

Honoring Texas Victims

Family Violence Homicides in 2021

ANALYSIS REPORT



Honoring Texas Victims

ANALYSIS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE HOMICIDES

*In memory of the Texas women and men killed
by their intimate partners in 2021*

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FORWARD



Gloria Aguilera Terry
CEO, TEXAS COUNCIL
ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

Every year the Texas Council on Family Violence issues this report examining intimate partner homicides across the state of Texas, the only of its kind in the state. The *Honoring Texas Victims* report is pivotal in understanding trends and challenges related to intimate partner homicide, as well as Texas' response to the issues related to family violence. The report honors victims, offers perspective into the tragic realities that each victim and their families endured, and seals our commitment to them to advocate for change. Simultaneously, the report offers practices to reduce violence and homicide in Texas. In 2021, TCFV carefully reviewed nearly 400 homicide cases and found that 204 Texans were killed in an intimate partner homicide. One hundred and sixty-nine women and 35 men were killed by a current or past intimate partner or stalking perpetrator.

Simply said, Honoring Texas Victims is an instrument of change. It influences change in policy, practice, and training.

While 2021 records a reduced number of homicides compared to the high level of 228 homicides in 2020, TCFV does not believe this reduction indicates that Texas families are exponentially safer. The year, 2021, is still aligned with an upward trajectory in the increase in intimate partner homicides over the last decade. Of notable concern, the number of homicides perpetrated with a firearm increased in 2021 to 75% from 67% in 2020, while the number of firearms law enforcement reported involved in domestic violence calls increased by 90%. Additionally, there is an alarming increase in LGBTQ+ homicides; LGBTQ+ homicides more than doubled in 2021, with twelve cases in 2021, an increase from five cases in 2020.

In February 2021, Texas experienced a winter like no other. Texans were faced with unsafe homes and an unprecedented winter storm that caused all 254 counties to be

declared a disaster by the Governor. More than 4.8 million Texans lost power while exposed to below-freezing temperatures for over six days during Winter Storm Uri. This natural disaster only exacerbated the barriers survivors faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, causing unfathomable disruptions to the criminal legal system, health care workers and frontline staff in nearly every public and private sector of Texas. Family violence service providers were affected significantly. Over half of the funded programs in the state reported impacts to TCFV, from staffing issues, to food, water, and fuel supply shortages, to major structural damage.

These strains on communities, particularly the criminal legal systems, resulted in a significant backlog of criminal cases that, in some cases are expected to take years to resolve. While researching, TCFV noted an extensive number of pending cases that could not be included in the analysis since the criminal proceedings and arrests had not progressed enough for inclusion. As a state, we must continue to strive to provide stronger responses to families experiencing domestic violence. We must address the backlog issues across the state and afford all victims of intimate partner violence access to protections available to them under Texas statute. We must push our policy and community leaders to enforce existing firearm laws and prioritize solutions to removing firearms from offenders who are prohibited from accessing and possessing them. We must lift and support our family violence service providers, as they continue providing the best services for families while responding to persistent and emerging challenges.

You cannot read this report and remain unchanged. You can no longer ignore what you may not have known until you read this. You now hold a responsibility to the 204 Texans honored in this report.

Finally, we must have an unwavering commitment to prevention or accept similar results next year and every year thereafter.

In profound reflection,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sonia Aguilera Terry".

SECTION I

Intimate Partner Violence and Homicides in 2021

204

TEXANS WERE KILLED BY THEIR INTIMATE PARTNERS ACROSS 63 COUNTIES IN 2021.

Counties indicated in white had one or more family violence fatalities where a victim was killed by an intimate partner or stalking perpetrator. No fatalities were documented in counties indicated in purple.

In 2021, TCFV recorded the deaths of 169 women and 35 men killed by an intimate partner or stalking perpetrator across 63 Texas counties. This includes 165 women killed by male partners, 28 men killed by female partners, and four women and seven men killed by same-gender partners. Twelve LGBTQ+ victims, including one woman killed by a former male partner, and three women killed by a stalking perpetrator who sought unwanted relationships with them, are among those killed.

“ *She's more than just one incident; there's an entire life.* ”

— FATHER OF VICTIM

The 204 Texans who lost their lives at the hands of an intimate partner can never fully and truly be represented in this report. Their lives reflected the richness and diversity of our state, and their deaths represent an incalculable loss to their families and communities. In their memory, we publish an online record of the narratives of intimate partner homicide victims and offer this report as an analysis of demographics and risk factors to identify potential systemic gaps for survivor safety and offer holistic approaches to addressing domestic violence in Texas communities. In addition, this analysis provides a critical lens that examines domestic violence issues in the state of Texas and tools and strategies for predicting lethality and preventing violence.

TCFV promotes cultural and systemic changes to prevent and end intimate partner abuse and uplift healthy, safe, respectful relationships. We stand with our partners in communities across the state who mobilize to improve outcomes for survivors and their families. As you read the following pages and the narratives of victims in 2021, we hope that you will identify ways to join these efforts. Connect with TCFV to learn more.

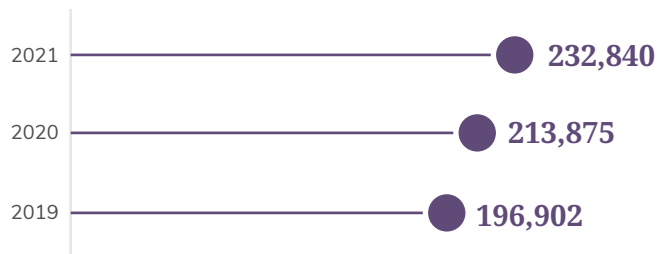
INDIVIDUALLY WE POWER CHANGE.
TOGETHER WE POWER A MOVEMENT.

SECTION II

Family Violence in Texas: 2021 Statistics

Between FY 2019–2021, Texas family violence incidents reported to law enforcement resulted in a 20.4% increase in victims at the scene.¹ According to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), in 2021, law enforcement officers in Texas responded to 232,840 incidents of family violence, up from 213,875 in 2020 and 196,902 in 2019. Approximately 59,000 family violence incidents were reported between former, current, and common-law spouses.² DPS collects family violence data based on relationship categories related to marriage and divorce but does not have specific dating relationship categories. Dating violence victims may likely be reported as ‘Other Family Members,’ a category that comprises 47% of family violence victims reported.

Reported incidents of family violence in Texas have continued to increase year over year.



Sixteen percent of family violence assaults (n=36,763) were classified as aggravated assault, typically involving

the use of weapons, strangulation, or other serious and injurious assaults; this represents a seven percent increase from 2020 in the number of aggravated assault incidents.³ Further, these incidents often indicated a high lethality risk with a 92% increase in firearms at the scene.⁴ This is underscored by a 2020 Texas survey that found that 74% of 352 family violence advocates surveyed reported decreased survivor safety during the pandemic.⁵

Over 250,000 calls were placed to a Texas crisis hotline for domestic violence in 2021.

In FY 21, 62,796 Texans received services at a family violence agency funded by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and over a quarter of a million calls were placed to a Texas crisis line for domestic violence.⁶ Over 6,000 Texas survivors were served in a family violence program on any given day.⁷ Family violence programs provide comprehensive, holistic services, including emergency and long-term housing, legal and economic advocacy, and counseling and support groups. Intakes and orientations for non-residential services to victims of family violence increased 13% from FY 20 (16,456) to FY 21 (18,549).^{8,9} The National Domestic Violence Hotline answered 12% more contacts in 2021 than 2020.¹⁰

1 Texas Department of Public Safety, Crime in Texas Online, Family Violence Summary Reports (2019-2021), available at: <https://txucr.nibrs.com/Report/FamilyViolence>.

2 Texas Department of Public Safety, Crime in Texas Online, Family Violence Summary Reports (2021), available at: <https://txucr.nibrs.com/Report/FamilyViolence>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Wood, Leila, et al. "On the Front Lines of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Occupational Experiences of the Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault Workforce." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 37, no. 11-12, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520983304>.

6 "Family Violence Program Statistics – Fiscal Year 2021." Texas Health and Human Services Commission Family Violence Program, Available upon request.

7 "Domestic Violence Counts: 16th Annual Report." National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2022, <https://nnedv.org/content/domestic-violence-counts-16th-annual/>.

8 "Family Violence Program Statistics – Fiscal Year 2021." Texas Health and Human Services Commission Family Violence Program, Available upon request.

9 Voth Schrag, R., McGiffert, M., & Wood, L. "Equity-focused, Survivor-centered Non-Residential Services for Texas. Technical Report." The University of Texas Medical Branch/The University of Texas-Arlington, 2022.

10 "A Year in Impact 2020 and 2021 reports." National Domestic Violence Hotline, https://www.thehotline.org/wp-content/uploads/media/2021/06/Hotline-EOY-Impact-Report-2020_FINAL.pdf and https://www.thehotline.org/wp-content/uploads/media/2022/05/2205-Hotline-EOY-Impact-Report-2021_FINAL-rev.pdf.

Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs (BIPPs) serve as an alternative to incarceration and as an intervention for people who harm their partners to critically examine their belief systems connected to their choices to use violence and promote positive behavioral change. With this change, they can learn and practice healthy and equal relationship dynamics. Most participants are mandated to attend by referral sources, including probation, parole, pre-trial services, Child Protective Services, and other sources, though opportunities exist for participants to self-refer and voluntarily attend. In FY 21, 25 Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs funded by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Community Justice Assistance Division served 4,593 participants, a 12% decrease from 5,208 participants in FY 20. From FY 20 to FY 21, all referral sources decreased placements by eight percent. Fifteen programs reported a reduction in referrals related to court backlogs that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and are preparing for an influx of referrals in the coming years. Statewide program completion rates increased from 61% to 65%.¹¹

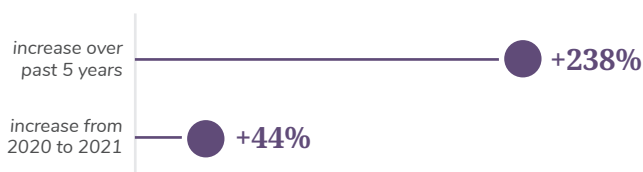
Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs (BIPPs) promote behavioral change for people who harm their partners.

Domestic Violence High Risk Teams (DVHRTs) promote coordination between criminal legal, advocacy, and community partners to provide enhanced support to survivors at the highest risk for lethal violence. In FY 21, TCFV awarded small grants to seven communities through funding from the Office of the Attorney General and the Criminal Justice Assistance Division of the Office of the Governor. The seven funded programs identified 470 high-risk cases in 2021, an over 30% increase in one year.¹²

DVHRTs are Domestic Violence High Risk Teams that provide enhanced support to survivors with the highest lethality risk.

The Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) produces the Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary, and their 2021 report highlighted alarming family violence and homicide trends. The OCA reported downward trends for all crime types in new cases filed for 2021, except homicide. In 2021, new homicide filings increased by 44%. In their five-year analysis, that number increased to 238%. This includes all homicides, not specifically family violence related-homicides.

New statewide homicide filings in Texas Courts have dramatically increased over the past five years.



Aside from capital murder, aggravated assault/attempted murder, family violence, and auto theft were the only felony categories that increased in 2020 and 2021.¹³ The OCA also reported, “After two years of decline, the number of new capital murder cases increased by 8 percent in 2020 and by 10 percent in 2021. In comparison, the number of convictions fell by a third in 2020 and by 27 percent in 2021.”¹⁴

11 “Battering Intervention and Prevention Program Evaluation Report.” Texas Department of Criminal Justice. September 2022.

12 Domestic Violence High Risk Teams 2021 Statewide Report. Texas Council on Family Violence.

13 “Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary - Fiscal Year 2021.” Office of Court Administration, <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1454127/fy-21-annual-statistical-report-final.pdf>.

14 Ibid.

SECTION III

Intimate Partner-Related Deaths Not Included

This report demonstrates an increase in intimate partner homicides within the LGBTQ+ community and a decrease in the number of women killed by male partners and number of men killed by female partners. Nationally, homicides increased nearly 30% from 2019 to 2020 and 6% from 2020 to 2021.¹⁵ This trend was mirrored in Texas, where homicide filings in courts rose 44%.¹⁶ In prior reports, TCFV has noted that when the overall homicide rate increases in the state, lethal violence against women by their intimate partners increases exponentially.¹⁷ However, that was not the case in 2021. A closer analysis demonstrates that the decrease may be due to a trend of unsolved, stalled cases and a backlog of cases within the criminal justice system. Fifty-two cases that are intimate partner-related, domestic violence related, or suspected as IPV-related fall outside the parameters of this report.

In 2021, TCFV identified an increase in cases in which victims were forced to make unthinkable decisions for their safety and committed homicide due to self-defense. These fatalities are as equally devastating as those cases included in this report. In 2021, TCFV identified fifteen cases as “justifiable” or self-defense homicides across the state, an increase from the six TCFV reported in 2020. Media reports and histories indicate these fatalities are likely related to intimate partner violence, but because they are still pending, they are separated from the findings in this report. The 150% increase in self-defense homicides is cause for alarm and underscores the need for additional support for families experiencing intimate partner violence.

Type of Case Not Included	Key Factors	Victims Identified
Justifiable or Self-Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twelve cases resulted in no indictment by a grand jury or dismissal. • Three cases pending grand jury review; no preliminary charges or arrests. 	14 men 1 woman
IPV Related Deaths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPV history. • Indictments for lesser charges than murder or manslaughter. 	1 man 4 women
Accidental (Intimate Partner Relationship)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPV was not indicated in the incident. • One case charged with manslaughter. • Three cases not charged criminally. 	4 women
Unsolved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open investigations or no arrests. • Intimate Partners last known person with victims or unknown relationship between victim and perpetrator. • Or victims were missing and the case was not yet determined to be a homicide. 	4 men 24 women

15 Morabito, Charlotte. “U.S. Murder Rates Were Still up in 2021 but Recent Data Suggests That Trend Could Be Reversing.” CNBC, 11 Aug. 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/08/11/us-murder-rates-stayed-high-last-year-but-trend-may-be-reversing-.html>.

16 “Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary - Fiscal Year 2021.” Office of Court Administration, <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1454127/fy-21-annual-statistical-report-final.pdf>.

17 “Honoring Texas Victims: 2019 Report.” Texas Council on Family Violence, 2020.

Five intimate partner violence-related deaths resulted in lesser charges than manslaughter or murder, but had domestic violence incidents or histories. While these cases are not included in the data analysis and narratives of this report, the circumstances related to domestic violence in each case merit review:

1 In Harris County, Bernard Witherspoon was killed by his dating partner, Uva Chinwe. Chinwe alleges she was defending herself from an assault and is currently charged with aggravated assault.

2 In Moore County, Elizabeth Loera Lujan died after jumping out of a moving vehicle that her husband, Chadrick Lujan, was driving. Lujan had a documented history of violence against Elizabeth and pled guilty to an accident involving death, a second-degree felony.

3 In Tarrant County, Priscilla Limon was abducted and killed. Her ex-boyfriend, George Edward Harry Frosch, was charged with kidnapping, and three other individuals were charged in connection to her kidnapping and death.

4 In Travis County, Aliana Martinez died after her husband, Ricardo Vasquez-Lopez, struck her with his car. Vasquez-Lopez was charged with Failure to Render Aid, a second-degree felony. Vasquez-Lopez was a protected party of an emergency protective order from an assault that occurred in May, where Aliana was arrested in Hays County.

5 In Burnet County, Molly Klein was found unconscious on the side of a road with a traumatic head injury. She was rushed to the hospital, where she later died. Her boyfriend was arrested and charged with Failure to Render Aid, a first-degree felony charge due to his prior criminal history.

Four intimate partner-related cases did not proceed through the criminal legal system as they were determined to be accidental deaths. Four women were killed accidentally. Of these, three women were killed by a boyfriend with a firearm, and one woman was killed by her girlfriend with a knife. Only one perpetrator was charged with manslaughter; the rest were not charged criminally. TCFV omitted the manslaughter case in this report and analysis, as all media reports indicate the death was accidental and not connected to an intimate partner violence (IPV) incident.

Twenty-eight homicide cases could not be included in this report due to the open, unsolved status of the case. These cases include a variety of circumstances; missing women who were last seen with a partner, intimate partner suspects who have not been formally charged, or autopsies that are undetermined or inconclusive.

A total of 52 cases that are intimate partner-related, domestic violence related, or suspected as IPV-related fell outside the parameters of this report.

SECTION IV

An Analysis of Intimate Partner Violence Homicides in 2021

WOMEN KILLED

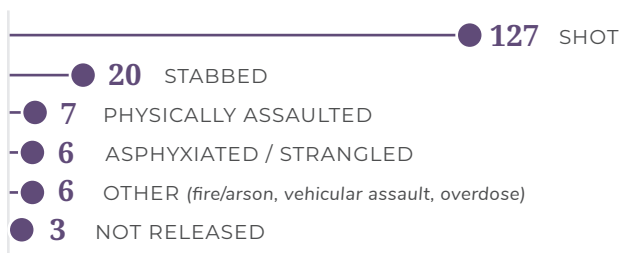
In 2021, 169 women were killed by an intimate partner or a stalking perpetrator. The number of women killed by men decreased from 183 in 2020 to 165 women in 2021. Three women were killed by men who pursued unwanted romantic relationships and stalked them.

The relationship status with the highest number of victims was **GIRLFRIEND**, followed by **WIFE**.



In 2021, 125 men and two women shot and killed their female intimate partners. Twenty men stabbed their victims, and six men strangled or asphyxiated their victims. Six men and one woman physically assaulted and killed victims. Five men and one woman used other means to kill their partners, including fire or arson, vehicular assault, and overdose. The means of death were not released in three cases. In 12 cases perpetrated by men, multiple types of violence occurred.

Most female victims (75%) were killed by firearm, making it the most common means of death.



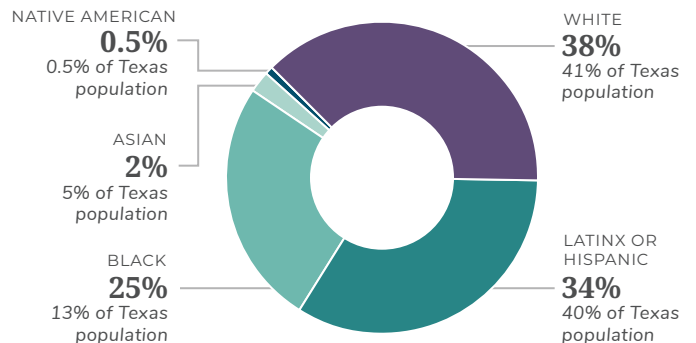
The ages of women and girls killed in 2021 ranged from 16 to 85. The highest age groups represented were women between 20-29 and 30-39. The number of women between the 50-59 decreased 63% from 19 victims in 2020 to seven victims. Ten percent of women killed were over 65, an increase from 12 victims in 2020 to 17 victims.

The highest age groups represented were female victims between 20-29 and 30-39.



“She was ready to start the next phase of her life.”

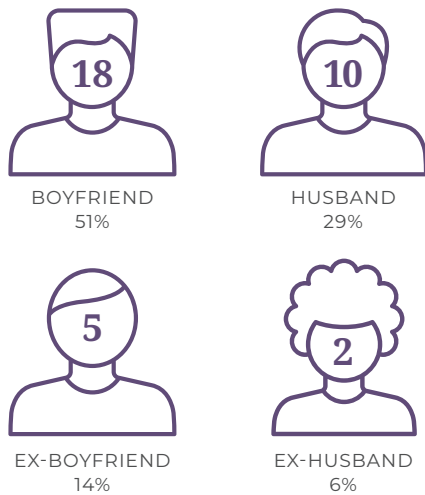
In Texas in 2021, victims included 64 White women, 57 Latinx or Hispanic women, 43 Black women, four Asian women, and one Native American woman.



MEN KILLED

In Texas in 2021, 35 men were killed by an intimate partner. The number of men killed by women decreased by 30%, from 40 in 2020 to 28 men in 2021. Seven men were killed by same-gender partners, a 75% increase from four men killed by same-gender partners in 2020.

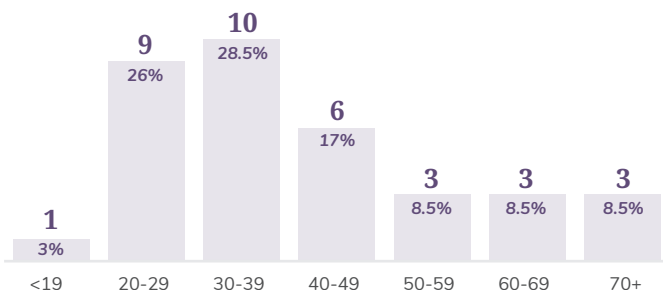
The relationship status with the highest number of victims was **BOYFRIEND**, followed by **HUSBAND**.



In 2021, 22 women and five men shot and killed their male intimate partners. Three women stabbed their victims. Two men and two women used other means to kill their partners, including fire or arson, vehicular assault, and strangulation. The means of death was not released in two cases.

The ages of men killed in 2021 ranged from 18 to 82. The highest age groups represented were men between 30-39, followed by 20-29. The number of men killed in each age group decreased from 2020, except for those under 19 and those over 70.

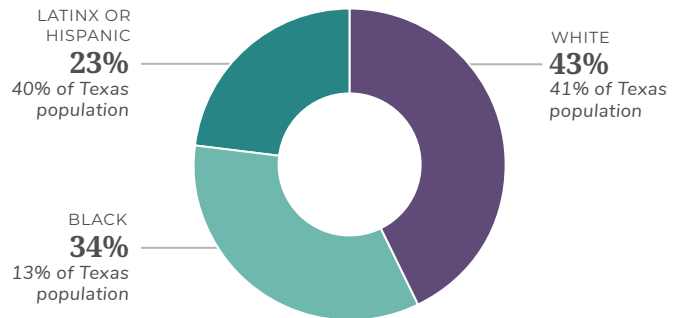
The highest age groups represented were male victims between 30-39 and 20-29.



youngest victim: **18 years old**

oldest victim: **82 years old**

In Texas in 2021, victims included 15 White men, 12 Black men, and 8 Latinx or Hispanic men.



LGBTQ+ VICTIMS

In 2021, 12 LGBTQ+ Texans were killed by their current or former intimate partners. This is the highest number of LGBTQ+ intimate partner victim homicides documented in one single year; in the five prior years combined, TCFV recorded 17 deaths.¹⁸

In 2021, six men were killed by their boyfriends and one man was killed by his ex-boyfriend. Two women were killed by their ex-girlfriends, one woman was killed by a current girlfriend, one woman was killed by her wife, and one LGBTQ+ victim was killed by her ex-boyfriend. Each of

these homicides are accounted for in the total number of women and men killed in the sections above.

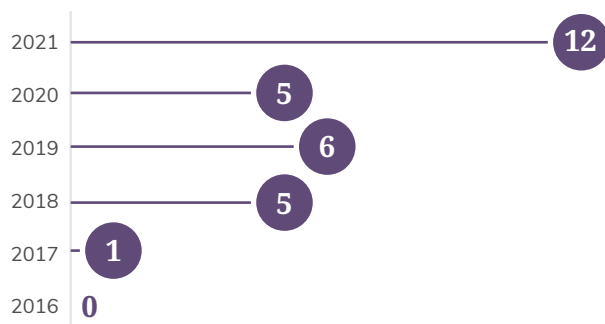
The prevalence of intimate partner violence among LGBTQ+ victims is equal to the prevalence of violence women experience at the hands of male partners, and in LGBTQ+ populations, exceeds that of heterosexual women. Forty-three percent of lesbian, gay or bisexual youth and 89% of transgender youth report experiencing dating violence. In a survey of transgender Americans, 54% of respondents reported experiencing intimate partner violence. LGBTQ+ survivors face barriers in reporting violence and help-seeking, including bias, stigma, and lack of understanding around sexual orientation or gender identity; it is of particular importance.

Among the unsolved cases that TCFV monitored this year, there were five murders in 2021 of transgender women in Texas with open investigations or limited publicly available

18 "Honoring Texas Victims: 2020 Report." Texas Council on Family Violence, 2021.

or released information about the relationships between victims and perpetrators that are not included in the report. Two cases were reportedly investigated as hate crimes and one was confirmed as not IPV by the investigating police department. No specific details were available on arrests or relationships between victims and perpetrators in these five cases. At least two victims were experiencing homelessness when they were killed. Two victims were in public places when they were shot and killed by unidentified suspects.

More LGBTQ+ Texans were killed in 2021 than the prior two years combined.



In monitoring homicide cases of transgender women, TCFV has noted that cases often remain unsolved before this report, and, in some cases, details emerge after the publication of the report to indicate a case met the parameters of the report. In recognition that there may be unidentified transgender or other LGBTQ+ victims of intimate partner homicide, exploring issues affecting survivor safety within this community is necessary, both within this report and within the collective work of the movement to end domestic violence.

Many LGBTQ+ cases go unreported or remain unsolved.

Transgender survivors of intimate partner violence may experience added layers of isolation if they do not feel safe navigating new services because of vulnerability to violence and harassment based on their identity. Family rejection, poverty, and housing insecurity may further reinforce their isolation in abusive relationships. Recent data indicates that homelessness increased by 88% for transgender people

between 2016 and 2019, at a time when it increased by 11% generally in the U.S. Transgender people experiencing homelessness are more likely to be unsheltered, staying outdoors or in unsafe places, which increases their risk of violence and vulnerability to mental health issues, physical health needs, and legal issues.¹⁹

Through the development of the 2019 Texas State Plan, TCFV identified the following three critical recommendations for strengthening prevention and survivor services within LGBTQ+ communities:

1 Enhance community collaborations with LGBTQ+-led and affirming organizations. Demonstrate support for efforts to promote LGBTQ+ rights. Partner with intimate partner violence intervention programs offered within LGBTQ+ organizations and identify ways to coordinate services to meet the needs of survivors.

2 Tailor prevention strategies to the LGBTQ+ community. Ensure programming is meaningfully equitable and accessible. Branding prevention programs designed for and inclusive of LGBTQ+ people will reflect that support is available from mainstream programs. Marketing strategies should be geared toward reaching specific audiences within the LGBTQ+ community, including youth, adults, older adults and BIPOC communities.

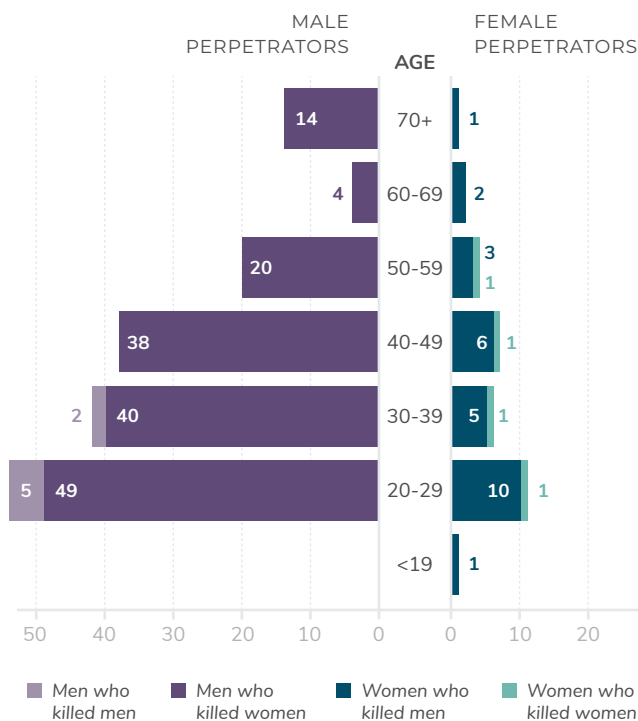
3 Promote access through mobile and virtual advocacy. Assess how programs have or have not expanded services to LGBTQ+ survivors during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify key learnings from service model adaptations to further expand inclusive services. Staff mobile advocacy programs with LGBTQ+ identified staff to strengthen representation in programs. Coordinate with LGBTQ+ organizations to offer co-located services.

19 Transgender Homeless Adults & Unsheltered Homelessness: What the Data Tell Us. National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2020, <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Trans-Homelessness-Brief-July-2020.pdf>.

HOMICIDE PERPETRATORS

The youngest perpetrator of intimate partner homicide was a 19-year-old woman who shot and killed her boyfriend. The oldest was a man, age 87, who shot and killed his wife. The most prevalent age group represented are perpetrators ages 20-29. Fifty-four men and 11 women between 20-29 killed their partners. Seventy-one percent of men who killed men and 30% of men who killed women were in this age group. Forty-two men and six women were between 30-39. The number of perpetrators in each age group decreases after 29, except for women ages 40-49 and men over 70. Fourteen men ages 70 and above killed their wives and girlfriend in 2021. This is the highest number of offenders in this age group since 2015 when 16 men killed their intimate partners.

The most prevalent age group are perpetrators ages 20-29, followed by perpetrators ages 30-39.



Six men had a history of violence against a previous female partner. Thirty-one had a history of violence against the women they ultimately killed. One woman had a history of violence against a previous male partner and two women had a history of violence against the male homicide

victims they ultimately killed. One woman who killed her ex-girlfriend had a history of abusive, jealous, and threatening behavior.

Authorities charged 112 men who killed their partners with capital murder, murder or manslaughter. Of those charged, six men remain at large and seven have been convicted and sentenced. Fifty-six men died by suicide after killing their partners, two were killed by law enforcement responding to the homicides, and two died by other means. Authorities charged 30 women who killed their partners with capital murder, murder, or manslaughter. Two women died by suicide after killing their partners.

RECOGNIZING LETHAL RISK FACTORS

Assessing lethality indicators with a survivor of domestic violence is one way service providers in any field can respond to survivor needs.

“ This just didn't happen this day; it led up to this. ”

Evidence-based lethality indicators identified and validated by the research conducted by Dr. Jacqueline Campbell in *The Danger Assessment*²⁰ provide advocates, first responders, and healthcare providers with the tools necessary to determine if a survivor of domestic violence is at high risk for lethality. Some of those indicators include offender actions and behaviors such as strangulation, threats of suicide, access to firearms, abuse that begins during pregnancy, and recent job loss. Assessing for these factors offers service providers a unique opportunity to educate survivors on their risk and provide the appropriate responses and safety planning with a survivor and their children.

Strangulation

Abusive partners who use strangulation as a method to assault their partners are seven times more likely to kill this partner.²¹ Strangulation, asphyxiation, and any form of impeding breath is an alarm indicating that abuse is escalating and the potential for homicide is high. If the abusive partner's history includes multiple strangulations, the likelihood of near lethal violence is even higher. In 2021, one woman and seven men had histories of strangling their intimate partners that occurred in the days and weeks prior

20 Campbell, Jacquelyn C., et al. "The Danger Assessment." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2009, pp. 653-674, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260508317180>.

21 Glass, Nancy, et al. "Non-fatal strangulation is an important risk factor for homicide of women." *The Journal of Emergency Medicine*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2008, pp. 329-35, doi:10.1016/j.jemermed.2007.02.065.

to the homicides. Two men were respondents on protective orders following strangulation assaults and each had charges for violations of those protective orders. One man had strangled his partner, then violated his conditions of bond for that assault, and was on house arrest when he killed his wife in her home.

*There is significant risk that a person who strangles their partner will go on to kill them.*²³

These brief case descriptions illustrate the extreme danger victims of strangulation experience and demonstrate the need for a coordinated effort to monitor and intervene in high-risk cases and the need to utilize lethality risk assessments.

Firearms

Texas exceeds the national rate of intimate partner homicides perpetrated with a firearm. In the U.S., firearms are used in more than half of all intimate partner homicides.²³ In 2021, firearm-perpetrated homicides accounted for 75% of intimate partner homicides in Texas. Access to a firearm by an abusive partner is one of the leading risk factors for intimate partner homicide.²⁴

Firearm issues compound other lethality risk factors. The perpetrators who had strangulation charges prior to the homicide killed their partners with a firearm despite firearm prohibitions in place. Nearly all homicide-suicides and homicides of pregnant victims were perpetrated with a firearm. Enforcement of firearm prohibitions represent one of the greatest opportunities for our state to reduce intimate partner homicides. Further analysis is provided in Section V of this report.

Pregnancy

Homicide is the leading cause of traumatic death among pregnant and postpartum women in the U.S. accounting

for 31% of maternal mortality cases. In Texas, survivors experience reproductive coercion at a rate three times greater than the national average. TCFV reports approximately four pregnant victims each year; in 2021, eight victims were pregnant, a decrease from 2020, when 11 victims were pregnant. Two pregnant victims were killed by their husbands, and one was killed by her ex-husband. Two pregnant victims were killed by their boyfriends, two were killed by their ex-boyfriends, and one was killed by her ex-girlfriend.

Separation

Separation poses a significant risk for intimate partner homicide and injury. The first few days and weeks of separation are a particularly critical period of lethality risk. Survivors are more likely to seek support from informal support systems such as friends, family, and faith communities.²⁵ While survivors are engaged in various systems, less than 25% access domestic violence services, and homicide victims access services at an even lower rate.

Nearly half of all victims in 2021 had sought help or taken steps to end their relationships.

In 2021, of the homicides identified by TCFV, 45% of victims had taken steps to either end their relationships or seek interventions to enhance their safety. Thirty-eight percent of women killed had separated or ended their relationships, and 33% of women had sought help to address the abuse, such as reporting abuse to law enforcement or seeking protective orders. Twenty-nine percent of male victims had ended their relationships or sought interventions to enhance their safety. Twenty-two percent of men had separated or ended their relationships, and 17% of men had involved reporting abuse to law enforcement or seeking protective orders. Relationship history and background information are not accessible in all reported homicides, so it is likely that more victims sought help or made attempts to end their relationships than is known.

22 Glass, Nancy, et al. "Non-fatal strangulation is an important risk factor for homicide of women." *The Journal of Emergency Medicine*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2008, pp. 329-35, doi:10.1016/j.jemermed.2007.02.065.

23 James Alan Fox and Emma E. Fridel, "Gender Differences in Patterns and Trends in US Homicide, 1976–2015," *Violence and Gender*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2017, pp. 37–43.

24 Campbell, Jacquelyn C., et al. "Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control study." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 93, no. 7, 2003, pp. 1089-97, doi:10.2105/ajph.93.7.1089.

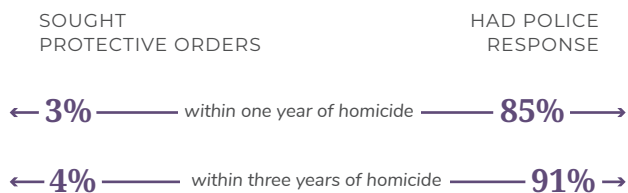
25 Kaukinen, Catherine. "The help-seeking strategies of female violent-crime victims: the direct and conditional effects of race and the victim-offender relationship." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 19, no. 9, 2004, pp. 967-90, doi:10.1177/0886260504268000.

In addition to the research TCFV conducted on the 2021 homicide cases, prior research conducted through interviews with surviving loved ones indicated that 48% of female intimate partner homicide victims had sought criminal or civil legal interventions.²⁶ Research on men killed by female intimate partners has indicated that approximately 75% of male victims have abused their female partners.²⁷

“As long as I stay here, I’m not going to be able to get away from him.”

A 2021 study that draws on data from 2010–2014 in one Texas county identified that 85% of women killed by an intimate partner had police response for a domestic violence incident within one year of the homicide, and 91% had police response within three years of the homicide. Homicide victims sought protective orders at significantly lower rates. Less than 3% of victims sought a protective order within one year of the homicide, and less than 4% within three years.²⁸ Seventy percent of men killed by an intimate partner had sought police intervention for a domestic violence incident within one year of the homicide, and 73% had police response within three years of the homicide. Twenty-three percent of men killed by their intimate partners had been reported for domestic violence within one year of the homicides, and 37% of men killed had been reported within three years of the homicides.²⁹

One study found that women killed sought protective orders at significantly lower rates than they had police response for a domestic violence incident.



Homicide-Suicide

In Texas, 37% of intimate partner femicides occur within a homicide-suicide case. Ending a dating relationship,

separating after living together, and filing for divorce pose the most significant risk for victims. Despite the high prevalence of homicide-suicide, few details are often available publicly, and community stakeholders report having limited awareness of the prevalence of homicide-suicide incidents.

The data collected in this report reveals most homicide-suicide incidents involve firearms and are perpetrated by men. Thirty-four percent of men and six percent of women died by suicide after killing their intimate partners. Ninety-one percent of men used firearms to kill their partners and themselves. Two women who killed themselves after killing their partners used a firearm to kill their partners and then themselves. Homicide-suicides are more likely to be perpetrated by older men. In 2021, 60% of men over 70 died by suicide following the homicides, and one died of other causes within days of the homicide, compared to 24% of men ages 20-29.

Most homicide-suicide incidents involve firearms, and are more likely to be perpetrated by older men.

Homicide-suicide takes a significant toll on the surviving family members, creating economic, legal, and psychological challenges, and participants report that minimal services are available. The impact of trauma on surviving family members spans a lifetime, and participants recommend an expansion of CVC benefits to full access over a lifetime, as well as a resource guide that describes how to navigate Crime Victim Compensation (CVC), criminal and civil matters, and resources for grief counseling.

INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDES ACROSS TEXAS COMMUNITIES: COUNTY DATA

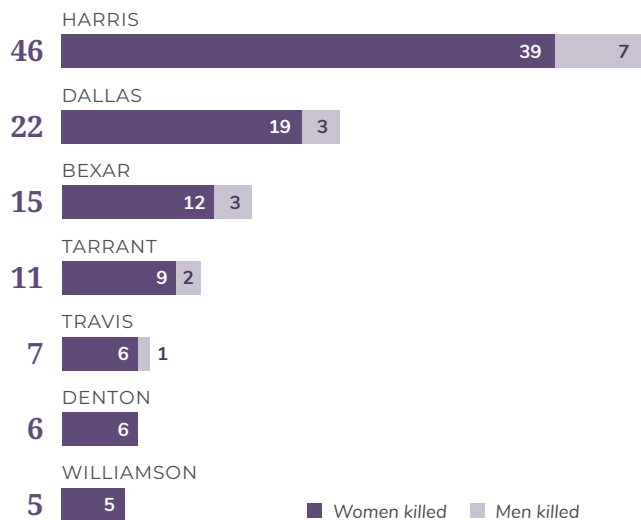
The 204 intimate partner homicides documented in this report occurred in 63 Texas counties in 2021. Counties with the largest populations report the highest number of fatalities, with four counties having an increase in

26 Campbell, Jacquelyn C., et al. "Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control study." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 93, no. 7, 2003, pp. 1089-97, doi:10.2105/ajph.93.7.1089.
 27 Campbell, Jacquelyn C., et al. "Intimate partner homicide: review and implications of research and policy." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2007, pp. 246-69, doi:10.1177/1524838007303505.
 28 Koppa, Vijetha, and Jill Theresa Messing. "Can Justice System Interventions Prevent Intimate Partner Homicide? An Analysis of Rates of Help Seeking Prior to Fatality." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 36, no. 17-18, 2021, pp. 8792-8816, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519851179>.
 29 Ibid.

intimate partner homicides and three counties having a decrease. Fatalities in Harris County increased by 24%, from 37 deaths in 2020 to 46 deaths in 2021. Fatalities in Dallas County increased 10% from 21 deaths in 2020 to 23 deaths in 2021. Travis County reported an increase from five homicides in 2020 to seven in 2021. Williamson County reported five homicides in 2021, following no homicides in 2020.

The following three counties reported decreases in intimate partner homicides. Tarrant County reported a decrease from 19 homicides in 2020 to 11 in 2021, Bexar County reported a decrease from 17 homicides in 2020 to 15 in 2021. Denton County reported a decrease from eight homicides in 2020 to six in 2021.

Texas counties with the largest populations report the highest number of fatalities.



County	Total IPV homicides	Women Killed	Men Killed
ANDERSON	1	1	0
BELL	3	3	0
BEXAR	15	12	3
BOWIE	2	2	0
BRAZORIA	1	1	0
BRAZOS	3	2	1
CALDWELL	1	0	1
CAMERON	2	2	0
CAMP	1	1	0
CHEROKEE	2	0	2
COLLIN	4	4	0
COMAL	1	1	0
COMANCHE	1	0	1

County	Total IPV homicides	Women Killed	Men Killed
DALLAS	22	19	3
DENTON	6	6	0
ECTOR	2	1	1
EL PASO	2	1	1
FAYETTE	1	1	0
FORT BEND	4	3	1
GALVESTON	4	3	1
GRAY	1	1	0
GREGG	3	2	1
GUADALUPE	1	1	0
HARDEMAN	1	1	0
HARRIS	46	39	7
HAYS	1	1	0
HENDERSON	1	1	0
HIDALGO	4	3	1
HOPKINS	1	1	0
HOWARD	1	1	0
JACKSON	1	1	0
JEFFERSON	3	2	1
JIM WELLS	1	1	0
JOHNSON	1	1	0
KENDALL	1	1	0
KLEBURG	1	1	0
LAMAR	1	1	0
LEE	1	0	1
LUBBOCK	2	2	0
MATAGORDA	1	1	0
MAVERICK	1	1	0
MCLENNAN	2	1	1
MIDLAND	2	2	0
MONTGOMERY	3	1	2
NOLAN	1	1	0
ORANGE	2	2	0
PANOLA	1	1	0
PARKER	1	1	0
RANDALL	2	2	0
RUSK	2	2	0
SAN PATRICIO	1	1	0
SMITH	2	2	0
TARRANT	11	9	2
TRAVIS	7	6	1
UPSHUR	1	1	0
VAN ZANDT	1	0	1
WALKER	1	0	1
WALLER	2	1	1
WASHINGTON	1	1	0
WEBB	1	1	0
WICHITA	2	2	0
WILLIAMSON	5	5	0
WISE	1	1	0
GRAND TOTAL	204	169	35

IMPACT OF WINTER STORM URI

During Winter Storm Uri, more than 4.8 million people in Texas lost power,³⁰ and some went without power for as long as four days, while exposed to below-freezing temperatures for over six days. At least 210 people died during the winter event, with most of the deaths connected to the power outages, and causes including hypothermia, carbon monoxide poisoning, and medical conditions exacerbated by freezing conditions.³¹ Temperatures dropped as low as six degrees in Austin, eight degrees in Dallas and ten degrees in Houston.³² All 254 counties were declared disaster areas by the Governor.³³

After power began to be restored, a new crisis emerged. Nearly 15 million people across Texas lost access to clean water and were forced to boil their water from their taps or melted snow before drinking or cooking with it.³⁴ The lack of potable water impacted 190 counties.³⁵

Winter Storm Uri impacted every Texan across the state; however, the most vulnerable populations were disproportionately negatively impacted. “They were less likely to have alternative locations to go during power or water outages; more likely to have poorly insulated homes, increasing their risk of hypothermia or broken pipes; and being less affluent and politically empowered, struggled more to repair damages or seek recourse.”³⁶

“ Texas holds the national record for weather-related disasters both in number (129 events) and in economic impact (\$200-300 billion) since 1980. ”³⁸

These risks compounded the dangerousness for families experiencing family violence. Texas advocates reported that domestic violence offenders used the weather conditions as an additional tool to maintain power and control. Survivors informed advocates their abusive partners forced them to stay outside in the cold, withheld jackets and blankets, and prohibited access to safe water.

Instances of family violence tend to increase immediately following natural disasters.

During the storm, and in the immediate aftermath, 54 family violence service providers were impacted in some capacity. Programs running emergency shelters reported a loss of power, burst pipes, flooding, water damage, food supply, loss of potable water, roof damage, and equipment loss. Some family violence providers reported as late as July 2022 that transitional housing facilities were still inoperable due to the damage seen from Winter Storm Uri.

A unique challenge created by Winter Storm Uri was that family violence program service providers across the state were seriously affected. Historically, when various regions are impacted by natural disasters, neighboring family violence agencies lend support to impacted programs. Winter Storm Uri interfered with this support network and interrupted how neighboring counties could support one another. Since all Texans were impacted at once, agencies that normally provide coordination of resources during disasters, such as TCFV and Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and all other community partners were also impacted during the storm.

30 Glazer, Yael R., et al. “Winter Storm Uri: A Test of Texas’ Water Infrastructure and Water Resource Resilience to Extreme Winter Weather Events.” *Journal of Extreme Events*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1142/s2345737621500226>.

31 “The February 2021 Cold Weather Outages in Texas and the South Central United States: FERC, NERC and Regional Entity Staff Report.” *Federal Energy Regulatory Commission*, 8 Dec. 2021, <https://ferc.gov/media/february-2021-cold-weather-outages-texas-and-south-central-united-states-ferc-nerc-and>.

32 Ibid.

33 “Governor Abbott Issues Disaster Declaration in Response to Severe Winter Weather in Texas.” *Office of the Governor | Greg Abbott*, <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-issues-disaster-declaration-in-response-to-severe-winter-weather-in-texas>.

34 Pike, Lili. “It’s after the Storm That’s the Hardest Part’: 390,000 Texans Still Don’t Have Clean Water.” *VOX*, 1 Mar. 2021, <https://www.vox.com/2021/3/1/22305616/water-texas-winter-storm-outage-california-fire-climate-change-infrastructure>.

35 Glazer, Yael R., et al. “Winter Storm Uri: A Test of Texas’ Water Infrastructure and Water Resource Resilience to Extreme Winter Weather Events.” *Journal of Extreme Events*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1142/s2345737621500226>.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

“Disasters may affect not only the prevalence of, but also the severity of IPV. Disasters may exacerbate the effects of ongoing abuse by disrupting access to important supports such as social and family systems that might offer practical and psychological assistance to IPV victims.”³⁸

When disasters affect large regions, networks that typically provide resources to neighboring counties are disrupted, resulting in less help for the vulnerable communities who need it most.

As risk and safety issues were exacerbated by Winter Storm Uri, TCFV explored its impact on intimate partner homicide. Twice as many homicides occurred in the four weeks following the storm’s onset than had occurred in the first six weeks of the year. From the beginning of the year to the start of the storm, January 1, 2021 to February 12, 2021, there were 13 total homicides. Within the first two weeks following the onset of the storm (February 13 to 27, 2021), 17 intimate partner homicides occurred. By the first 30-day mark from the start of Winter Storm Uri, a total 26 individuals were killed by intimate partners. By the 60-day mark, 14 additional intimate partner homicides occurred.

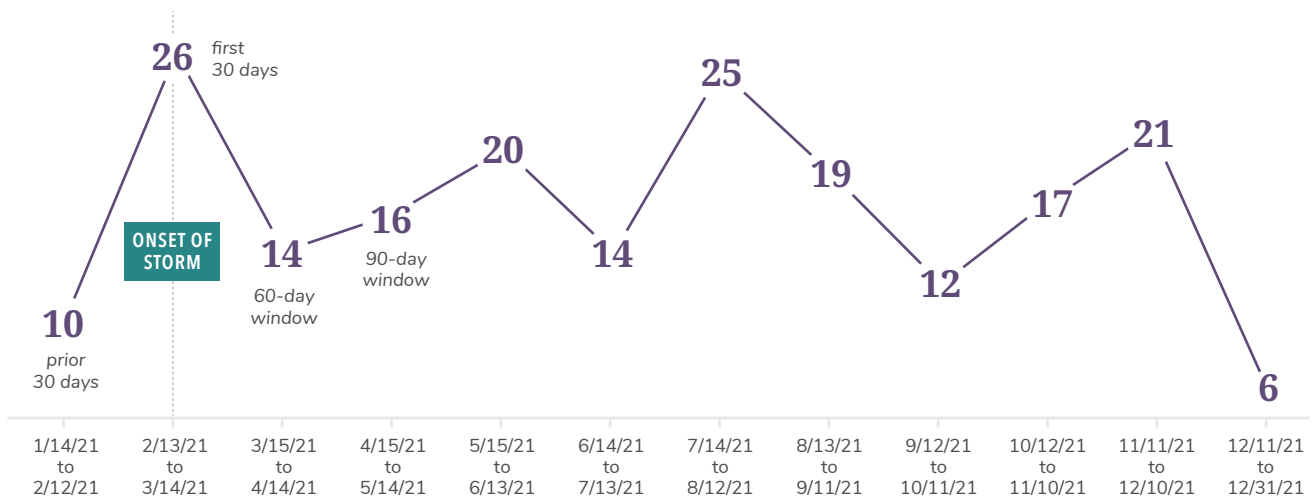
By the 90-day mark, 16 additional intimate partner homicides occurred. A total of 56 homicides occurred within the first 90 days following Winter Storm Uri.

Nearly half of fatalities in the 30-day window following the onset of the winter storm occurred in the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex. Dallas County had the highest number of fatalities in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, with half occurring during the week of the storm.

Intimate partner homicides that occurred within the first 30 days of the onset of Winter Storm Uri (February 13 through March 14, 2021):

County	# of homicides	County	# of homicides
BELL	1	HIDALGO	1
BEXAR	3	MONTGOMERY	1
COLLIN	2	TARRANT	1
DALLAS	6	TRAVIS	1
DENTON	2	WALLER	1
EL PASO	1	WICHITA	1
HARRIS	1	WILLIAMSON	1
HAYS	1	WISE	1
HENDERSON	1	GRAND TOTAL	26

Intimate partner fatalities rose during the aftermath of Winter Storm Uri.



38 Sety, M. “Domestic Violence and Natural Disasters”, 2012, cited in First, Jennifer M., et al. “Intimate Partner Violence and Disasters: A Framework for Empowering Women Experiencing Violence in Disaster Settings.” *Affilia*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2017, pp. 390–403, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109917706338>.

Factors leading to increased rates of intimate partner violence in disaster-affected communities may include how intimate partner relationships are impacted through stress, strained communication, and increased aggression.³⁹ Post-disaster stressors such as housing and financial disruptions and unemployment contribute to increased rates of IPV.⁴⁰ Increased risk may be attributed to increased isolation, limited contact with a support system or outside help, or increased dependence on the abusive partner.

People who abuse their partners are likely to escalate abuse when victims are at their most vulnerable and when perpetrator accountability is low.⁴²

The impacts of a statewide natural disaster, compounded by the added stress and complications from the COVID-19 pandemic, undoubtedly impacted survivors' safety and well-being. As noted in reports from Texas advocates,

people who harm their partners used the conditions of the storm as a mechanism of abuse and control. Increased violence and abuse may accelerate survivor plans to end a relationship or engage criminal and civil legal systems to address the abuse. Abusive partners often escalate violence, threats, and harassment to maintain control in their relationships. These escalation patterns may, in turn, result in higher incidents of intimate partner homicide and near-lethal violence during periods of disaster.

Disaster planning is critical to survivor safety. As a result of the winter storm, many family violence service providers reported creating an in-the-moment disaster plan that they will continue to refine and use for future disasters.⁴² Some family violence service providers reported successes in established disaster preparedness plans that prevented extensive disruptions while other programs received extensive community support in responding to the storm. In preparation for the next event, safety planning for survivors ahead of disasters and strong collaborations across communities' resources is crucial to minimize the danger to family violence survivors.

39 Sety, M. "Domestic Violence and Natural Disasters", 2012, cited in First, Jennifer M., et al. "Intimate Partner Violence and Disasters: A Framework for Empowering Women Experiencing Violence in Disaster Settings." *Affilia*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2017, pp. 390–403, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109917706338>.

40 Ibid.

41 Campbell, Andrew M. "Improving Prevention of Family Violence during (and after) Disaster: Lessons Learned from the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Forensic Science International: Reports*, vol. 3, July 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsir.2021.100179>.

42 Flores, Rita, and Jessica Moreno. "HTV Stakeholder Summary." 5 August 2022. Collective Capacity.

SECTION V

Center Prevention to Create Safer Communities

According to the Center for Disease Control, intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious preventable public health problem that affects millions of Americans and occurs across the lifespan.⁴³ Millions of Americans are at risk for injury, mental health impacts, housing and economic insecurity, legal issues, and intergenerational trauma stemming from abuse perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner.

Intimate partner violence is a preventable public health issue.

IPV also has a significant economic toll.⁴⁴ A 2010 study calculated that one aggravated assault costs society as much as \$107,020 from direct losses suffered by crime victims, criminal legal system costs, and intangible costs, such as decreased quality of life. A single murder costs society \$8,982,907, calculated in 2008 currency rates.⁴⁵ Adjusting for inflation over the last 14 years, a homicide can now result in over \$12,000,000 in economic loss. In contrast, the average cost of a single family violence service in 2020 was just \$26.09 a day.⁴⁶ This is far below the emotional and economic cost of this tragic loss of life, even

under Medicaid rates. Preventing merely half of the annual domestic violence homicides would have the economic impact of making the state of Texas better off by as much as 1.2 billion dollars each year.

Many of the complex stressors that exacerbated both frequency and severity of domestic violence during the pandemic have their root in the underlying norms and community factors that primary and secondary prevention efforts address and mitigate. Successful prevention strategies focus both on the individual factors that can contribute to interpersonal violence, such as prior trauma and experiences of intergenerational violence, as well as the community-level issues where young people learn skills to navigate healthy vs unhealthy relationships.

Investing in intimate partner violence prevention is an economic and public safety investment.

Preventing intimate partner violence contributes to safer communities, reduced lethality and injury risk for survivors, their families, and law enforcement officers, and mitigates the lifelong vulnerabilities associated with adverse childhood experiences. Approaching domestic violence as a public health problem and adequately funding prevention strategies could mean that future Texans live safer, healthy lives free from violence.

PREVENTION EDUCATION

Reflecting on the prevalence of intimate partner homicide brings forward an important message from survivors who contributed to TCFV's State Plan. Survivors shared the

THE SOCIETAL COST OF A
SINGLE HOMICIDE:

\$12,000,000+

THE AVERAGE COST OF A
SINGLE FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICE:

\$26.09/day

43 "Intimate Partner Violence | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 9 Oct. 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html>.

44 "The Cost of Domestic Violence Is Astonishing." *The Washington Post*, 22 Feb. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-cost-of-domestic-violence-is-astonishing/2018/02/22/f8c9a88a-0cf5-11e8-8b0d-891602206fb7_story.html.

45 McCollister, Kathryn E., et al. "The cost of crime to society: new crime-specific estimates for policy and program evaluation." *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, vol. 108, no. 1-2, 2010, pp. 98-109, doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2009.12.002.

46 "Family Violence Program Statistics – Fiscal Year 2021." *Texas Health and Human Services Commission Family Violence Program*, Available upon request.

value of prevention education and its power to shape safer communities. Specifically, survivors reflected on the impact prevention education could have had on their level of safety. Considered a priority by many survivors, the need for training in such skills can be best summed up in the response of one Texas survivor when asked for recommendations on how to improve the work of Family Violence Centers:

“ Just education. People need to know what [family violence] is, to know they don’t have to be in it. ”

During the 87th Texas Legislature, **Senate Bill 9** was passed to center prevention education and increase parental choice. SB9 added new considerations for school campuses to navigate as they instill healthy relationship education in their curriculum. Some key provisions that school communities must navigate include:

- 1 Increasing opportunities for parental involvement, including actively opting their child into this instruction,
- 2 Center the recommendation of the school health advisory council on which violence prevention curriculum to adopt,
- 3 Reporting provisions that require notification of the parents of youth involved in dating violence,
- 4 Requiring schools to make available age-appropriate educational materials and resources to students.

These four consideration points involve important decisions from parents and school leaders to ensure the appropriate response to survivors in their community, particularly those students experiencing dating violence or family violence. Now more than ever, parents must be engaged to understand their role in ensuring their children get this lifesaving instruction. A major risk to consider is that those young people who are not allowed to partake could also be experiencing victimization. Excluding a child from this instruction can cause them to lose out on learning vital life skills with greater community wellness implications.

All over the state, family violence programs are partnering with school communities and other stakeholder groups to provide prevention education. These community-based programs provide education and maintain pathways to supportive services for survivors and their families. While SB9 does not govern these activities, it also allows family violence programs the opportunity to support schools in new ways. The elements of SB9 also underscore the importance of multipronged, community-wide prevention efforts for parents, educators, and others to be best informed and equipped to support the movement to end family violence.

PARTNER ABUSE INTERVENTION: SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO HARM THEIR PARTNERS

In Texas, partner abuse intervention services are codified in Texas statute as Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs (BIPPs), with established frameworks for funding, best practice, oversight, and training and technical assistance. Texas stands out among other states for decades of investment in services for people who harm their partners.

Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs are structured groups with the aim of offender accountability and victim safety. The facilitated groups challenge participants to critically think, examine, and assess their beliefs systems that underpin the choice to abuse and control a partner. Texas BIPPs encourages positive behavioral change through dialogue so those enrolled let go of their past learned behaviors and commit to fostering healthy, nonviolent relationships with their partner. BIPP is an essential service that is designed to meet the requests of survivors, wanting the violence to stop. BIPP is also an essential strategy of a coordinated community response to enhance survivor safety and end family violence.

In March 2020, Texas BIPPs mobilized quickly to implement virtual service provision, strategizing to work with participants with limited tech resources and successfully maintained service provision following state accreditation guidelines. Programs coordinated across communities to match participants to virtual services in areas where services were unavailable. These efforts were undertaken deliberately and thoughtfully to promote victim safety during the lockdown.

In 2021, TCFV identified only one homicide perpetrator who had been ordered to attend BIPP. He did not comply with the requirement and his probation was revoked. He was sentenced to four years in prison, but he was out of prison

in May 2021 when he killed his ex-girlfriend. It's unclear from available records if he was on parole or otherwise supervised. When a domestic violence offender moves from probation to prison to parole, their requirement to complete BIPP should remain with them. This would allow them the best opportunity to learn non-violent relationship principles and prevent near-lethal violence and homicides.

Forty-seven homicide perpetrators had an identified history of using violence against their partners. Two people who had a history of using violence against their partners were killed in a domestic violence homicide included in this report, and 12 more people were killed during a justifiable homicide when their partners used lethal self-defense. Domestic violence victims, their families, and even those who harm them deserve an opportunity for a different outcome that BIPPs in Texas make available to those who participate.⁴⁷

BIPPs provide the opportunity for behavioral change for abusive partners and a safer outcome for survivors and their families.

According to a multi-site evaluation of battering intervention programs, offenders completing at least three months of a program were 50% less likely to re-assault their partners in the 15-month follow-up compared to a comparable group who did not complete the program.⁴⁸ When viewed as an extension of community supervision, coupled with court oversight and sanctions for offenders who do not comply with program requirements, outcomes improved.⁴⁹ Recent research shows that BIPP participants are about three times less likely to have domestic violence recidivism compared to nontreated control/comparison groups.⁵⁰ The trends for re-assault showed a sharp de-escalation of abuse over time: at the four-year follow-up of the multi-site

study, fewer than ten percent had re-assaulted a partner in the previous year.⁵¹

Texas currently allocates 1.75 million dollars per year to fund Texas BIPPs. This funding provides BIPP services through 25 funded programs. Ending family violence begins with addressing the person who is causing harm. Investment in BIPP services is a cost-effective alternative to incarceration and significantly contributes to preventing domestic violence.

HOMICIDE PREVENTION THROUGH SYSTEM COORDINATION: THE DVHRT FRAMEWORK

Domestic Violence High Risk Teams (DVHRTs) are one method focused on preventing intimate partner fatalities by identifying survivors at high risk for future homicide. Through the DVHRT, high-risk survivors get enhanced support from law enforcement, advocates, prosecutors, and other systems partners. This wrap-around model holds offenders accountable and is a trauma-informed approach to maximize victim safety.

The DVHRT Model consists of four core components:

- 1** Early identification of the most dangerous cases through evidence-based risk assessment,
- 2** Increased access to supportive services for high-risk victims,
- 3** Increased offender monitoring and accountability, and
- 4** A coordinated response to high-risk cases through a multidisciplinary team.⁵²

47 "Battering Intervention and Prevention Program Evaluation Report." Texas Department of Criminal Justice. September 2022.

48 Gondolf, E. "Evaluating batterer counseling programs: A difficult task showing some effects." *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 9, 2004, pp. 605-631; for further reviews of batterer program research see also: Saunders, D. "Group interventions for men who batter: A summary of program descriptions and research." *Violence and Victims*, vol. 23, 2008, pp. 156- 172, and Murphy, C., & Ting, L. "Interventions for perpetrators of intimate partner violence: A review of efficacy research and recent trends." *Partner Abuse*, vol. 1, 2010, pp. 26-44.

49 Gondolf, E. (2000). "Mandatory court review and batterer program compliance." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 15, 2000, pp. 438-437; Burke, K. "Just what made drug courts successful?" *New England Journal of Criminal and Civil Confinement*, vol. 36, 2010, pp. 39-58; Wilson, D., Mitchell, O., & MacKenzie, D. "A systematic review of drug court effects on recidivism." *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, vol. 2, 2006, pp. 459-487.

50 Cheng, Shih-Ying, et al. "Compared to What? A Meta-Analysis of Batterer Intervention Studies Using Nontreated Controls or Comparisons." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2021, pp. 496-511, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838019865927>.

51 Gondolf, Edward W. "A 30-Month Follow-up of Court- Referred Batterers in Four Cities." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2000, pp. 111-128, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x00441010>.

52 "Domestic Violence Homicide Prevention: The Geiger Institute." Geiger Institute, <https://geigerinstitute.org/>.

DVHRTs in Texas

The DVHRT concept in Texas is deeply connected to collaboration among the local family violence program, law enforcement, prosecutors, and other member agencies to ensure an effective, comprehensive response to family violence. The DVHRT Coordinators and their Teams continuously assess what factors indicate that offenders pose an elevated risk of homicide in domestic violence cases. All DVHRT sites consistently coordinate local agencies and resources to support victims and hold offenders accountable. They also take on enhanced responses to factors associated with the highest safety risk for a victim such as the presence of a firearm and strangulation.

In 2021, 470 victims and high-risk offenders were provided services at DVHRT sites funded by TCFV.⁵³ This represents an increase of 34% in 2021 from the 351 reported cases in 2020. While some of this rise can be attributed to new sites' population, the pandemic resulted in court backlogs, changes in arrest decisions, bail considerations, and other criminal legal case decisions and made systems navigation complicated.⁵⁴ Although there is no demonstrated evidence that these sites reduced intimate partner homicides, DVHRTs are stable support for planning and systems coordination for family violence survivors.

Texas DVHRTs provided services to 34% more victims and high-risk offenders in 2021 compared to 2020.



53 Domestic Violence High Risk Teams 2021 Statewide Report. Texas Council on Family Violence.

54 Ibid.

SECTION VI

Prioritize Firearm Prohibition Enforcement to Save Lives

Laws, policies, and procedures that prevent people with histories of domestic violence from possessing and purchasing firearms are vital to ensuring victims' safety.⁵⁵ Lack of firearm prohibition enforcement coupled with increased firearm possession results in more risk for IPV survivors, their families and communities, and responding law enforcement.

In 2021, more women were killed by a partner or former partner with a firearm than by all other means of murder combined.

The increase in women shot and killed by their male partners over the last ten years from 68 in 2012 to 125 in 2021, is highly correlated with a significant increase in firearm possession. Active concealed handgun license holders reported by Texas Department of Public Safety increased from 584,000 in 2012 to 1.7 million in 2021. In 2020 and 2021, 3.5 million firearms were purchased in Texas.⁵⁶

Women are five times more likely to be killed if an abusive partner has access to a firearm.⁵⁸

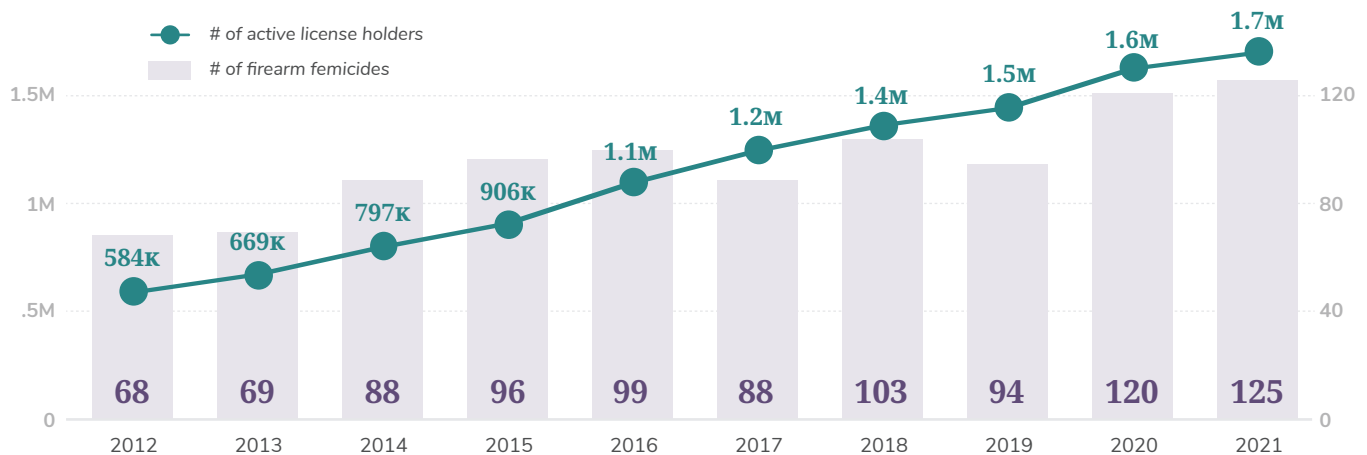
Active license holder data indicates that more Texas homes have firearms in them. Seventy-two percent of 2021 IPV homicide victims were killed in their homes or a perpetrator's home and 75% of Texas victims were killed with a firearm. Preventing firearm-related IPV homicides at a time when firearm ownership has almost tripled requires collaborative and engaged coordinated community responses to ensure a firearm transfer from domestic violence offenders who are prohibited possessors. Without action, this dangerous trajectory will continue.

Home is not safe when an abusive partner has a firearm.

72%
OF VICTIMS WERE
KILLED AT HOME

75%
OF VICTIMS WERE
KILLED WITH A FIREARM

The increase in Texas firearm possession and intimate partner femicide are highly correlated.



55 "Domestic Violence & Firearms." Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 25 Aug. 2022, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms/>.

56 Nass, Daniel. "How Many Guns Did Americans Buy Last Month?" The Trace, 4 Oct. 2022, <https://www.thetrace.org/2020/08/gun-sales-estimates/>.

57 Ibid.

Texas laws prohibit firearm possession for individuals with Class A misdemeanor family violence convictions, including deferred adjudications, felony convictions, and for respondents of protective orders.⁵⁸ “However, existing loopholes in federal and state law leave guns in the hands of abusive partners and stalkers, often with deadly results.”⁵⁹ Compounding risk is the reality that few counties and courts have firearm transfer processes in place,

so oftentimes perpetrators are not being prompted to dispose of their firearms at the close of a criminal case or protective order hearing and compliance is rarely monitored. Currently, less than ten of our state’s 254 counties have any type of program to ensure the transfer of firearms from abusers per the law. Of those that do, many are one court working to take on a process in a large jurisdiction.

FIREARM PROHIBITIONS APPLICABLE IN TEXAS

Condition	Texas Prohibition	Federal Prohibition	Duration
Person convicted of a felony crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not allowed to possess a firearm for five years after the completion of their criminal sentence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent bar from legally possessing firearm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May only possess on their own property after five years of completing their sentence under Texas statute. Lifetime prohibition under federal statute.
Person convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not allowed to possess a firearm for five years after release from confinement or community supervision. Applies only to Class A misdemeanor assaults against a family or household member. Does not apply to current or former dating partners outside of the same household. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent bar from legally possessing firearm. Applies to convictions of any level misdemeanor, including Class C’s, domestic violence against a family or household member, and, as of 2022, includes current or former dating partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May possess a gun legally anywhere in Texas after five years post release from confinement or community supervision under Texas Statute. Lifetime prohibition under federal statute.
Respondent to a Protective Order (PO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not allowed to possess a firearm for the duration of the final PO. May possess a firearm anywhere in Texas after the protective order expires. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not allowed to possess a firearm for the duration of the final PO against an intimate partner as defined by 18 USC 921(a)(32) which excludes partners that never married, cohabitated or had a child in common. May possess a firearm after the protective order expires. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until the Protective Order expires.

58 Weapons, TX Penal Code § Sec. 46.04 (a).

59 “Guns and Violence against Women: America’s Uniquely Lethal Intimate Partner Violence Problem.” Everytown Research & Policy, 23 Feb. 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/guns-and-violence-against-women-americas-uniquely-lethal-intimate-partner-violence-problem/>.

Texas and federal law currently prohibit firearm ownership under four different measures:

- 1 Under Texas statute, a person convicted of a felony crime cannot possess a firearm for five years following release from confinement or community supervision.⁶⁰ After five years, a person convicted of a felony may only possess a gun on their own property. Under federal statute, an individual convicted of a felony may never legally possess a firearm again.⁶¹
- 2 Under Texas statute, an individual convicted of a Class A misdemeanor assault against a family or household member is not allowed to possess a firearm within the last five years of sentencing. After five years, a person convicted of a misdemeanor family violence charge may legally possess a gun anywhere in Texas.⁶² Under federal statute, a person convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence may never legally possess a firearm again.⁶³
- 3 Texas law states anyone currently the respondent of a final protective order may not possess a firearm. A respondent may legally possess a firearm anywhere in Texas after the protective order has expired.⁶⁴ Federally, a respondent of a protective order may not possess a firearm for the duration of the protective order. A respondent may legally possess a gun under federal law after the order has expired.⁶⁵
- 4 A judge may restrict someone from possessing a firearm through other methods, such as conditions of bond.

UNDERSTANDING GAPS IN TEXAS FIREARM PROHIBITIONS

Frequently the gaps in state or federal statute where firearm prohibition laws do not apply to victims of dating violence are called the 'Boyfriend Loophole.' In Texas law, the loophole had been partially closed as it pertains to protective orders but not for misdemeanors. "Texas's firearm prohibition for Class A misdemeanants generally does not apply to people convicted of violent assaults against a current or former dating partner, unless the defendant has been married or lived with the victim; and it does not apply to people convicted of threatening a family or household member with imminent violent injury."⁶⁶ This means if a dating partner has been arrested and convicted of a Class A misdemeanor for assaulting his girlfriend, but they do not live together, he is excluded from the misdemeanor firearm prohibitions for domestic violence convictions. If that same couple was married or living together, the firearm prohibition would be applicable.

Federally, a similar loophole has also existed. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 closed this federal boyfriend loophole by adding people in a dating relationship to the scope of the firearm ban for DV misdemeanants and felons.⁶⁷

EXAMINING FIREARM PROHIBITIONS AMONG A SAMPLE OF HOMICIDE PERPETRATORS

Using public records found online within district clerk websites and the Department of Public Safety Crime Records Division, TCFV analyzed a sample of 2021 homicides within Harris County. The Harris County District Clerk offers a detailed and accessible tool for reviewing both criminal and civil court proceedings. This information has allowed researchers to gather the best use of publicly available data to determine how many firearm-related intimate partner homicides were committed by a prohibited possessor.

60 Weapons, TX Penal Code § Sec. 46.04 (a).

61 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1).

62 Weapons, TX Penal Code § Sec. 46.04 (b).

63 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(9).

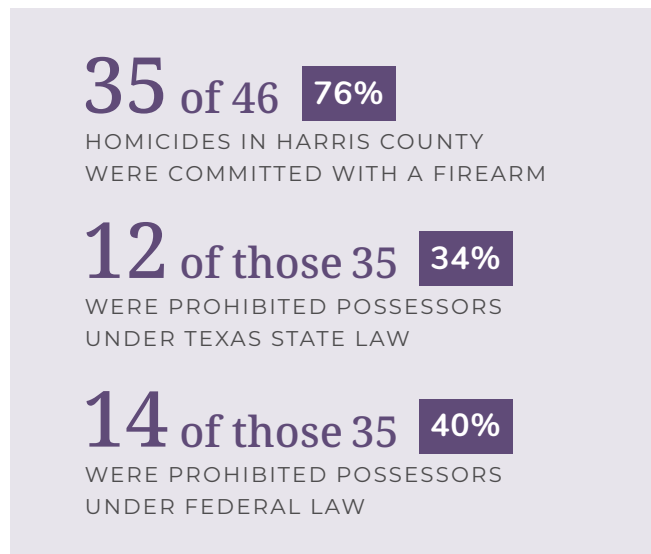
64 Weapons, TX Penal Code § Sec. 46.04 (c).

65 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(8).

66 "Domestic Violence & Firearms." Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 25 Aug. 2022, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms/>

67 Greenberg, Jon. "Politifact - What Is the 'Boyfriend Loophole,' and How Does the New Gun Law Close It?" *Politifact*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.politifact.com/article/2022/jun/30/what-boyfriend-loophole-and-how-does-new-law-close/>.

In 2021, Harris County had a total of 46 intimate partner homicides. Of those 46 homicides, 35 were committed with a firearm. Utilizing the publicly available data and comparing it to Texas and Federal firearm laws, TCFV identified that 12 of those 35 offenders were prohibited possessors under Texas state law and 14 of those 35 offenders were prohibited possessors under federal law. That is 34%-40% of intimate partner homicides that could have potentially been prevented, had the offenders' firearms been properly surrendered or transferred.



In 15 of the 35 cases (43%) in 2021 in Harris County, TCFV identified prior law enforcement contact. Eleven homicide perpetrators who had law enforcement contact had a firearm prohibition.

In one recent study, researchers reviewed intimate partner homicides in one Texas county from 2010 to 2014. Koppa and Messing determined that 55% of intimate partner femicides and 43% of intimate partner male homicides were committed with a firearm between 2010 – 2014.⁶⁸ In 2021, that number increased to 76%.

Koppa and Messing analyzed law enforcement contact within one to three years prior to the homicide. The researchers reported “across all intimate partner femicide victims, in the three years prior to the homicide, police had been in contact with the victim for a DV complaint in 91% of cases, and there had been a DV arrest with the victim as a complainant in 45% of cases. Furthermore, femicide victims were visited by law enforcement an average of 5.6 times (range: 0-36) in the three years prior to the homicide (among those for whom police had taken a complaint, police visited them an average of 6.2 times over the three years prior to their deaths).”⁶⁹ These contact statistics are higher than what is identified annually in this report. Law enforcement contacts are opportunities for prevention, intervention, and connection to local service providers when they include critical lethality assessments and coordinated response.

Developing consistent and sustainable practices for asking about firearms and transferring them away from prohibited possessors is a solution that does not require policy or legislative change.

Firearm transfer protocols require local coordination and resources to successfully implement and maintain. This practice will impact the safety and well-being of survivors and their children and law enforcement who are responding to these calls for service in potentially lethal cases. Transferring firearms away from prohibited possessors must become a priority within the criminal legal system to prevent intimate partner violence threats, near-lethal violence, homicides, and suicides.

68 Koppa, Vijetha, and Jill Theresa Messing. “Can Justice System Interventions Prevent Intimate Partner Homicide? An Analysis of Rates of Help Seeking Prior to Fatality.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 36, no. 17-18, 2021, pp. 8792–8816. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519851179>.

69 Ibid.

SECTION VII

Enhance Safety & Access to Justice for Survivors

DIGITAL SAFETY

The presence of technology is woven into most of our daily activities and routines and presents both risks that abusive partners may misuse technology to stalk, track and monitor survivors, as well as opportunities to connect survivors to support and services. Abusive partners use social media accounts, access to computers and cell phones, spyware, and personal trackers to monitor survivors without their consent. The National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that 97% of family violence programs identify survivors experiencing tech-facilitated abuse.⁷⁰

TCFV identified stalking and digital abuse in five percent of homicides in 2021, though it is likely to have occurred in far more.

Technology can become a tool to maintain power and control over survivor's lives and well-being.

Manka Melson began to stalk and threaten Aaliyah Gradnigo after she had ended the relationship. In December 2020 and January 2021, Melson sent over 10,000 text messages to Aaliyah before shooting and killing her on January 23, 2021.

Luis Hernandez, Jr. stalked and threatened Maria Soto on social media. Her family reports that when Maria reported the online abuse to authorities, they told her there was nothing they could do. Hernandez killed Maria in Big Spring on July 21, 2021.

La'Shekia Kenney was stalked, harassed and threatened by her ex-boyfriend, Kendall Johnson. Johnson threatened to kill himself if La'Shekia refused to get back together. La'Shekia kept screenshots of his threatening messages to document his abuse. Johnson and his friend, Calvin Anderson, drove to La'Shekia's home in Kilgore and stabbed and killed her on September 2, 2021.

Experiencing a high degree of threats and harassment on social media is not uncommon for survivors leaving abusive relationships, and technology can become a tool to interfere with survivors' lives and well-being and maintain power and control.

The expansion of virtual social services and healthcare provider services during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed survivors to more readily access support when they have access to tech resources and the freedom to access online services. At the same time as this expansion occurs, advocates must be aware of the potential for tracking and monitoring associated with accessing services online.⁷¹ To mitigate the risks and promote the supportive factors inherent in technology, advocates can work with survivors to identify the types of devices and accounts they have that may be vulnerable to online abuse, harassment, and non-consensual tracking. With all of this in mind, tech-enabled devices can greatly enhance ongoing safety planning.

While virtual services can greatly enhance access to support, caution must be used to prevent non-consensual tracking and abuse.

70 "A Glimpse from the Field: How Abusers Are Misusing Technology." Safety Net Project, National Network to End Domestic Violence, 17 Dec. 2014, <https://www.techsafety.org/blog/2015/2/17/a-glimpse-from-the-field-how-abusers-are-misusing-technology>.

71 "Digital Services Toolkit." National Network to End Domestic Violence, <https://www.techsafety.org/digital-services-toolkit>.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND SAFETY IMPACTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As courts are catching up after months-long closures from COVID-19 shutdowns, systems have “scrambled to address the backlog of cases and rise in incidences of violence.”⁷² Concern over the backlogs caused by the pandemic is high. During the pandemic, the number of weekly jury trials decreased from an average of 186 to just four.⁷³ This type of delay will have significant impacts on survivors and their children seeking safety.

The Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) produces the Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary, and their 2021 report highlighted alarming family violence and homicide trends. The OCA reported downward trends for all crime types in new cases filed for 2021, except homicide. In 2021, new homicide filings increased by 44%. In their five-year analysis, that number increased to 238%. This includes all homicides, not specifically family violence-related homicides. In prior years, TCFV has noted that when the overall homicide rate increases in the state, lethal violence against women by their intimate partners increases exponentially. Aside from capital murder, aggravated assault/attempted murder, family violence, and auto theft were the only felony categories that increased in 2020 and 2021. The OCA also reported, “After two years of decline, the number of new capital murder cases increased by 8 percent in 2020 and by 10 percent in 2021. In comparison, the number of convictions fell by a third in 2020 and 27 percent in 2021.”⁷⁵

As family violence cases and homicides increase and as reported convictions decrease, there is concern that this delay will erode community faith in the system to hold

offenders accountable. As counties and communities work to address the backlog of criminal cases, they must also prioritize informing the community of their progress. Survivors and their families deserve to be supported and believed and have ready access to the protections the criminal legal system is designed to afford them.

Accessing Supportive Services and Legal Remedies Virtually

Logistical barriers, including cost, childcare, issues with transportation, and the timing and location of services, commonly interfere with survivors accessing advocacy. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a significant shift to virtual services to maintain critical access for survivors.

Family violence programs successfully moved to provide virtual services in the early days of the pandemic. This increased virtual services offerings from just 3% prior to the pandemic to 28% in 2021, representing a 750% increase comparing 2019 to 2021.

Providing services virtually paired with funding from the exceptional item investments (EIF) included in the biennial budgets passed by in the 86th (2019) and 87th (2021) Texas Legislative Sessions strengthened access to services

that survivors identify as most helpful in increasing their safety, such as legal and housing services. Approximately 60% of EIF services were provided virtually.⁷⁶

Early in the pandemic, courts also pivoted to virtual hearings, out of necessity and pursuant to Emergency Orders of the Texas Supreme Court. While technology for court hearings presented new challenges around safe uses of various platforms and internet bandwidth, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) provided guidance, and TCFV

“...Without additional resources—through extra judges to assist and things like that—we do anticipate it will take us anywhere from three to five years to dig out.”⁷⁵

— DAVID SLAYTON,
FORMER DIRECTOR OF
ADMINISTRATION, TEXAS
JUDICIAL COUNCIL

72 Dunne, Kelly, and Cherra M. Mathis. “Practice Note: Domestic Violence Advocacy and Response to Intimate Partner Homicide in the Covid-19 ERA.” *Homicide Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2022, pp. 333–344, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10887679221112037>.

73 Stinson, Paul, et al. “Texas Court Backlog Could Last Five Years without More Funding.” *Bloomberg Law*, 24 May 2021, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/texas-court-backlog-could-last-five-years-without-more-funding>.

74 Ibid.

75 “Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary - Fiscal Year 2021.” Office of Court Administration, <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1454127/fy-21-annual-statistical-report-final.pdf>.

76 “Family Violence Program Statistics – Fiscal Year 2021.” Texas Health and Human Services Commission Family Violence Program, Available upon request.

continues to offer support around reducing risks and privacy issues associated with virtual court. Virtual court options emerged as a trauma-informed modality for participation in legal proceedings for survivors. Of chief importance were virtual protective order hearings. Survivors, advocates and attorneys noted the benefits of virtual protective order hearings, including greater physical and emotional safety as well as offering convenience and time savings. These benefits within the protective order process come when many survivors juggle competing demands around their families, work, and focus on their safety. With over 8,000 protective orders issued in 2021, this virtual option offered enhanced safety and allowed enhanced participation from all parties in the process. As one research article noted “Providing virtual services reduces disruption to survivors’ jobs so they no longer need to travel for services, reduces need to find childcare, and makes everything most accessible to those who need it.”⁷⁷ TCFV intends to advocate for codifying the option for applicants to request a virtual protective order hearing in the 88th Texas Legislative Session.

The option of virtual protective order hearings greatly benefited survivors, allowing for more convenience, fewer costs, and enhanced safety.

TECHNOLOGY CONTRIBUTOR, RING (AN AMAZON COMPANY), MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In 2021, Ring launched an initiative to donate 1,000 Security Cameras and Video Doorbells to Texas domestic violence agencies in support of survivor safety. The donation also included a free Ring Protect Plan subscription for the life of each donated device. Upon receiving donated devices, TCFV and its member organizations prioritized survivors at the highest risk. Ring’s goal was simple—to listen and learn, amplify support for expert organizations supporting survivors, and to help increase survivor safety with technology to safeguard one’s home. This collaboration in Texas began in early 2021 with a request for donation by the Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (HCDVCC). After continued positive anecdotal feedback from expert organizations, the initiative then expanded statewide in Texas to other high risk victim support sites

including: Fort Bend Women’s Center, Grayson County Crisis Center, and the Center Against Sexual and Family Violence in El Paso.

Security Cameras and Video Doorbells are used as an additional tool within a survivor’s safety plan. These products can send notifications to a user’s mobile device, alerting survivors when motion is detected and enabling a live view of the designated area whether they’re home or away. Two-way audio communication allows survivors to communicate with someone at the door, even if the survivor is at another location. The devices amplify safety by letting survivors have the peace of mind to assess a situation, activate a safety plan or respond without unlocking or opening their doors. This technology also has the ability to capture harassment, stalking, and violations of protective orders.

TCFV partnered with Adam Dodge, founder of EndTAB (Ending Tech-Enabled Abuse) to assess technology use through a survivor lens. Ring not only welcomed feedback but ensured EndTAB and TCFV had all of the relevant information to develop safety guides for survivors and advocates that promote best practices to maximize safety. The safety guides incorporate a technology safety plan for the advocate and the survivor to navigate together based on personal circumstances. The safety guides have had an even broader reach among other domestic violence victim support organizations and make a strong resource to survivors who are already Ring users. The guides were developed in English and Spanish to expand use and application.

An additional residual, yet powerful outcome of this initiative comes when a leader in the technology space invests resources, time and expertise and leverages their influence to send a profound message of support to those experiencing violence in the home.

HB 1372: SEPARATING TELEPHONE NUMBERS FROM ABUSIVE PARTNERS’ ACCOUNTS

Maintaining access to a cell phone and associated accounts can be a lifeline for survivors. Losing access to a cell phone account may expose survivors to continued abuse and significantly interfere with their social support networks, economic resources, and safety plans. Typically, phone companies require permission from the account holder to remove cell phone lines from family plans

77 Dunne, Kelly, and Cherra M. Mathis. “Practice Note: Domestic Violence Advocacy and Response to Intimate Partner Homicide in the Covid-19 ERA.” *Homicide Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2022, pp. 333–344, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10887679221112037>.

“ He even checked our cell phone transcripts to make sure I was being an attentive mother to our daughter. When I finally decided to take back my freedom and separate our lines, I was told I needed my, soon-to-be, ex-husband’s permission. My heart sank. He still had power and control over me... Leaving my abuser was already surrounded by barriers. We need to break down as many barriers as possible so that survivors don’t have to be at the mercy of an abuser they need to separate from.”

— TEXAS SURVIVOR TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF HB 1372

and abusive partners often refuse to cooperate with the account separation.

Recognizing that cell phone accounts gave abusive partners a tool to extend their power and control over survivors, Representative Guerra successfully passed HB 1372 during the 87th Texas Legislative Session. If an abusive partner is the account holder of a family cell phone plan, survivors who apply for a family violence protective order can ask the court for wireless separation, the rights to transfer their own cell phone number and their children’s cell phone numbers to a new account.

Digital safety exists when someone can access devices, accounts, and the internet, maintain control over their own devices, accounts, technology, and exist online without limitation or fear.⁷⁸ As Aaliyah, La’Shekia, and Maria’s deaths demonstrate, online abuse, threats, and harassment are not just disruptive and unsettling in digital spaces, they represent the dangerousness of abusive relationships and the potential for lethal violence. Understanding the lethality risk indicators and digital abuse, we can mitigate these risks by supporting survivors in accessing digital spaces safely and holding those accountable who misuse technology to abuse, threaten, monitor and control their partners.

78 EndTAB, <https://endtab.org/>

Methodology

HISTORY

TCFV has recorded, honored, and published the names of women killed by their intimate partners each year for over 43 years. For the last thirteen years, TCFV has published *Honoring Texas Victims: Family Violence Fatalities* annually to share the stories of Texans killed by their intimate partners.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In June and July 2022, TCFV hosted three Honoring Texas Victims Stakeholder Sessions with a multi-disciplinary group to strengthen homicide prevention efforts. TCFV invited 50 stakeholders, with 37 participants representing the criminal and legal systems, local domestic violence organizations, culturally specific community organizations, and one research institution.

TCFV contracted with Collective Capacity Consulting, LLC (CCC) to support the design and facilitation of the Honoring Texas Victims Stakeholder Sessions. Each session began with acknowledgments of the complexity of domestic violence, the varying perspectives in the virtual space, and a commitment to respect the confidentiality of the unpublished narratives. TCFV provided an overview of five themes that arose in the existing data, followed by facilitated

discussions by CCC to gather best practices, strategies, and recommendations. The themes included cases involving: separation and help-seeking, homicide-suicide, pregnancy, Winter Storm Uri, and firearms. After the session, TCFV hosted an optional 30-minute session to offer space to debrief or participate in a grounding exercise.

While the stakeholder discussions illuminated the limitation of resources and overwhelming needs in the field, the stakeholders provided ideas for future steps for the Honoring Texas Victims report and analysis and community specific advocacy. Stakeholders shared ways local communities currently address intimate partner abuse and stressed the need for greater focus on new and innovative strategies. The 2021 Honoring Texas Victims Report includes summaries and recommendations from the stakeholder sessions.

While the stakeholder discussions illuminated the limitation of resources and overwhelming needs in the field, the stakeholders provided ideas for future steps for the Honoring Texas Victims report and analysis and community specific advocacy. Stakeholders shared ways local communities currently address intimate partner abuse and stressed the need for greater focus on new and innovative strategies. The 2021 Honoring Texas Victims Report includes summaries and recommendations from the stakeholder sessions.

REPORT PARAMETERS

The 2021 Report includes intimate partner homicides from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021, for cases in which the perpetrators have been charged with murder or manslaughter or ruled homicide-suicide. Due to the publication date of the Report, TCFV includes cases with closed investigations by August 31, 2022. Cases are included if 1) the homicide victim and perpetrator were previously or currently in an intimate relationship of any length, 2) the victim was killed by a person who stalked or actively pursued a relationship, even if the victim did not engage in a relationship, 3) the intimate partner violence victim was killed, and 4) criminal charges are brought against the perpetrator.

TCFV acknowledges that not all intimate partner violence related homicides are included within the report parameters. In situations where the intimate partner violence victim is not killed but family members, bystanders, law enforcement responding or others are killed, those cases are not documented in this report. Additionally, cases are excluded if criminal charges are not brought against the perpetrator or if they are dismissed before the publication date.

RESEARCH PROCESS

TCFV conducts key steps to collect homicide data and case information. TCFV identifies cases that meet the report parameters by:

- Reviewing the Texas Department of Public Safety's Supplemental Homicide Report in the Crime in Texas portal
- Monitoring press media and social media in all 254 Texas counties
- Reviewing law enforcement and County and District Attorneys' communication releases
- Researching homicide cases with local and state partners
- Confirming the accuracy of information through law enforcement, County and District Attorneys, the Department of Public Safety, victim advocates and family violence service providers
- Partnering with an attorney with family violence expertise to conduct a legal review of the case narratives.

REPORT TERMINOLOGY

The terms "family violence," "domestic violence," and "intimate partner violence" are used in the public vernacular interchangeably. This report focuses on intimate partner homicides and intimate partner homicide-suicides and uses the terminology "domestic violence" and "family violence" because they are used more broadly in criminal legal and advocacy frameworks. The State of Texas uses the term "family violence" in criminal legal settings and other statutory language to describe the violence that occurs not only between dating or intimate partners but also members of the same household or family. When referring to people accused of homicides, TCFV uses the terms "perpetrator," "offender," or "suspect," and when referring to people who harm their partners, TCFV uses the term "abusive partners" most frequently. When incorporating contributions from external authors, TCFV may allow for additional terminology outside these terms.

TCFV carefully reviews case details and strives to represent each victim both accurately and respectfully and may update information upon request when notified of documented errors. Please contact info@tcfv.org if you would like to offer feedback on a specific case.

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

THIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN BY THE TEXAS COUNCIL ON FAMILY VIOLENCE.

TCFV acknowledges with appreciation the support from professionals around the state who responded to our requests for information and thereby ensured the accuracy of this report. TCFV deeply appreciates the time and commitment of the 37 stakeholders from across the state who participated in the Honoring Texas Victims Stakeholder Sessions.

TCFV Staff Authors:

Mikisha Hooper
Sarah Hilderbrand, LMSW
Maria José Angelelli, MA

External Authors:

Rita Flores
Kelsey McKay, JD
Jessica Moreno, LMSW

Additional Writing, Analysis, and Review:

Morayo Akande, MPH
Diane Bocklage
Anna Belle Burleson, Survivor
Krista Del Gallo
Barbra Grimmer
Audrey Hernandez
Deviba Jadeja, MA
Kate Kerns
Tiffany Lee, MA
Samantha McWhinney
Lisa Nichols, LPC-S
Roy Rios
Elyssa Schroeder, LMSW
David Scott, Ph. D.
Claire Sudolsky
Gloria Aguilera Terry
Molly Voyles
William West, MPH, CHES

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The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this program are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the above agencies.

TEXAS COUNCIL ON FAMILY VIOLENCE PROMOTES SAFE AND
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS BY SUPPORTING SERVICE PROVIDERS,
FACILITATING STRATEGIC PREVENTION EFFORTS, AND CREATING
OPPORTUNITIES FOR FREEDOM FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

