

Partners to Blame in Half of Female Slayings

By Mary Whitfill

By Neal Simpson
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Victims of domestic violence on the South Shore from 2008 through 2018. Top, from left: Michelle Clarke of Weymouth, Patricia Langely of Rockland, Elizabeth Coyne of Weymouth, Zhen Li, Quincy; bottom, Barbara Tassinari of Abington, Patricia Frois of Marshfield, Anita Clark of Stoughton, Shana Warner of Marshfield.

Roughly 900 women are killed in the U.S. each year by someone who was supposed to love them, statistics that don't appear to be improving after years of domestic violence programs and awareness.

First of two parts.

Michelle Clarke was found in her Weymouth apartment a year ago, dead from what investigators called "sharp trauma."

A year earlier, Zhen Li was run over in the driveway of her Quincy home. Four times.

And earlier this week, Shana Warner, a 48-year-old mother of three was stabbed, shot, dragged behind a car and left for dead on a Marshfield road.

Each of the women, prosecutors say, died in the most extreme act of domestic violence at the hands of someone who was supposed to love her. They are among the roughly 900 women killed in the U.S. each year by a husband, estranged husband, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend. Those "intimate partners," as experts refer to them, are responsible for half of all homicides of women in the country despite decades of work aimed at preventing domestic violence and holding abusers accountable.

"We are in roughly the same place we were 15 years ago," said Toni Troop, spokeswoman for Jane Doe Inc., the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. "There were some years in between with much higher rates and some years with slightly lower rates, but I can't say there is a trend one way or another."

Warner, who prosecutors say was killed by her estranged husband Monday, was the 12th

Massachusetts woman killed so far this year by what investigators described as current or former spouses, domestic partners or boyfriends. Last year, there were 15.

Researchers have long known that women are far more likely to be killed by someone they know than by a stranger, but a study released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that intimate partners are responsible for a larger share of homicides against women than previously thought. While past studies have put the number at 35 or 40 percent, the study of more than 8,000 homicides found slightly over 50 percent were committed by current and former partners. In all, the study identified 4,035 women who had been killed by intimate partners in the decade leading up to 2014.

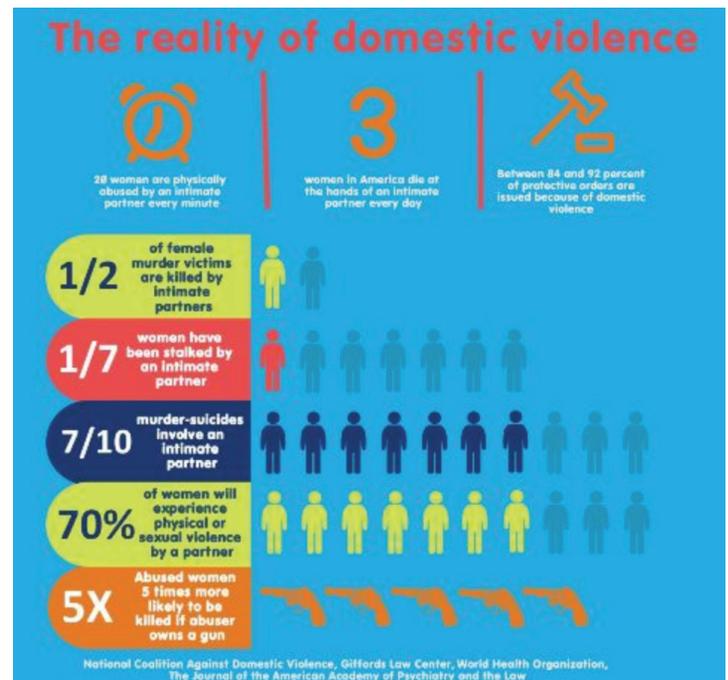
The deaths had little else in common, the study found. Slightly over 11 percent were preceded by violence in the previous month. About 12 percent involved jealousy or a lover's triangle. Almost 30 percent were preceded by an argument.

But domestic violence experts say these killings share other common traits that can be used to identify domestic violence victims in the greatest danger.

Jon Tiplady, a former Danvers police lieutenant and adjunct criminal justice professor at Salem State University, said police officers, victim advocates and medical professionals are now trained to look for a range of risk factors, including access to weapons, incidents of stalking, an escalation of threats, harm to animals and a history of physical abuse. He said reports of strangulation in particular are a red flag.

“When someone closes your airway, they’re showing you they have that ability, that they can kill you,” he said.

Tiplady has been following news about Shana Warner’s killing in Marshfield and noticed right away two risk factors: stalking and access to firearms.



After her death, Shana Warner’s children told police that Allen Warner “knew a lot about guns.” And police said that the week before the killing, Allen Warner, wearing camouflage and apparently collecting cans in the rain, was found wandering in the woods near the home of Shana Warner’s father,

Allen Warner’s mother also told police that her son had beaten Shana Warner in the past and said she was sure he was the one who killed her, according to police reports filed in court. Shana Warner’s boyfriend, John Tallent, who had been dating her for five months and lived with her in Marshfield, said she was afraid of her husband.

And yet there are no restraining orders on file for Allen Warner in district courts in Plymouth or Hingham or in Plymouth County Probate Court, where an application for divorce was scheduled to be heard in January.

Sue Chandler, executive director of Quincy-based DOVE Inc., said there are many barriers that keep women from leaving their abusers or seeking help from the courts or police. They may depend on the abuser financially or emotionally, she said, or they may cling to hope that they can stop the abuse without leaving the abuser. Or they may believe, correctly in some cases, that attempting to leave places them in even greater danger.

“When someone who is experiencing domestic violence decides to leave a relationship is when they are at the most risk of violence,” said Troop of Jane Doe Inc. “Because they are saying ‘no.’ And when someone wants to control you, that is not what they want to hear. That is the essence of domestic violence.”

That’s one reason domestic violence advocates have increasingly pushed for a coordinated community response that pulls together police, doctors, the courts, schools, churches and outside agencies to identify victims and get them help. If all these groups are talking, Chandler said, doctors can spot evidence of abuse, police can send officers by victims’ homes to check on them and probation officers can keep tabs on abusers if they’re on probation.

In Norfolk County, the district attorney’s office maintains a special team of prosecutors, advocates, social workers, police and others who meet monthly to talk about the highest risk domestic violence cases in the county. DOVE also has advocates at eight police stations who follow up on all every domestic violence incident reported to police. “Typically, the victims in these cases are so afraid that they won’t testify, or drop any charges they do file,” said David Adams, co-founder of Emerge, the first abuser education program in the state.

“Victims are trying to manage the situation the best they can, and the idea of a high risk team is that it takes some of the burden off the victims.”

Massachusetts has one of the lowest rates of intimate partner homicide in the country — something advocates attribute in part to the state’s strict gun control laws — but Chandler said the state can do more. She said there are only 200 shelter beds for domestic violence victims in the state and they are consistently full. She said 60 percent of the calls to DOVE’s hotline are from people seeking emergency shelter.

“Society tells people, ‘well, you should just leave,’” she said. “Where’s she supposed to go? It’s a huge problem.”

In the Marshfield case, Shana Warner did leave her husband, but he pursued her into the new life she was creating with Tallent, her boyfriend. Shana Warner’s father told police his daughter had “finally found happiness,” court records show, and her boyfriend said this week their newfound love was “like a fairytale.”

“This is obviously a huge tragedy,” Adams said of the Shana Warner’s death. “The only good we could ever say about it is ‘how can we stop this from happening again?’”