in 1990 by survivors of domestic violence and their allies, the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence is a non-profit network of over 65 domestic violence advocacy programs across the state of Washington. Our work includes research, training, promoting domestic violence awareness, and public policy advocacy. To learn more, please visit our website at wscadv.org.

###