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UNDERSTANDING DELAWARE'S FATAL INCIDENT REVIEW TEAM

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Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

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WHO AM I?

Lauren (or Ren), she/her
Senior Administrator - DVCC
Latina, queer, UD grad, nerd
Well acquainted with death

Fun fact: I have 14+ pets!

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WHAT WE'LL COVER

- Group Agreements & Participation
- What is the DVCC? What is FIRT?
- Purpose & Goals of DV Fatality Reviews
- Fatality Review Procedures
- National Fatality Data
- Delaware Fatality Data

GROUP AGREEMENTS

1. Respect this space and one another
2. What is shared here stays here
3. Lean into discomfort
4. Remember the people behind the numbers

PARTICIPATION

Participate at your own comfort level

Take a break, grab water, etc. when needed

We are human first, professionals second

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WHAT IS THE DVCC?

- The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC) is a state agency legislatively created (Del. Code, Title 13, Chapter 21) to improve Delaware's response to domestic violence and sexual assault.

- The DVCC brings together all stakeholders including service providers, policy-level officials and community partners to eradicate domestic violence.

Vision Statement: The DVCC is committed to leading the nation through innovative legislative action, community education and an outstanding coordinated system response to violence in families and the community.

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Have you heard of fatality reviews?

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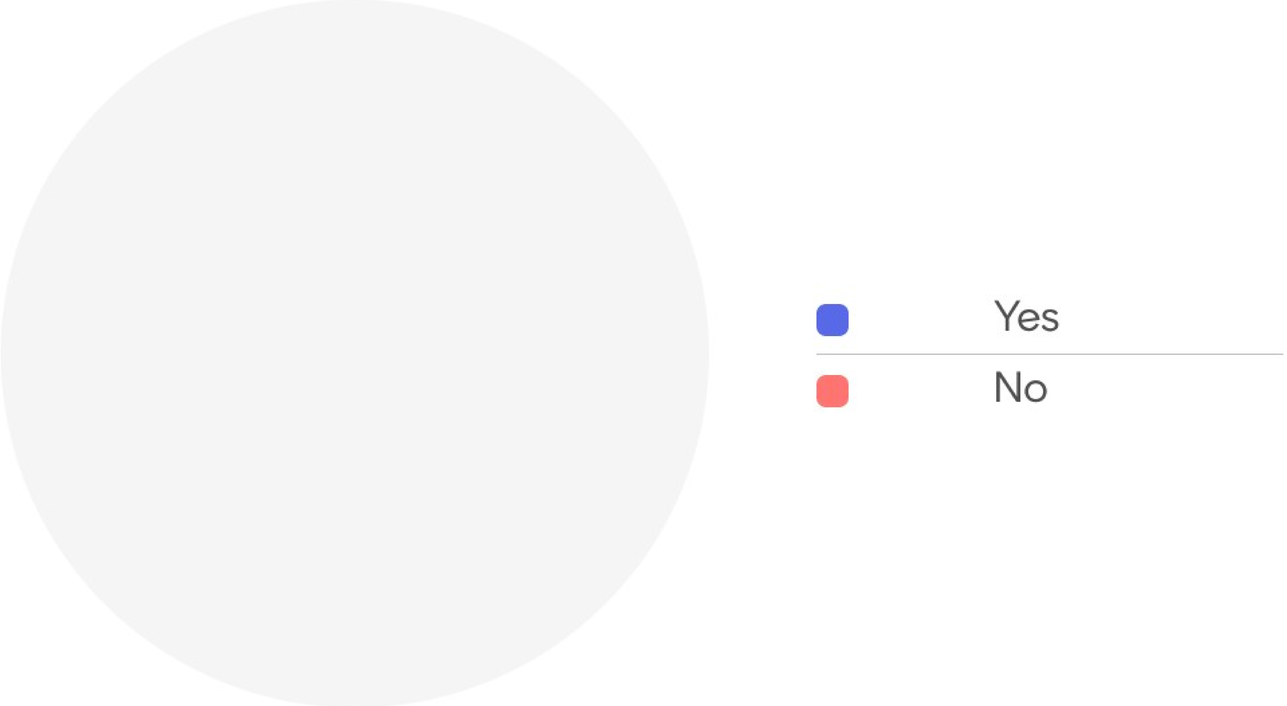
Have you heard of fatality reviews?



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Why should we review DV fatalities?

4:23-7:43

Why should we review DV fatalities?

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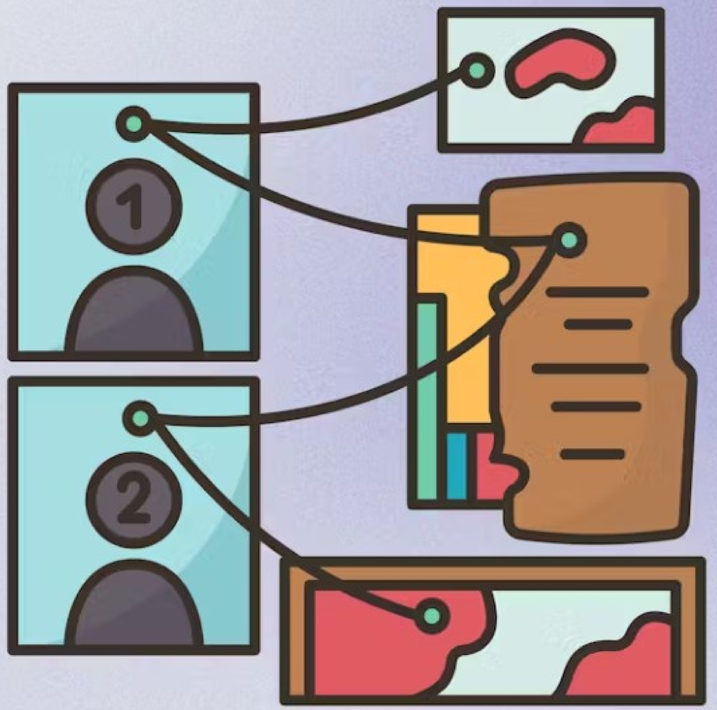
WHY REVIEW DV FATALITIES?

- DV fatality reviews provide a way of reviewing DV related deaths & near-deaths through a lens of **prevention** and **accountability**.



- Reviews focus on
  - Identifying trends & obstacles in service delivery
  - Assessing adequacy of agency interventions
  - Developing recommendations for improved policies/practices

- Reviews **ALSO**
  - Strengthen the coordinated community response
  - Build understanding and appreciation for various professionals' roles
  - Challenge societal norms around talking about death

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WHAT IS FIRT?

The DVCC's Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT) was established by statute (Del. Code, Title 13, § 2105) in 1996 and became the first statewide team in the country.

Members are dedicated professionals with the power to "investigate and review, through a review panel, the facts and circumstances of all deaths and near deaths that occur in Delaware as a result of domestic violence."

FIRT tracks and reviews both fatal and near-fatal incidents related to domestic violence, including a large range of case types.

MEMBERSHIP

In accordance with 13 Del. C. §2105, in addition to the co-chairs, the Review Team shall consist of:

- The Attorney General or designee
- The Chief Defender or designee
- The Director of the Division of Family Services or designee
- The President Judge of the Superior Court or designee
- The Chief Judge of the Family Court or designee;
- The Chief Magistrate of the Justice of the Peace Courts or designee
- The Director of the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, or designee
- The Commissioner of the Department of Correction or designee
- A law-enforcement officer to be appointed by the Delaware Police Chiefs' Council
- A treatment provider from a certified batterers' intervention program appointed by the Council
- Two victim advocates appointed by the Council
- A victim or survivor of domestic violence appointed by the Council
- A licensed health-care professional knowledgeable in the screening and identification of domestic violence

MEMBERSHIP

Chairs

Dana Harrington Conner - Professor Widener Law, DVCC Member
Jenna Milecki - Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice
Lisa Hudson - Sussex Operations Administrator, Department of Correction

Members

Vicki Pierce - Assistant Public Defender, Office of Defense Services
Trenee Parker - Director, Division of Family Services
Katelyn Will - Staff Attorney, Superior Court
Erica Davis - Director of Legal Affairs, Family Court
Gerald Ross - Magistrate Judge, Justice of the Peace Court
Dr. Dyanne Simpson - Chief of Psychiatry, DSAMH
Marvin Mailey - Executive Director, DE Assoc. of Chiefs' of Police
Ann Altemus - Program Director, CHILD, Inc.
Veronica Colombo - Victim Services Manager, Delaware State Police
Stephanie Rodriguez - Program Director, Turning Point
Pamela Brooks-Grimes - Survivor of DV, appointed by Council
Amy Stier - Forensic Nurse Examiner, Christiana Care
Cpl. Andrea Warfel - Delaware State Police, DVCC Member

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PURPOSE & GOALS

- **Our Goals**
  - **Honor** victims, survivors, and families
  - **Strengthen** multidisciplinary collaboration through accountability and problem solving
  - **Implement meaningful change** aimed to reduce deaths caused by domestic violence
- **NOT Our Goals**
  - To *blame* or *shame* any victims/survivors, agencies, professionals, or other individuals involved in a case

CONFIDENTIALITY & ETHICS

- Confidentiality is two-fold
  - What comes in
  - What (doesn't) go out

- **Trust and vulnerability are KEY**
  - Review process does not function if team members do not trust in the confidential space and feel safe to voice opinions honestly

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

"The review process, and any records created therein, shall be ***exempt from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.*** *The records of any such review, including all original documents and documents produced in the review process with regard to the facts and circumstances of each death or near death, shall be* ***confidential****... **The records and proceedings shall not be available through court subpoena and shall not be subject to discovery.** No person who participated in the review nor any member of the Council shall be required to make any statement as to what transpired during the review or information collected during the review."*

Members of the DVCC, Review Team and of each review panel, as well as their agents or employees, shall be ***immune from claims and shall not be subject to... recourse,*** *civil or criminal... provided such persons acted in good faith and without malice in carrying out their responsibilities.*

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REVIEW STRUCTURE

- FIRT holds **three** case reviews each year, each review is ~6 hrs. long and covers one case

- Team members are responsible for providing records of their agency's involvement with the case parties
  - Senior Admin. prepares the case packet & facilitating review

REVIEW STRUCTURE

- The review panel collaborates to build a comprehensive case timeline and identify red flags, themes, outstanding questions

- Reviews conclude with team members identifying **recommendations** based on the review findings. Recommendations are adopted upon a 60% vote of participating members of the review panel.

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CASE TRACKING

- Cases identified through the Department of Justice, the Division of Forensic Science, referrals from other agencies, and from the media
- The DVCC Senior Administrator collaborates with FIRT co-chairs to select cases for full panel review
  - Focus on reviewing diverse case types with consideration of intersectional factors

NATIONAL TRENDS

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True or False: Race does not impact rates of domestic violence homicide, women of all races are proportionately victimized.

True	False
0	0

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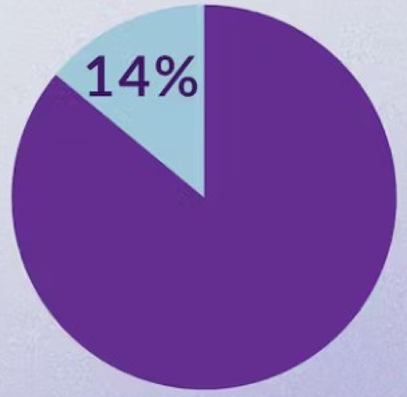
NATIONAL DV HOMICIDE DATA

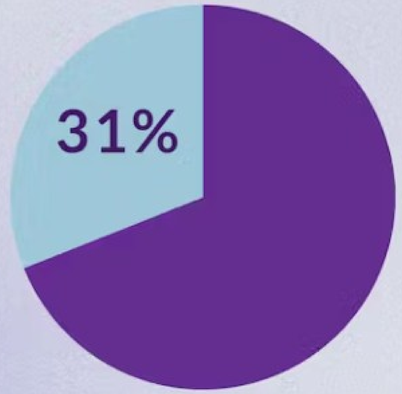
Black women have consistently been murdered by men at higher rates compared to all other races.

From 1996-2020 a total of **45,817** females were murdered by males in single victim/single offender incidents in the US

- **64%** of victims were White
- **31%** of victims were Black
- **3%** of victims were Asian/Pacific Islander
- **1%** of victims were American Indian/Alaska Native

Black % of US Female Population





Black % of US Female Homicide Victims Killed by Males

When Men Murder Women: A Review of 25 Years of Female Homicide Victimization in the United States

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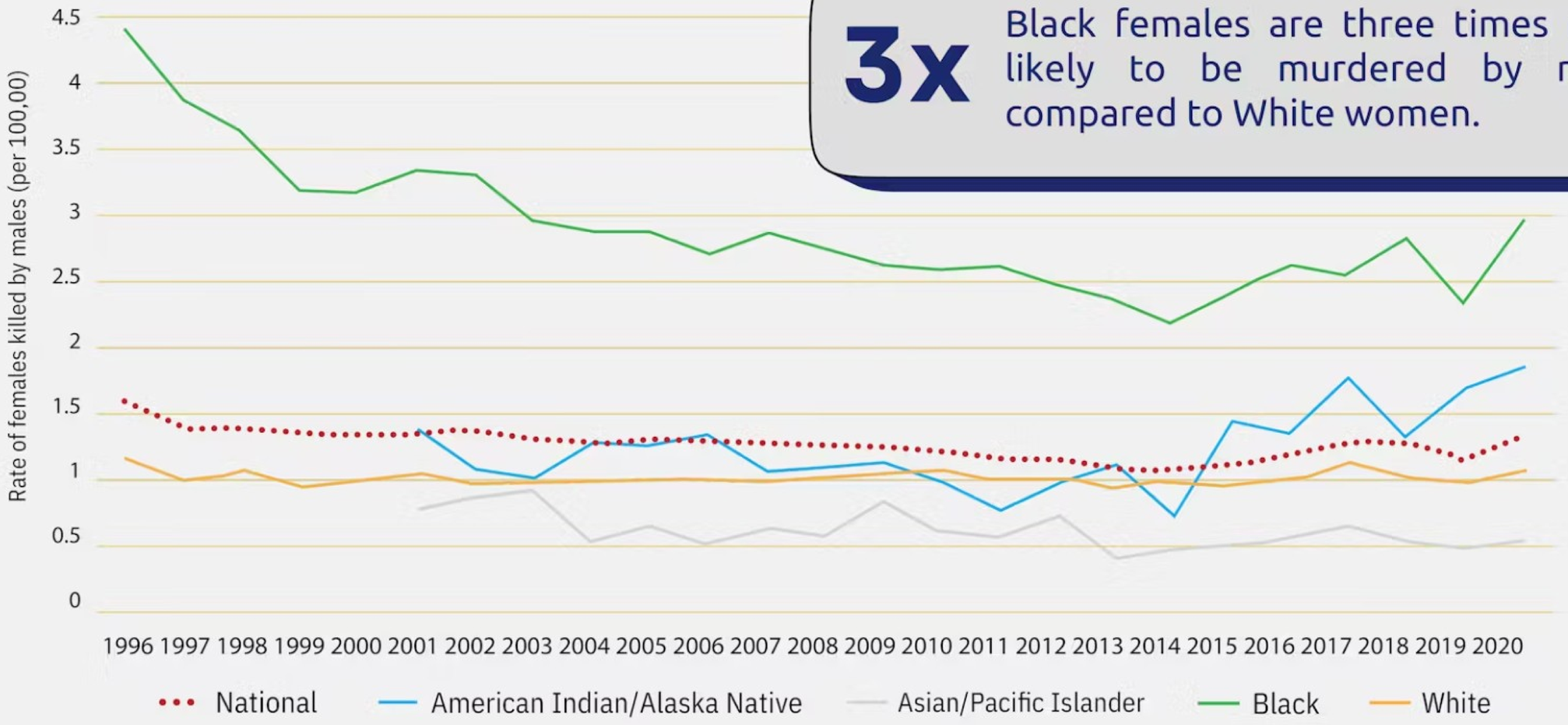
Figure 2. National rates of females killed by males in single victim/single offender incidents by race, 1996 – 2020*



3x Black females are three times more likely to be murdered by males compared to White women.

*Race data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian/Pacific Islander populations were not reported in VPC's annual *When Men Murder Women* reports until 2001. Ethnicity data is unavailable on a national level due to the inadequacy of data collection and reporting.

True or False: Women are more likely to be killed by a stranger than by someone they know.

True	False
0	0

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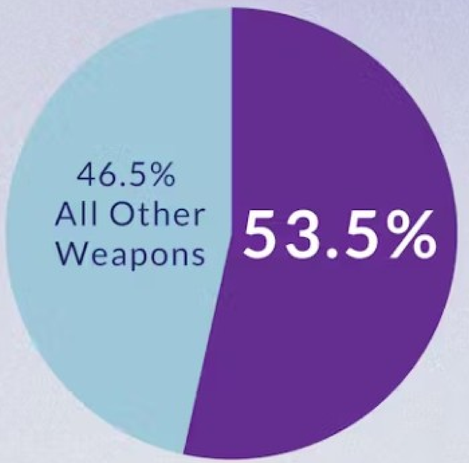
NATIONAL DV HOMICIDE DATA

Of all female victims of homicide by males from 1996-2020,

- **92%** of victims knew their killers
- Of these, **61%** were killed by an intimate partner

Of female victims of homicide by males from 1996-2020 (where information was available),

- **53%** were killed with a firearm
- Of these, **72%** were killed with a handgun



When Men Murder Women: A Review of 25 Years of Female Homicide Victimization in the United States

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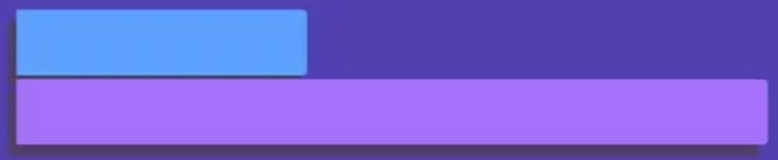
2023 NATIONAL DATA

BLACK FEMALES WERE MURDERED BY MALES AT A RATE **2.5X TIMES** HIGHER THAN WHITE FEMALES IN 2023.

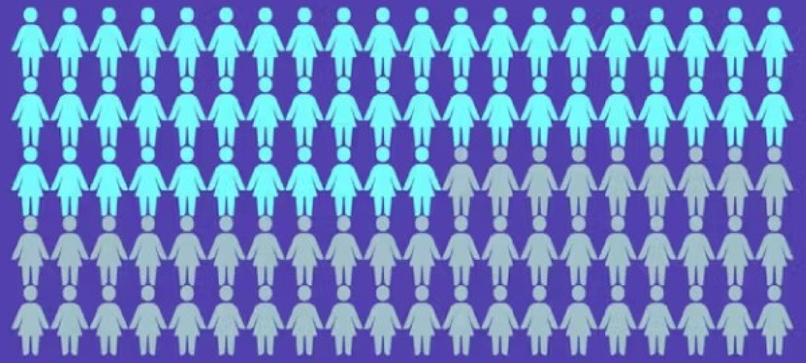


Read the VPC study *When Men Murder Women* to learn more at vpc.org

FIREARMS WERE THE **MOST COMMONLY USED** WEAPON BY MALES TO MURDER FEMALES IN 2023.

Read the VPC study *When Men Murder Women* to learn more at vpc.org

OF FEMALES KILLED BY MALES WITH GUNS IN 2023, **MORE THAN HALF** WERE KILLED BY AN INTIMATE MALE PARTNER.



Read the VPC study *When Men Murder Women* to learn more at vpc.org

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2024
FIRT DATA

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IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Domestic Violence Related Death: A death that occurs as a result of domestic violence or is traceable to domestic violence. This includes both homicides and suicides that are related to domestic violence.

Domestic Violence Related Near-Death: An incident in which a victim survives but is critically injured or in immediate danger of death due to domestic violence.

Domestic Violence Related Suicide: A suicide that is traceable to or influenced by domestic violence, such as a victim taking their own life due to the abuse, control, manipulation, or mental and emotional distress caused by domestic violence.

Murder/Suicide or Homicide/Suicide: An incident in which the perpetrator commits homicide (usually against an intimate partner or family member) and then kills themself.

Perpetrator Suicide: A suicide by a person who has committed an act of domestic violence (such as homicide or assault) before taking their own life.

A man kills his partner, then dies by suicide, leaving a note blaming her for "ruining his life."

Domestic Violence Suicide	Perpetrator Suicide
0	0

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A person dies by suicide shortly after learning their abusive ex-partner is being released from jail.

Domestic Violence Suicide	Perpetrator Suicide
0	0

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IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Intimate Partner Homicide: A homicide in which the victim and perpetrator are current or former intimate partners. This could include current/former spouses, dating partners, or individuals involved in a romantic or sexual relationship.

Non-Intimate Partner Homicide: A homicide that occurs in a domestic violence context but does not involve an intimate partner. This could involve a family member, such as a parent killing a child, or vice versa, or a sexual competitor.

- **Familial Homicide:** A homicide in which the victim and the perpetrator are family members, including parents, children, siblings, or other relatives.

- **Sexual Competitor Homicide:** A homicide that occurs due to jealousy or rivalry over a sexual or romantic partner. Typically, the perpetrator kills someone whom they view as a "competitor" for their partner's attention or affection. Though not directly an intimate partner homicide, this is a form of homicide where the motive revolves around possessiveness or controlling behavior over a past or present intimate relationship.

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A teenager kills his father after years of reported physical abuse to him, his siblings, and his mom.

Intimate Partner Homicide	Familial Homicide	Sexual Competitor Homicide
0	0	0

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A man kills his ex-girlfriend after she starts dating someone new.

Intimate Partner Homicide	Familial Homicide	Sexual Competitor Homicide
0	0	0

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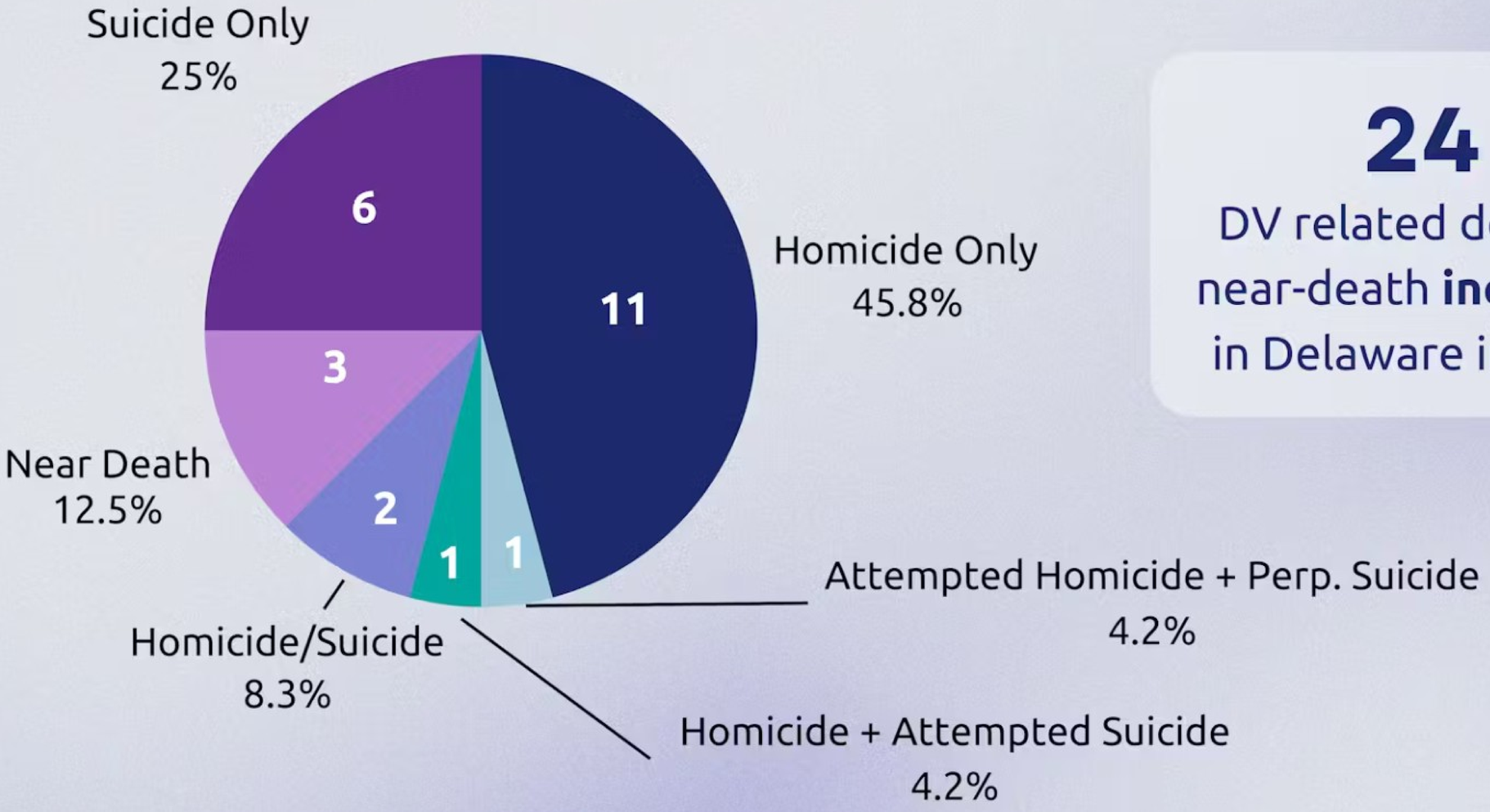
A man shoots his neighbor whom he believes is trying to "steal" his wife.

Intimate Partner Homicide	Familial Homicide	Sexual Competitor Homicide
0	0	0

DV DEATH & NEAR-DEATH DATA

2024 Incident Summary



24

DV related death & near-death **incidents** in Delaware in 2024

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DV DEATH & NEAR-DEATH DATA

2024 Victim Summary

Those **24** incidents included a total of:

25 DV RELATED DEATHS

16 VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE

9 VICTIMS OF SUICIDE

13 CHILD WITNESSES

6 NEAR-DEATH VICTIMS

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IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

Limitations in Demographic Data Collection

Demographic data including sex, race, and ethnicity are gathered from police and medical examiner reports. This data may not accurately reflect every victim or perpetrator's gender identity or how they classified their race or ethnicity.

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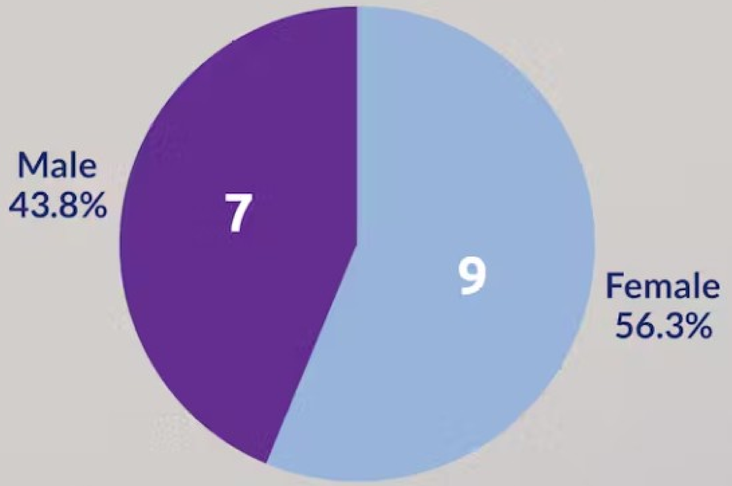
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED HOMICIDES

2024 Victim & Perpetrator Demographics

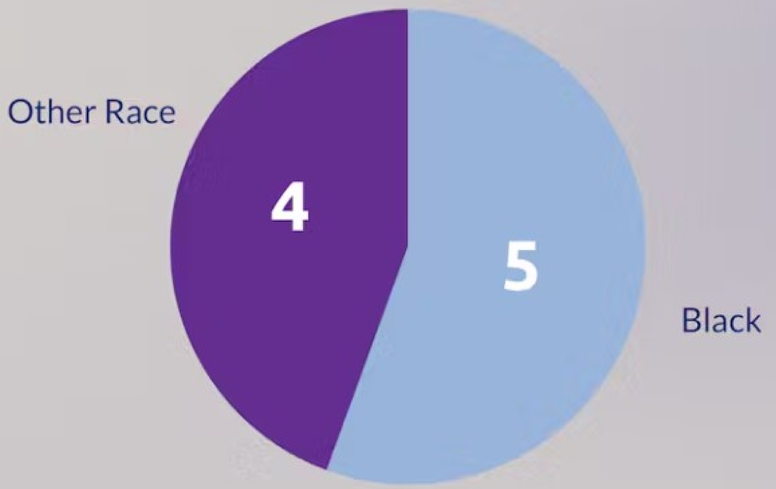
14 total homicide incidents involving 16 deceased victims

Victim Sex



Of the 16 homicide victims, **9 (56%)** of them were female.

Female Victim Race



Of the 9 female victims, **5 (56%)** of them were Black.

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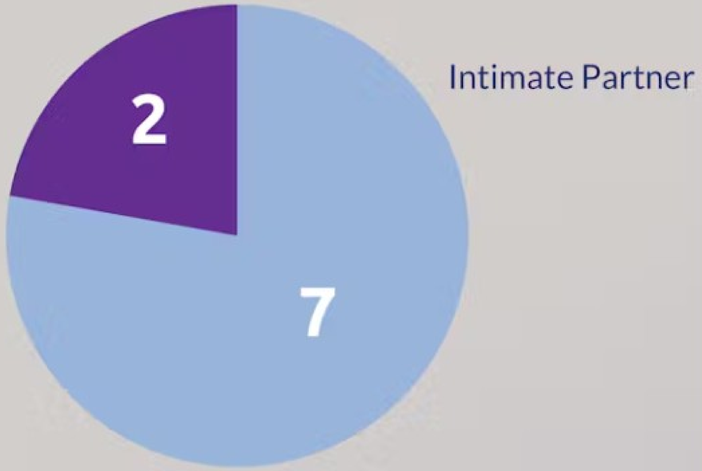
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED HOMICIDES

2024 Intimate Partner Data

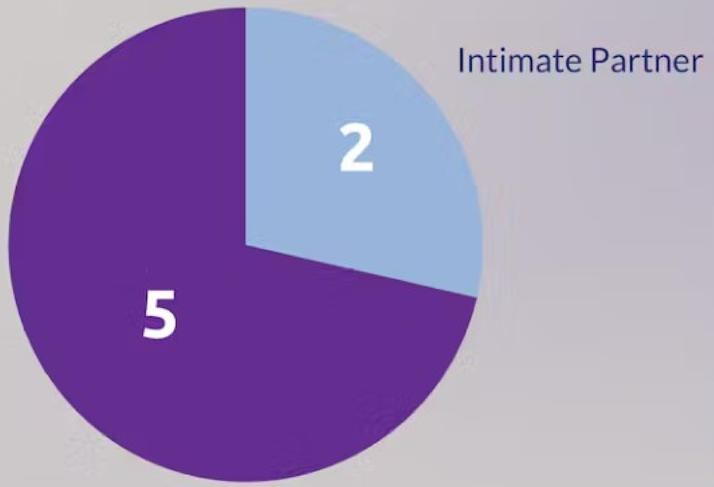
9 homicide incidents committed by a current or former intimate partner of the victim

Female Victims



Of the 9 female victims, **7 (78%)** were killed by a current or former intimate partner.

Male Victims



Of the 7 male victims, **2 (29%)** were killed by a current or former intimate partner.

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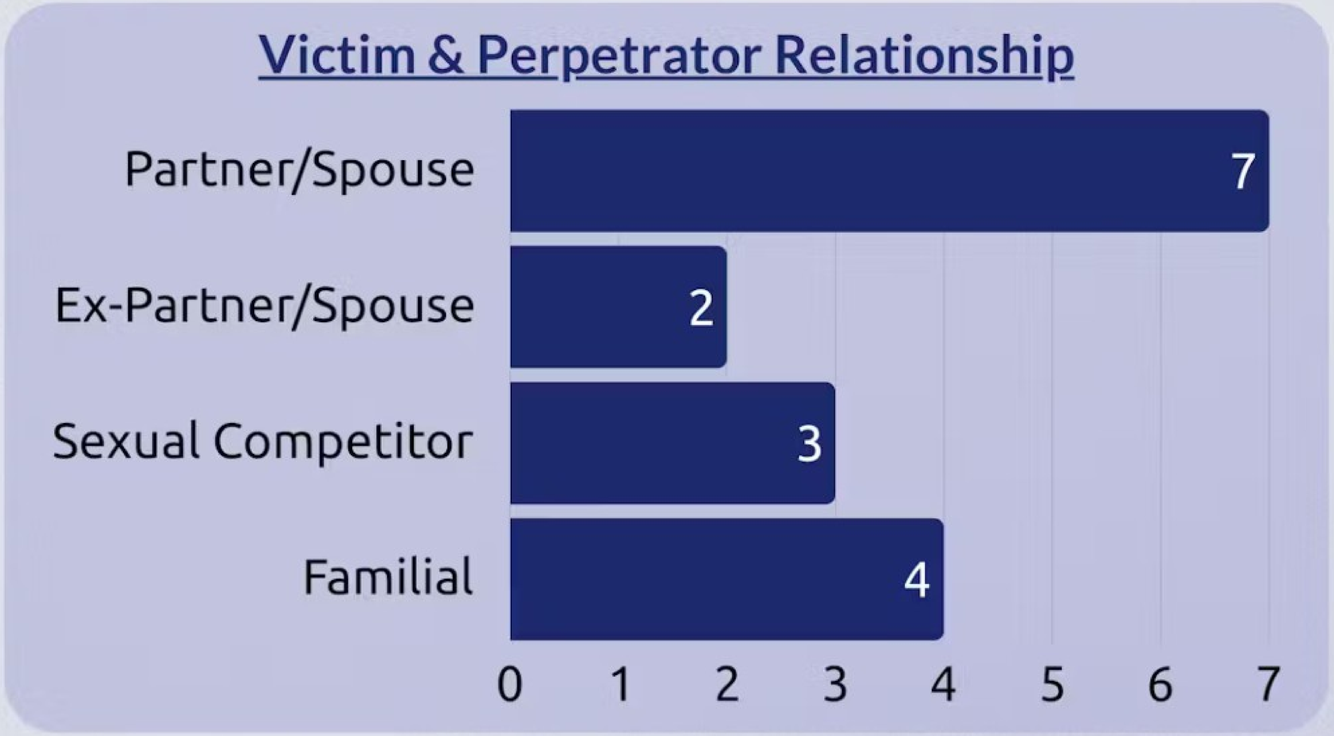
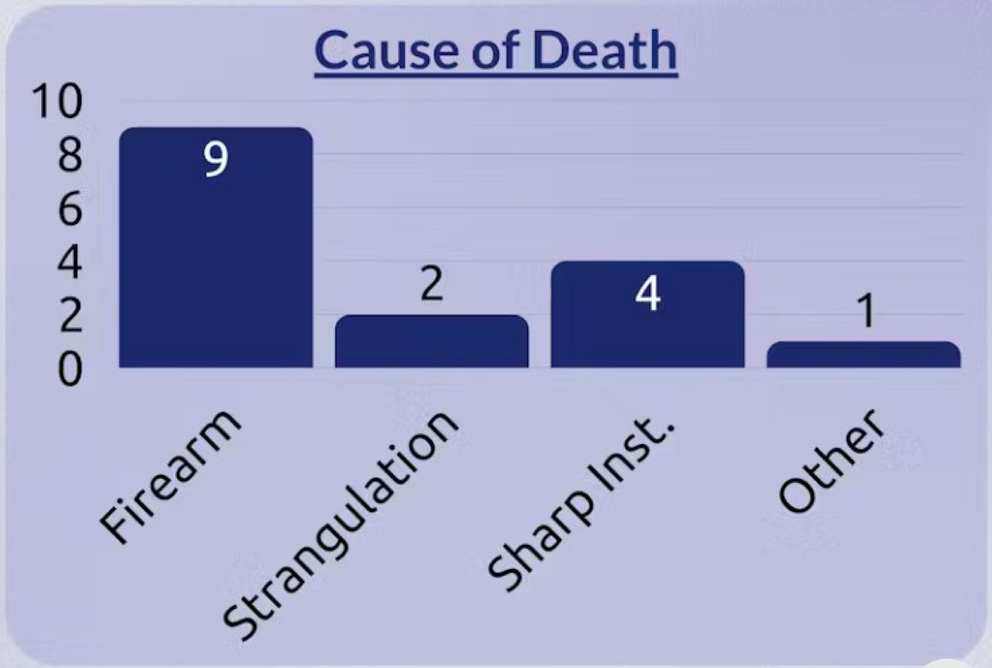
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED HOMICIDES

2024 Victim & Perpetrator Data



56% of the 16 total homicide victims were killed by a current or former intimate partner.

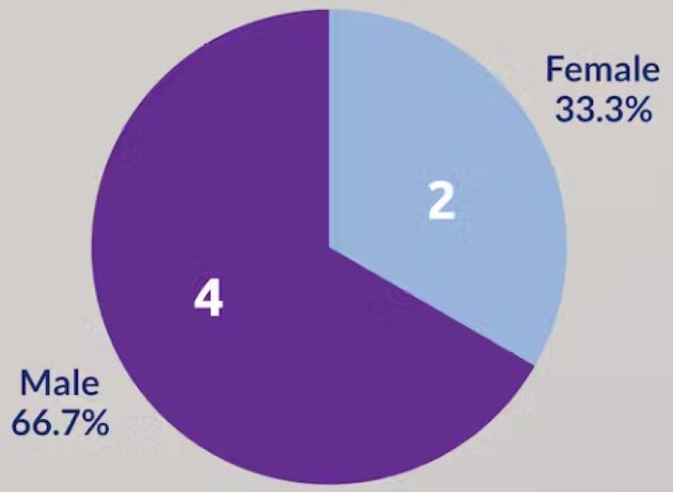
Firearms are consistently the leading cause of death in DV homicides. In 2024, **56%** of DV homicides were by firearm.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED NEAR-DEATHS

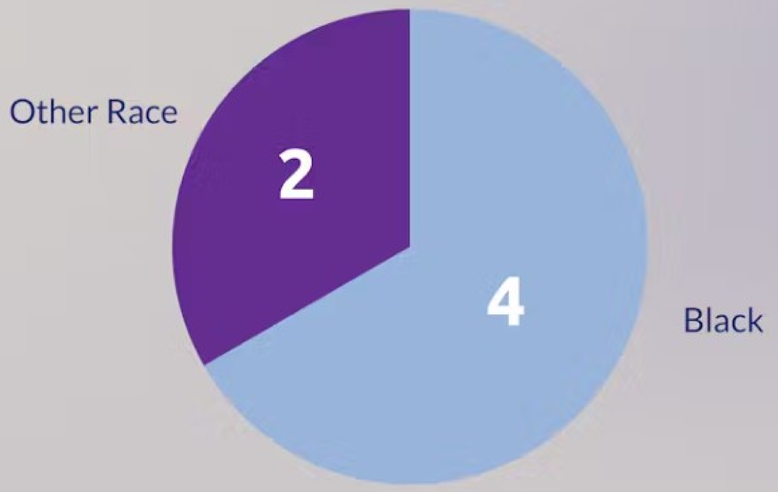
2024 Victim & Perpetrator Demographics

Victim Sex



Of the 6 near-death victims,
2 (33%) of them were female.

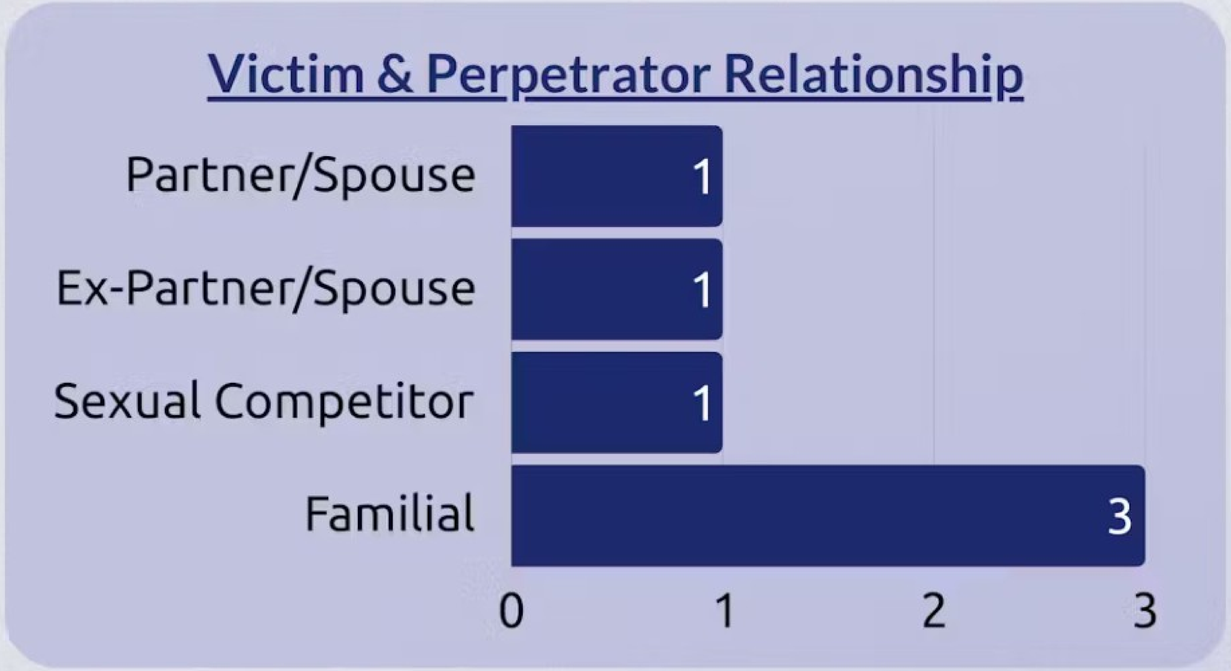
Victim Race



Of the 6 near-death victims,
4 (67%) of them were Black.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED NEAR-DEATHS

2024 Victim & Perpetrator Data



The chart above depicts the relationship between each of the 6 near-death victims and the perpetrator who injured them.

3 near-death victims were injured by firearms and **3** by a sharp instrument (i.e. stabbing).

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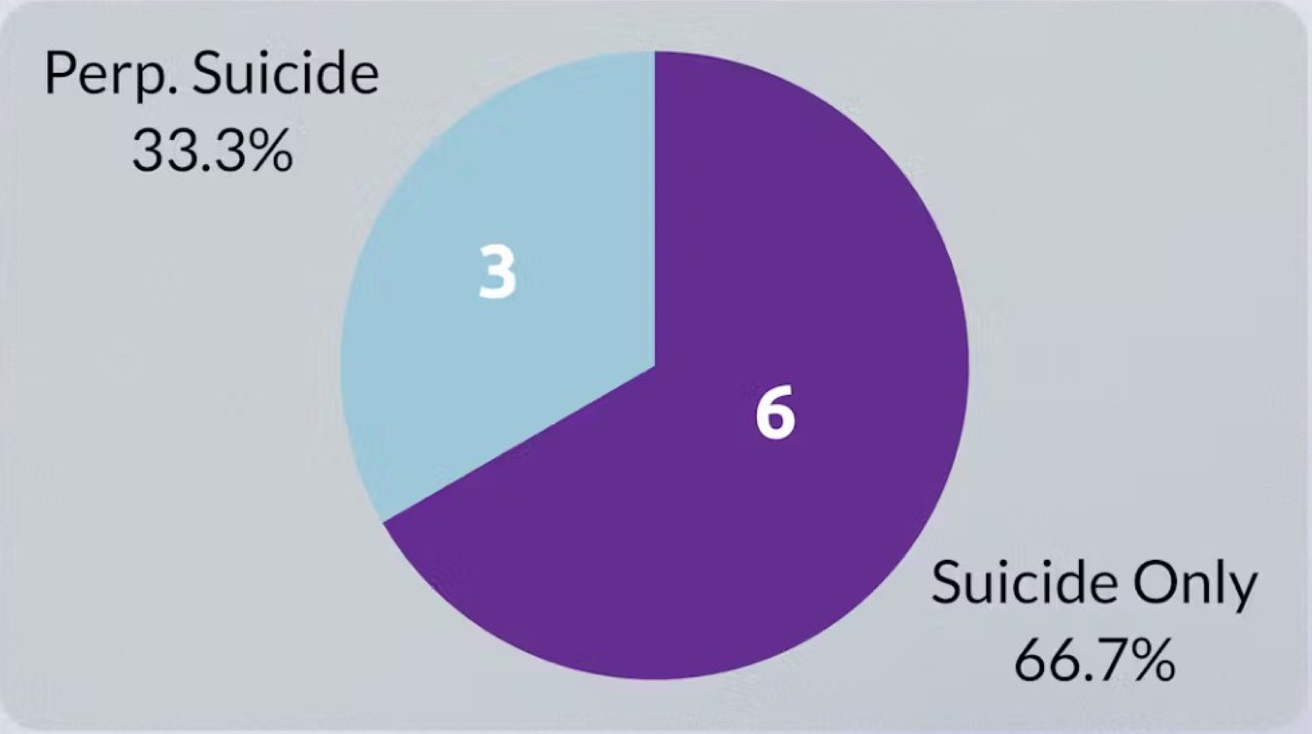
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED SUICIDES

2024 Suicide Data

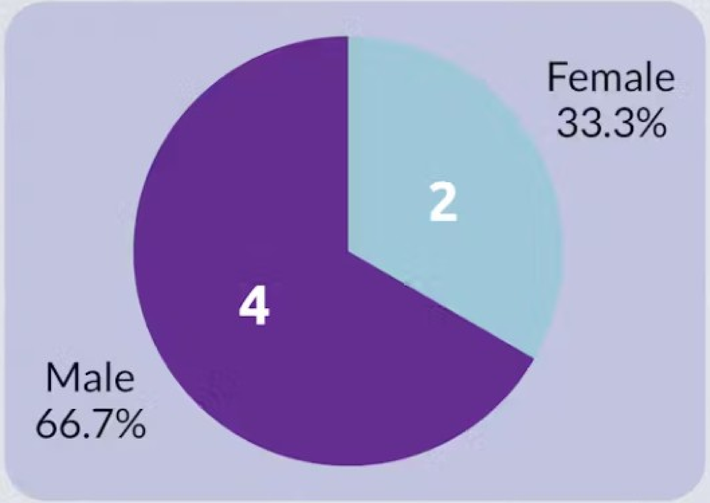


There were a total of **9** DV related suicides in Delaware in 2024.

The **3** perpetrator suicides were all men and all by firearm.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED SUICIDES

2024 Suicide Data



6 suicide only incidents.

Both females were White.
3 males were White and **1** was Black.

All 6 suicide cases had prior history of DV and/or prior suicide attempts or threats.

- **Both females**: history of being the primary victim in a DV incident.
- **All 4 males**: history of being the primary aggressor in a DV incident.

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Looking Ahead

The Future of FIRT

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Why do you work in this field?

Why do you work in this field?

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Domestic violence fatality reviews give us the opportunity to learn from tragedies and work towards our ultimate goal of eliminating domestic violence.

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QUESTIONS?