

# ACT Domestic and Family Violence Death Review

## 2023 Summary



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**The ACT Domestic and Family Violence Death Review (Death Review) aims to better understand domestic and family violence (DFV) by learning from what went wrong in previous cases to prevent future DFV deaths in the ACT.**

The 2023 biennial report is the first report of the Death Review. It looked at 12 cases of people who were killed because of DFV in the ACT between 2000 and 2022, with most cases in the report occurring before 2015. The next biennial report will be conducted in 2025.

These 12 cases revealed the 9 following themes:

- 1. In nearly all the cases, the perpetrator used coercive control.** Coercive control is when the perpetrator tries to control the victim. This can be by limiting their freedom, stalking them and controlling their access to money. In most cases, the perpetrator used coercive control even when they didn't use physical violence.
- 2. Most victims did not seek support from DFV support services, but relied mainly on help from families and friends.** While some victims did seek help from services, the coercive control they were experiencing was not recognised.
- 3. The murders were not a result of an increase in physical violence.** Instead, perpetrators used more serious forms of coercive control in the lead-up to the murder.
- 4. Most deaths by DFV occur between a couple where one person is the victim and the other is the perpetrator.** The time around a couple separating was very dangerous because the perpetrator felt like they were losing control over the victim. After separation, the risk of serious harm or death is even higher.
- 5. Many perpetrators had mental health or substance abuse issues, increasing the risk of harm to the victim.** This also made it difficult for support services to help the perpetrator in a holistic way.

# Summary (continued)



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**6. Most perpetrators did not accept responsibility or show remorse.** They blamed others for their actions or tried to cover up the murder.

**7. Often, perpetrators or victims had children, but the children were not usually seen as victims and did not receive specific help.** Also, half of the perpetrators had seen or experienced DFV as children, showing a cycle of abuse may continue through generations.

**8. Many of the perpetrators and victims came from non-English speaking backgrounds.** Many of these victims sought help from their cultural/faith communities or leaders.

**9. Victims tried to fight and resist the abuse in different ways, such as lying to the perpetrator, and physically defending themselves and their children.** Sometimes families and friends were the only ones who knew what was happening when victims were most at risk.

The report recommended several ways to try to reduce the risk of harm:

**1. Promote greater understanding of how coercive control works and how it can be recognised.**

This could be supported through a better and more accurate definition of DFV and specialised training for frontline services.

**2. Increase government, sector and community understanding of the different factors that increase the victim's risk of harm.** These can include separation, perpetrator mental illness and substance abuse.

**3. Design and provide tools for frontline agencies to better assess risk to keep victim-survivors safe and provide more targeted services** to meet the needs of children and young people experiencing DFV.

**The ACT Government is reviewing these findings and will respond to the report recommendations in the second half of 2024.**

*Domestic and family violence is a confronting issue and could be triggering to some people. If reading this summary has caused concern or distress, please seek support if you need it. Services include:*

1800 RESPECT P: 1800 737 732

Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) P: (02) 6280 0900

Full Stop Australia P: 1800 385 578

Victim Support ACT (VSACT)

P: 1800 822 272

***If you or someone else is in immediate danger, please phone Triple Zero (000).***