A HOMICIDE-SUICIDE IN MASSACHUSETTS

The example below tells the story of a typical homicide-suicide in Massachusetts, but to ensure confidentiality, it is not the story of an actual death. The example was created to illustrate the violent death data typically collected and linked in the Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System (MAVDRS).

**DEATH CERTIFICATE**

- **Homicide victim:** 43-year-old white female
- **Suicide victim:** 52-year-old white male

**MEDICAL EXAMINER**

- Female died from 4 gunshots to torso
- Male died from 1 gunshot to head

**LAW ENFORCEMENT**

- Co-worker stated victim had broken up with suspect 10 days ago
- No prior reports of domestic violence

**DEATH CERTIFICATE**

The victim was a 43-year-old white female. She was injured and died in her residence from gunshot wounds. The manner of death was homicide. She was an office secretary. Another victim was a 52-year-old white male. He died at the scene from a gunshot wound to the head. The manner of death was suicide. He was a laborer working in construction.

**MEDICAL EXAMINER**

Police responded to the victim’s residence. The victim, a 43-year-old white female, died from 4 gunshot wounds to her torso. A second victim, a 52-year-old white male, was also at the scene. He died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. The male is suspected of killing the female, and then killing himself. The victims were intimate partners.

**TOXICOLOGY**

Both the victim and the boyfriend had negative toxicology results.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT**

When the victim, a 43-year-old white female, did not show up for work, the victim’s co-workers called police to assist in a well-being check. Police responded to the victim’s residence and found her on the floor of the living room with gunshot wounds to her torso. Upon further investigation, police discovered the body of a 52-year-old white male in the rear of the home with a gunshot wound to his head. A co-worker on the scene stated that the deceased male was the victim’s estranged boyfriend. The co-worker stated the victim had broken up with the boyfriend 10 days prior after a relationship of many years.

The victim and the boyfriend had one minor child, a 4-year-old son, between them. The child was not at home at the time of the incident. The child was with his grandmother, the victim’s mother, who lives nearby. The victim’s mother told law enforcement that the victim had complained to her that the boyfriend would get very angry whenever the victim talked about breaking up.

According to police reports, there were no prior incidents of domestic violence reported. Family and neighbors also were unaware of any domestic disturbance between the victim and the boyfriend.
MASSACHUSETTS Violent Death Reporting System
Part of CDC’s National Violent Death Reporting System
Operated by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Injury Surveillance Program
Collecting data since 2003

THE BIG PICTURE

Homicide-suicide incidents are rare but violent events with long-lasting effects on families and communities. From 2003-2007 in Massachusetts, there were 41 homicide-suicide incidents in the state that resulted in 49 homicides and 41 suicides, for a total of 90 deaths, per Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System (MAVDRS) data.

Among the 41 homicide-suicide incidents (in which the fatal injuries were inflicted less than 24 hours apart) during 2003-2007, most were:

- intimate partner violence-related,
- perpetrated by white males,
- involved the use of a firearm,
- did not involve an intoxicated perpetrator,
- had homicide victims who were female and older than all other homicide victims on average, and
- had perpetrators who were known to the homicide victim.

41% homicide-suicide incidents resulted in 49 homicides & 41 suicides (90 deaths)

TRANSLATING DATA INTO ACTION

Capturing new information

Before the MAVDRS, there was no official way to capture information on homicide-suicide incidents because existing surveillance systems were person-based.

- The MAVDRS is incident-based, which enables identification of multiple deaths from the same incident or between victims and suspects, and provides a better understanding of the violent deaths.
- Without the MAVDRS, important differences between homicide-suicides and separate, unrelated homicides or suicides could be missed.

Sharing new information

New information about violent deaths is available through the MAVDRS, and the Injury Surveillance Program has disseminated these findings through 7 annual data reports, 4 special bulletins and many responses to data requests. For example, the program:

- identified and disseminated new findings about an increase in suicides among middle aged white males,
- identified and disseminated new findings about an increase in multiple-victim incidents in general, and particularly among homicide-suicide incidents,
- is tracking the emerging issue of suicide by hydrogen sulfide, which results from mixing household chemicals – chemicals that can produce fumes dangerous to first responders and other people living in the building where an incident occurs;
- analyzed train-related death data for the state suicide prevention program;
- analyzed youth-related violent death data for the governor’s Safe and Successful Youth Program; and
- regularly responds to a variety of data requests from counties, cities and towns.

Improving data quality

Because it double checks data from each source and corrects coding mistakes, the MAVDRS has improved the quality of data from Vital Records, medical examiners and law enforcement.

Improved collaboration

Other benefits of implementing the MAVDRS are improved relationships and data sharing among public health, medical examiners and law enforcement agencies. Improved collaboration with the Boston Police Department has increased the amount of information on circumstances and suspects that the agency shares with the Injury Surveillance Program.

MAVDRS identifies multiple deaths from the same incident, connects victims & suspects
MAVDRS can track emerging issues, e.g. suicide by hydrogen sulfide (household chemicals)
MAVDRS improved data sharing between public health & Boston Police Department

41% homicide-suicide incidents resulted in 49 homicides & 41 suicides (90 deaths)