

Family Violence

Death Review Committee

2018- 2019
Annual Report

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Family Violence Death Review Committee 2018-2019 Annual Report

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Message from the Chair of the Family Violence Death Review Committee

In Alberta, between January 1 and December 31, 2018, there were 17 family violence incidents that resulted in the death of 23 Albertans (20 victims and three perpetrators). The rate of family violence deaths in the province has remained relatively unchanged in recent years, despite the collective, ongoing work that is being done to address family violence. The Family Violence Death Review Committee (the Committee) has been working to support the reduction of family violence since becoming operational in 2014.

In 2018, the Committee provided two Case Review Reports to the Minister of Community and Social Services for public release. To date, the Committee has submitted eight in-depth examinations of individual cases to the Minister. These eight cases have generated 38 distinct recommendations to government to help improve services and supports and to prevent future tragedies.

The last year's case reviews continue to demonstrate the importance of public education and awareness about family violence, as well as the need to work together to prevent family violence. We hope to improve public and professional responses to potential signs of family violence, and promote that family violence prevention is everyone's responsibility. The Committee's recommendations also encourage continued collaboration and coordination of services in order to address family violence. Family violence is not an isolated issue; no single person can prevent family violence on their own. For that reason, we must continue to work together as a community to help prevent family violence and further tragedies because of family violence.

To that end, the Committee's work is made possible through supportive relationships with Government of Alberta ministries and community partners. The Committee would like to thank the Ministries of Health, Children's Services, Community and Social Services, and Justice and Solicitor General. We would also like to thank the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police and Alberta's Police Services throughout the province for their excellent work and for their help, support and cooperation. I look forward to continuing to work with the committee in developing recommendations to prevent family violence as well as the staff of the Secretariat who are so dedicated in the work we do.

Dr. Allen Benson, LLD (Hon.) Chair

Executive Summary

Alberta's Family Violence Death Review Committee is a multi-disciplinary, cross-sector group reporting to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The Committee derives its authority from the *Protection Against Family Violence Act (PAFVA)*. The role of the Committee is to review incidents of family violence resulting in deaths and to provide advice and recommendations respecting the prevention and reduction of family violence.

The Committee reviews all family violence related deaths in Alberta; however, not every incident is examined through an in-depth case review. When conducting in-depth reviews, Secretariat staff research and compile all relevant information related to the death and the circumstances in which it occurred and create a case review report. The committee breaks out into smaller pods for face-to-face meetings to discuss the case review reports and identify the presence or absence of systemic issues. The analysis and findings from the pods are then presented to the Committee, who then makes recommendations to the Minister for effective prevention/intervention approaches that support the reduction and prevention of family violence deaths.

The 2018/2019 Annual Report provides an overview of the Committee's membership, structure and accountability. The report also explains how case reviews are completed, the processes used to complete the reviews and the resulting recommendations.

The 2018/2019 Annual Report also provides a detailed examination of information collected on the 17 family violence incidents in 2018 that resulted in 23 deaths (20 victims and three perpetrators). Key findings from this report include:

- In the majority of incidents, 60 per cent occurred while the partners were a couple.
- Victim's ages range from young children to older seniors.
- Two incidents involved multiple homicides and three involved murder-suicides.
- Eleven of the incidents occurred in major metropolitan areas of Calgary and Edmonton.
- Family violence remains a gendered crime; 80 per cent of victims were female; 90 per cent of perpetrators were male.
- In the majority of family violence deaths, 69 per cent continue to involve the use of a weapon.
- The majority of perpetrators and victims were young adults between the ages of 20-29.

Introduction and Overview of the Committee

In 2009, Community and Social Services (formerly Human Services) led a cross-ministry committee to set the foundation for a mechanism to review family violence deaths in Alberta. Subsequently, a working group of community partners and police agencies was formed to provide options for an operational structure for the Committee. In 2013, legislation was passed that established the Committee under the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA) <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/p27.pdf>.

The Committee became operational in February 2014. The work of the Committee is supported by a secretariat of staff from Community and Social Services.

Committee Membership

The Committee is a multi-disciplinary group of 10 family violence experts. Members represent various sectors—including legal services, law enforcement, sexual assault services, victim advocacy and community organizations. On October 31, 2016, the first term of the Committee ended. The second term began when members were appointed in June 2017. The second term of the Committee is made up of four new members and six returning members.

The 2018 Committee is made up of the following members:

- **Committee Chair: Dr. Allen Benson**, Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- **Ms. Sylvia Kasper QC**, former Crown Prosecutor and Manager of the Calgary Domestic Violence Unit.
- **Superintendent Donnan McKenna**, RCMP
- **Superintendent Cliff O'Brien**, Calgary Police Service
- **Ms. Karen Pease**, Executive Director, A Safe Place Women's Shelter
- **Ms. Debra Tomlinson**, Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services
- **Ms. Monique Auffrey**, CEO, Discovery House, Calgary
- **Inspector Carlos Cardoso**, Edmonton Police Service
- **Mr. David Grauwiler**, Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division
- **Ms. Salimah Walji-Shivji**, Vice President and General Counsel, AgeCare

The Committee also utilizes Ex-Officio members when cases require expertise on a specific subject matter. These temporary members are subject to all governing Legislation and Code of Conduct as standing members.

Mandate

The Committee derives its authority from the PAFVA and has the responsibility to review family violence deaths in Alberta. The Committee provides expertise to contribute to evidence-informed policy, legislation and practice, through their analysis and recommendations from the

review of family violence related deaths. The Committee reviews information and data for all family violence deaths that occur in the province, including the circumstances surrounding the deaths, to identify family violence trends and risk factors. The Committee also completes in-depth reviews of family violence-related deaths and makes recommendations aimed at preventing deaths and reducing family violence in general.

Definitions and Methodology

Under the Canadian Criminal Code, a person commits homicide when they cause the death of a human being, directly or indirectly, by any means. The Committee considers homicides to be family violence-related if:

- The victim(s) and perpetrator(s) were spouses or partners, former spouses or former partners, adults with children in common, or adults/ teens who had been in a dating relationship.
- The death was a homicide of a person other than the intimate partner and it occurred within the context of family violence. This would include the homicide of a bystander or someone who attempted to protect a family violence victim from harm.
- The homicide was a child death that occurred as an extension of or in response to ongoing abuse between adult intimate partners.

Source of Information

The Committee compiles summary data from the total number of police-reported family violence homicides committed in Alberta in a given year. It is important to note that the number of police reported family violence homicides in a year may change as police progress through their investigations. The Committee receives data about family violence deaths from the 11 different police agencies in Alberta on a yearly basis. The Committee then reviews the police reported data and determines whether the data meets the definition of family violence related deaths, as set out in PAFVA and the criteria established by the Committee, as noted above.

Confidentiality

Under PAFVA, the Committee must not disclose any identifying information about the individual whose death is the subject of review, or any other individual involved in the death, in publicly released reports. Additionally, committee members take an Oath of Confidentiality during their tenure. In accordance with provincial legislation, and in order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved, the names of victims and perpetrators are not made public and only non-identifying statistics are provided.

Code of Conduct

In accordance with the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, which governs all agencies, boards and commissions, the Committee is guided by an Oath of Conduct and established Mandate and Roles. The Committee's Code of Conduct is reviewed by the Office of the Ethics

Commissioner before it is approved by the Minister of Community and Social Services. The Code of Conduct can be found online at <http://alberta.ca/ags-ministries.cfm#Human>.

Operating Principles of the Committee

Systems-Focused

The Committee strives to understand how systems and communities are effective in responding to family violence victims and perpetrators, and to identify whether barriers exist. The Committee is not a fault-finding body. PAFVA prevents the Committee from making any findings of legal responsibility or any conclusion of law. Through thorough review of individual cases, the Committee examines how systems respond to victims of family violence and perpetrators. The objectives of in-depth reviews are to identify:

- Barriers to safety and support-seeking behaviours;
- How institutions can discourage or encourage an informed and appropriate response to family violence;
- Gaps in training, policy, practice, resources, communication and collaboration; and
- How programs and policies of government and agencies may need to adapt and change.

Prevention-Focused

The Committee's in-depth review process looks at what conditions led to family violence deaths and how the death itself may have been prevented. Members examine:

- What factors could have prevented the violence from escalating or prevented the death from occurring?
- What conditions shaped the victims' and perpetrators' options?
- What systems were available and accessed by the victims and perpetrators?
- How did the systems respond to the victims and perpetrators?

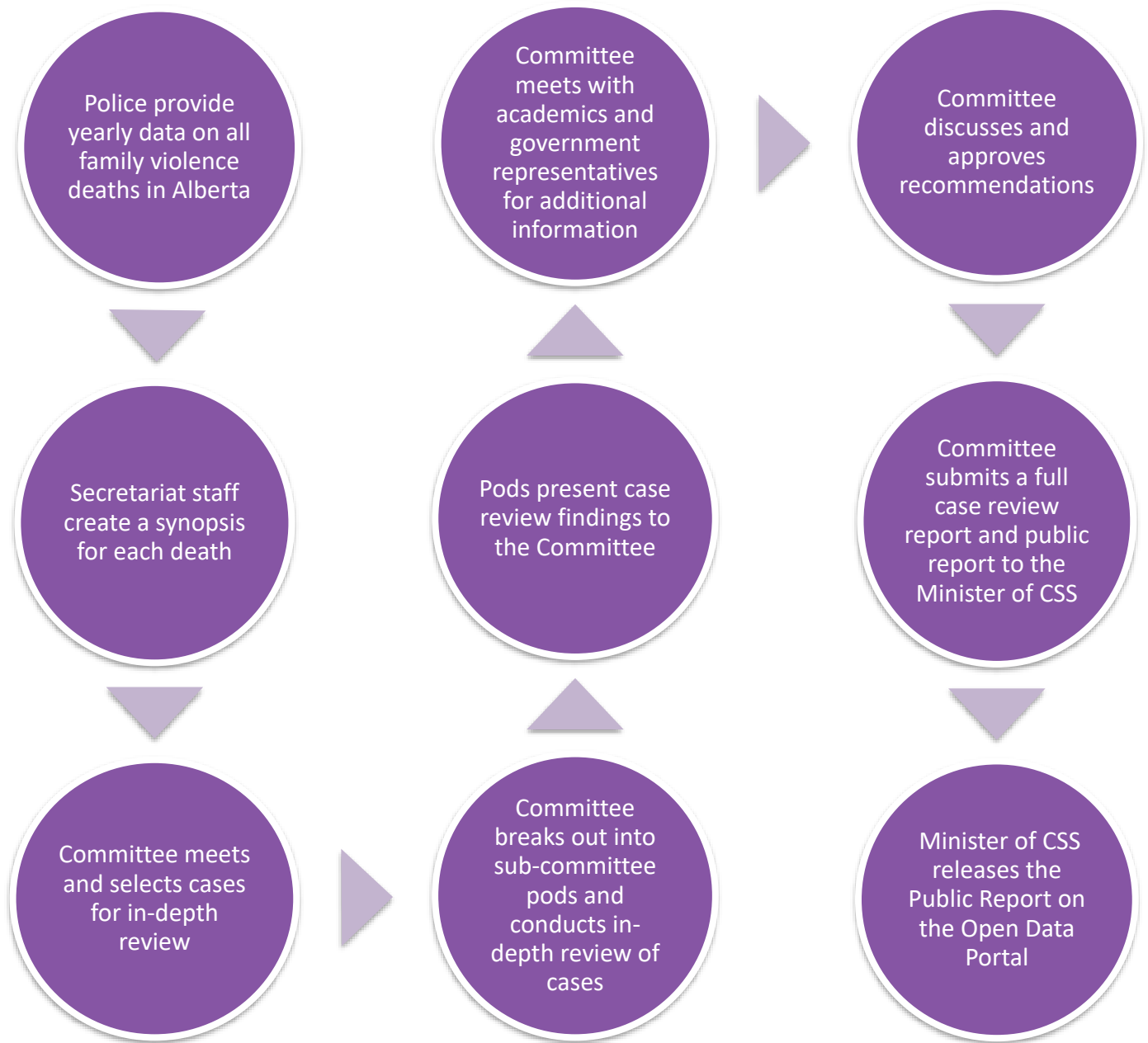
The Committee uses these questions to develop recommendations targeting systemic change to prevent future tragedies.

Data-Driven

In addition to the information learned from conducting in-depth case reviews, the Committee analyzes data on family violence deaths throughout Alberta to provide a comprehensive picture of the prevalence and circumstances surrounding family violence deaths in the province.

In-Depth Case Reviews

Process Map



Method for In-Depth Case Reviews

The Committee reviews all family violence related deaths in Alberta; however, not every incident is examined through an in-depth case review. Before the Committee can conduct an in-depth review of a case, any criminal investigations or proceedings must be concluded.

Cases that are eligible for an in-depth review:	Cases that are ineligible for review:
Homicides and murder-suicides by an intimate partner (current or former).	Homicide committed by an intimate partner where there is an ongoing police investigation.
Friends, family, new partners and bystanders killed by the perpetrator in the context of intimate partner violence.	The perpetrator is facing criminal charges and has not yet been tried or sentenced.
Children killed by the perpetrator in the context of intimate partner violence (as retaliation intended to punish or hurt the other partner).	Suicide death of perpetrator who was unsuccessful in a homicide attempt against their intimate partner (near misses).
Abuser killed by victim in self-defense.	Homicide of a family or a household member not related to intimate partner violence.
Abuser killed by victim's friends, family member, or bystander intervening.	Child abuse homicides.
Abuser killed by law enforcement while responding to a family violence related homicide.	Death by suicide of a domestic violence victim.

When conducting in-depth reviews, the Committee identifies the presence or absence of systemic issues and makes recommendations to the Minister for effective prevention/intervention approaches that support the reduction and prevention of family violence deaths. All recommendations are made using the **SMART** Criteria.

SMART Criteria guides the formation of recommendations and stands for:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic/Reliable
Timely

Completed In-Depth Case Reviews

When the Committee completes an in-depth case review, a report is submitted to the Minister of Community and Social Services and subsequently released to the public. The report focuses on the recommendations and findings only, as legislation prohibits the release of identifying information to respect the privacy of the individuals involved. In 2018/2019 two reports were submitted to the Minister. Four reports that had been previously submitted (in 2017/2018) to the Minister were released publicly.

To date, eight in-depth examinations of individual cases were submitted to the Minister and released publicly. These eight cases have generated 38 distinct recommendations to government to help improve services and supports and to prevent future tragedies.

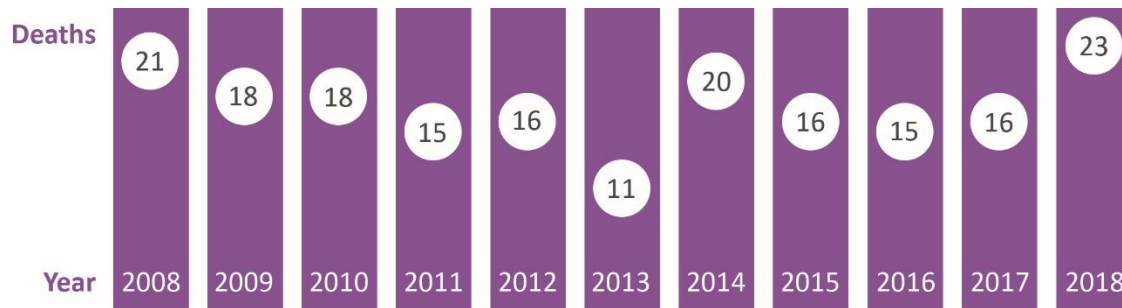
Recommendations from previous reports can be found online at:

<https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-death-review-committee.aspx#toc-3ouupdate>.

2018 Family Violence Statistics and Findings

In 2018, there were 23 deaths (20 victims and 3 perpetrators) due to family violence. Between 2008 and 2018 there have been 189 deaths in Alberta due to family violence as set out by the Committee's criteria.

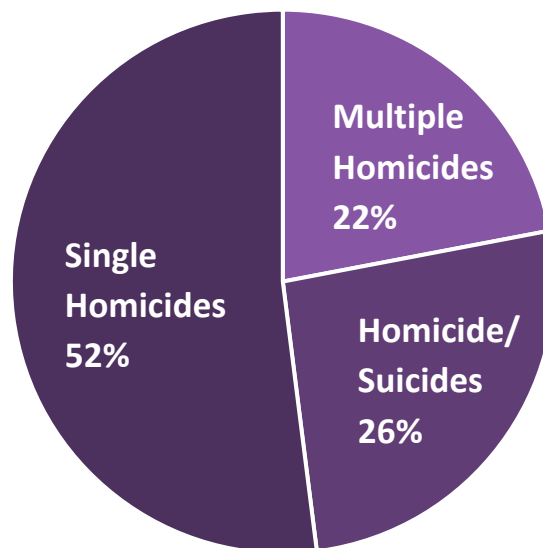
Family Violence Deaths in Alberta by Year (2008-2018)



Characteristics of Family Violence Deaths in Alberta

Fifty-two per cent of family violence deaths were single homicides. Twenty-six per cent were homicide/suicide, and twenty-two per cent were multiple homicides.

Types of Family Violence Deaths 2018



2018 Summary of Deaths by Region

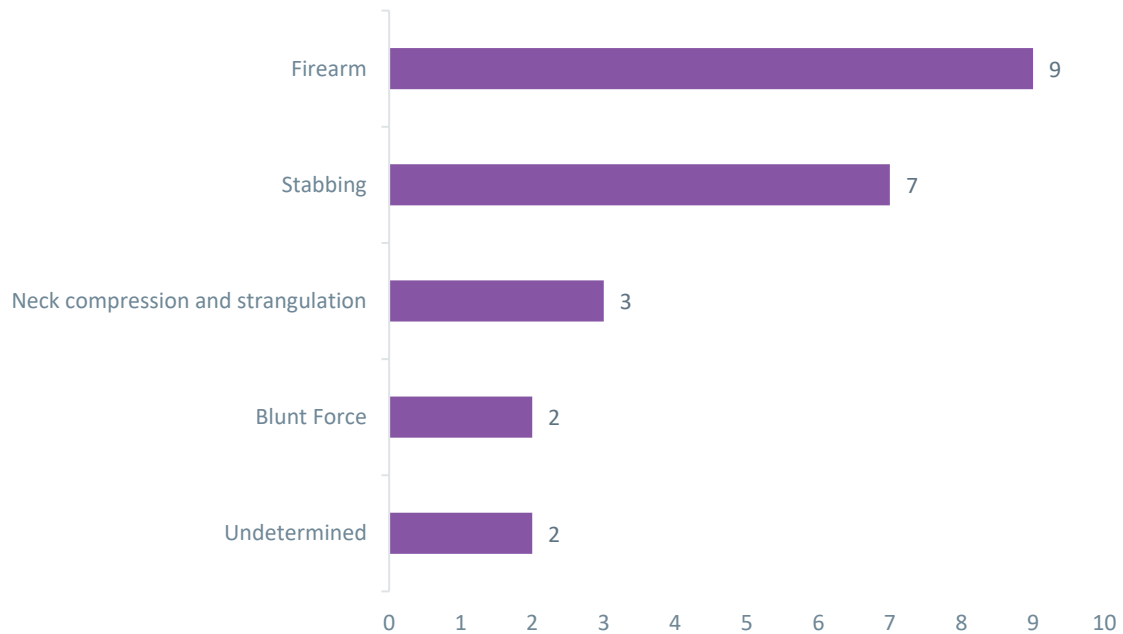
Alberta's major metropolitan cities had the highest rates of police reported family violence deaths.



2018 Family Violence Deaths in Alberta

The highest number of victims of family violence deaths were women aged 20-29, who were in a relationship with their abuser at the time of their deaths and were killed with a weapon.

2018 Causes of Death



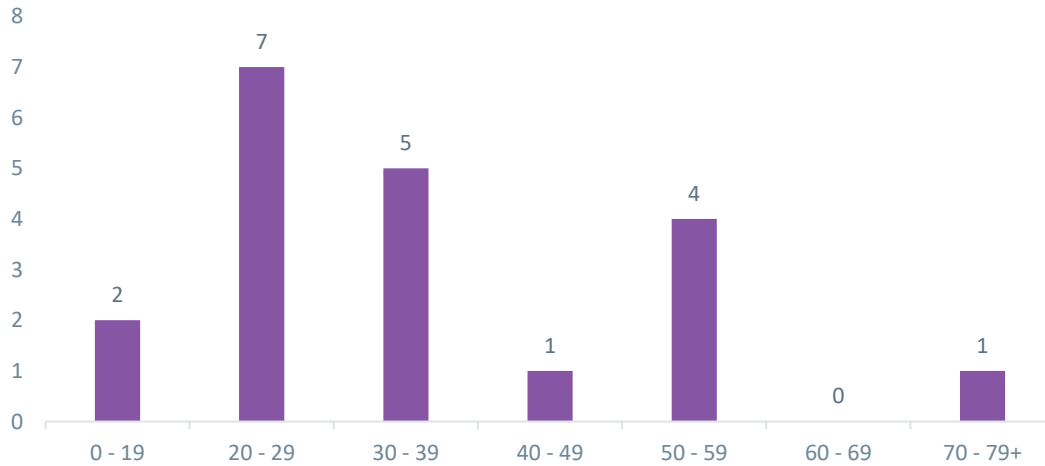
The majority of all family violence deaths involved a weapon (firearm/knife). Sixteen deaths involved a weapon (nine due to firearms and seven due to stabbings), three involved neck compression and strangulation; two deaths resulted from blunt force injuries; and two deaths were undetermined (the medical examiner was unable to identify an official cause of death).

Of the 23 family violence deaths, 20 were victims and three were perpetrators who committed murder/suicide. The 20 victims of family violence deaths were comprised of 16 females and four males.

Analysis of Victims of Family Violence Death in 2018

The majority of victims of family violence death were women aged 20-29 who were in a relationship with the perpetrator at the time of their death.

2018 Age of Victims



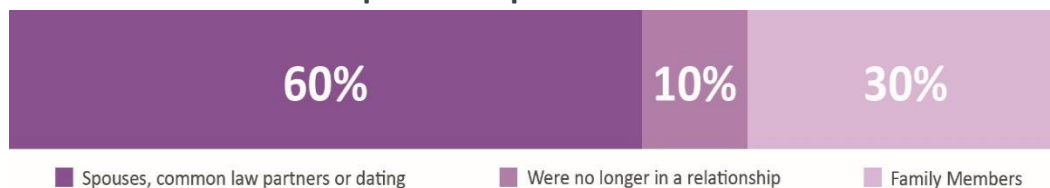
*the two deaths in 0-19 were children under 18 years of age.

2018 Family Violence Deaths by Gender



The majority of victims were in a current relationship with their abuser at the time of their death: 60 per cent were spouses, common law partners or dating partners, 10 per cent were no longer in a relationship, 30 per cent were family members,

2018 Victims Relationship with Perpetrator



Analysis of Perpetrators of Family Violence

The majority of family violence deaths were perpetrated by men aged 20-29 who used a weapon against his current partner.

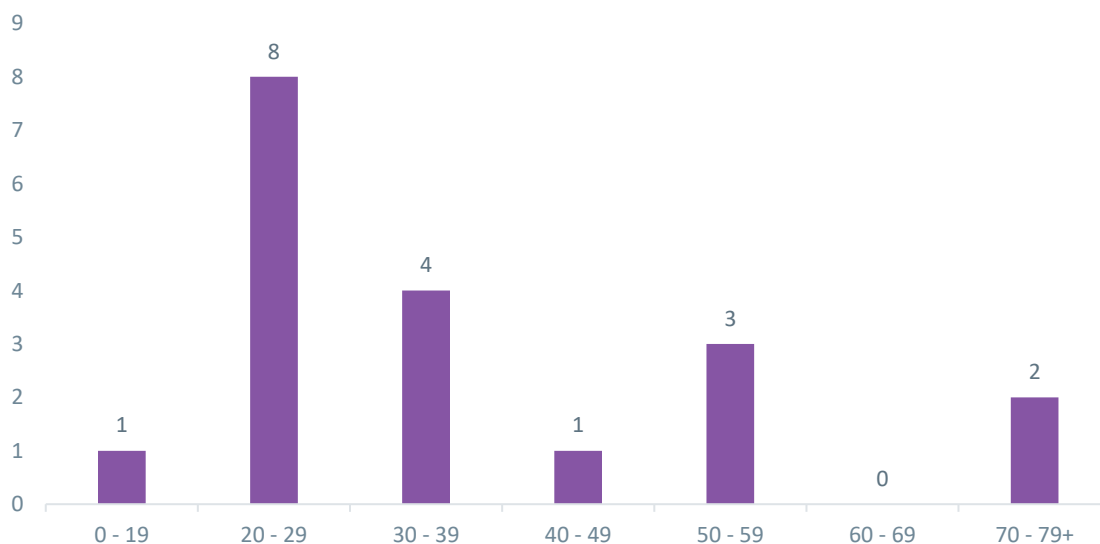
In 2018, 90 per cent of perpetrators were men and 10 per cent were women.



In 2018, men perpetrated all of the multiple homicides and two of the three murder suicides that occurred in Alberta.



Age of Perpetrators



Conclusion

In 2018, Alberta had 17 family violence incidents that resulted in 23 deaths (20 victims and three perpetrators). The 23 victims range from children under the age of 18 to older seniors. More deaths this year involved the use of firearms than previous years, and occurred in the larger urban areas of Edmonton and Calgary. Family violence continues to be a gendered crime with the majority of perpetrators being younger males and the majority of victims being younger women. The majority of perpetrators were also in a relationship with their victim at the time of the murder.

Family violence is a complex issue that effects everyone. As the Committee continues to review cases, we remain committed to making recommendations to prevent family violence. We know that although family violence is complex, it is preventable. However, we must all work together to be successful in preventing family violence. We look forward to working with government and community partners to advance family violence prevention in Alberta.