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'1 domestic violence death is too many; 34 is horrific'



Some of the victims in the 2015 Femicide Report are: (top row, left to right) Joseph Kroll, Krista Fisherman, Lanaea Harrison, Linda Boehme and Esther Muchina-Dobie. (middle row, left to right) Samirria White, Ayan Abdi Abdulahi, Carol Lee Alexander-Pickart, Lisa Isham and Addison Hillard. (bottom row, left to right) Anthony Morgan, Elizabeth Gregg, Krista Ambers, Kelly Anderson and April Erickson (also known as April Tennin). (Courtesy Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women) See more photos of victims below.

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When 22 women were killed in domestic violence in the state last year, 13 of the alleged perpetrators had previously been accused of abuse, the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women said Tuesday. Many of the men's past domestic violence-related charges had been dismissed.

The significant criminal histories of the accused were among the coalition's findings in its annual report about domestic violence homicides. Last year, the group counted at least 34 people who they said lost their lives to domestic violence.

"For 27 years, the number of victims of domestic violence homicide has remained in the double-digits — an unacceptable fact," said Becky Smith, the coalition's public awareness program manager. "One is too many; 34 is horrific."

Of the victims, 22 women and three men were allegedly killed by a current or former intimate partner; the other nine were friends, bystanders, family members or others trying to intervene, the coalition said.

"Today we collectively mourn the loss of our family, friends, colleagues and those we may not have known but choose not to forget," Smith said. "Today we reflect on what we have learned and how to create opportunities for change, so that together we can live violence free."

[The Femicide Report](#) is based on news reports and details from police, prosecutors, courts, battered women's programs and those who knew the victims. There were 23 such deaths in 2014, according to the report.

Key findings of the 2015 Femicide Report included:

Leaving increases risk

Leaving an abusive relationship, often increases the risk of harm. That's because batterers may " 'step up' their efforts to control or intimidate the victim," the report said.

Eight of the 22 women killed last year had left or were attempting to leave. That was the case for Eugenia Rae "Gina" Tallman, who'd confided in a relative she was planning to leave her husband, the coalition said. Prosecutors charged Tallman's husband, Gonzalo Galvan, with fatally shooting her and her 15-year-old daughter, Victoria Alvarez, in their South Minneapolis home in September.

Past threats to kill the victim

Threats "are among the most reliable indicators of lethality and are the most often overlooked by the criminal and civil justice systems," the report said. At least three of the women killed had been subject to past threats.

Before April Erickson (also known as April Tennin) was found shot in her Maplewood home in August, she'd told people her husband had threatened to kill her. Her 12-year-old son knew, too, telling police that his stepfather had said, "If I ever kill your mom, I'm going to kill the rest of you so there are no witnesses." Prosecutors have charged Erickson's husband, Larry Todd Tennin, with murder.

Firearm use

Eleven of the 22 women were killed with firearms, consistent with previous years' findings that they're used in about half of domestic violence homicides. In at least 36 percent of last year's cases, the alleged perpetrators were barred from possessing a firearm at the time of the homicide.

"We know that domestic-violence firearms prohibitions are only as effective as their implementation," said Rebekah Moses, the coalition's public policy program manager. The coalition is calling for better record-keeping in all domestic violence crimes about how alleged perpetrators got access to firearms.

Past domestic violence-related charges

Collectively, the 13 alleged perpetrators with criminal histories had 76 domestic-violence-related charges against them. Four were pending at the time the women were killed. Of the remaining 72 charges, only 19 had resulted in convictions and the rest had been dismissed, the coalition said.

"We need to look beyond convictions — if convictions alone worked, we wouldn't be here today," said Mark Ostrem, Olmsted County attorney, who is also Minnesota County Attorneys Association president. He said prosecutors ought to "look in depth into any patterns that emerge" and they should work to ensure offenders are ordered to complete Batterers' Intervention Programming.

Disproportionate impact on women of color

Sixty percent of last year's victims were women of color, and five of the 22 women were Native American.

"We have to ask, 'Why are so many of my sisters being taken?'" said Patti Larsen, Sacred Hoop Tribal Coalition director.

She said she wonders about factors, such as: women remaining with their batterers because they fear becoming homeless or a child-protective agency taking custody of their children, or law enforcement not believing a woman because of her own criminal history or because she has an addiction.

The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women is suggesting that response teams of criminal justice and other agencies be examined to ensure they reflect a community's diversity.

Economic stability

One of the most common reasons domestic-violence victims stay with or return to an abusive partner is lack of financial resources, Smith said. Court records show that 55 percent of the women killed last year had "faced economic instability in the past," she said.

While there are coordinated response teams between the criminal justice system and victim advocacy groups, the coalition says others should be brought into the discussions, such as landlords, housing courts, housing providers and county economic assistance programs.

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Some of the victims in the 2015 Femicide Report are: (top row, left to right) Karen Short, Cole Short, Madison Short, Brooklyn Short, Grace Van Norman and Ramona Turner. (middle row, left to right) Eugenia Tallman, Victoria Alvarez, Flowera Ransom, Steven Sandberg, Julie Hildreth and Rose Downwind (bottom row, left to right) David Allen Madison, Adelle Jensen, Thomas Jenkins, Dominic Jasper and Kavonta Pratt (Courtesy Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women)

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