

Statewide High-Lethality Trends Assessment Findings for Legislators

Project Summary: ICADV conducted a statewide assessment measuring trends for high-lethality for domestic violence cases by surveying domestic violence advocates, nurses & medical staff, prosecutors, and governmental victim assistance staff. We asked respondents to track trends by 6 key evidence-based indicators for lethality in domestic violence. Below are key findings.

Key Findings

1. Respondents across different roles report increases in multiple high-lethality indicators.

- a. Nearly 70% report an increase in high-lethality cases.¹
- b. Nearly 70% report an increase in non-fatal strangulation—this is the most predictive indicator for domestic violence fatalities.²
- c. Nearly 70% report an increase in escalating physical violence and assault severity.³
- d. Nearly 60% of respondents report an increase in survivors reporting threats by their partner to kill them and/or their children.⁴

2. Respondents across systems and roles are consistently describing increased strain on resources to address domestic violence such as staffing, capacity, and shelter & housing access. They report adapting their practices and services in response to increasing high-lethality cases, including increasing cross-system coordination, but note this does not resolve lack of resources.

- a. “High-lethality cases over the past two years have significantly impacted our work, increasing both the intensity and complexity of the services we provide. We are seeing more clients facing immediate, life-threatening danger, which requires rapid safety planning, higher staff engagement, and more coordination with community partners.” – DV Advocate
- b. “It requires more attention, as it should. However, that requires more resources that we don't have because it pulls me away from other cases in order to handle these cases correctly.” – Prosecutor
- c. “More injuries, more complicated patients, higher need for shelters, more concern for children.” – Nurse/Medical Staff

3. Respondents report increased fear, trauma, and emotional strain affecting both survivors and themselves.

¹ 69.06%

² 69.82%

³ 69.37%

⁴ 59.91%

- a. “These cases also take an emotional toll on staff, contributing to burnout and secondary trauma, while stretching already limited resources and highlighting the urgent need for expanded capacity and support.” – DV Advocate
- b. “I feel helpless when trying to provide resources because they are limited.” – Nurse/Medical Staff

Why This Matters: Supporting survivors and their children to safety takes intensive service, coordination, and resources across multiple systems. Key domestic violence professionals across Indiana, including prosecutors, domestic violence advocates, and emergency medical staff, are reporting increasingly dangerous and complex high-lethality cases that require greater staffing capacity, housing and shelter access, comprehensive safety planning, and cross-system coordination to support safe outcomes.

At the same time, these professionals across different systems are reporting increasing strain on those resources while still answering the call to serve survivors and families with what they have. Absent continued support and investment, systems can only stretch so far. As Indiana experiences a record-high in domestic violence fatalities, professionals are warning that survivors and their children are facing increasingly dangerous situations and these systems need support to continue holding the line for survivor and community safety.

Sample

223 totals responses

- Prosecutors – 42
- Victim Advocates (prosecutor’s office or law enforcement agency) – 24
- DV Advocates (non-government) – 106
- Nurses & Medical Staff – 51

Statewide Representation

All 92 counties were represented in the statewide assessment.

- Nearly 2 out of 3 non-governmental domestic violence advocates serve multiple counties in Indiana. Those serving multiple counties average 3 additional counties a week in addition to their primary serve county, demonstrating domestic violence advocates serving Hoosiers across the state of Indiana.

Length of Work Experience

- Nearly 3 out of 4 respondents⁵ have served in their current roles for 3+ years.

⁵ 71.75%