

2009 Record Year for Domestic Violence Homicides in Wisconsin

Spike in Domestic Violence Killings Comes Despite Falling Violent Crime Rate

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Madison - The number of domestic violence homicides in Wisconsin in 2009 will far outpace 2008 and may constitute a 10-year high. Even as national and local reports show a decrease in violent crime and homicides in 2009, the domestic violence homicide rate in Wisconsin grew.

There were 36 domestic violence homicides in 2008. Preliminary data indicate that there were at least 46 domestic violence incidents resulting in 59 deaths in 2009. In addition, although statewide data for 2009 are not yet available, local domestic abuse victim programs report unprecedented numbers of requests from victims desperately seeking shelter and other services.

General crime statistics contrast the domestic violence trend. Localities in Wisconsin report decreased violent crime in 2009. Milwaukee saw homicides at a 20-year low and violent crime on pace to be down 18 percent. The FBI recently released a report showing a 10 percent drop in homicides and a 4.4 percent dip in violent crimes nationally through the first part of 2009.

Victim advocates say that while the divergence between domestic violence rates and general crime statistics is alarming, it is not surprising given recent economic conditions and the uniqueness of domestic abuse when compared to other crimes.

"While economic turmoil doesn't drive abusers to use violence, financial insecurity prevents victims from leaving abusive homes, meaning the violence continues and escalates," said Patti Seger, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV).

Experts in criminology attribute falling crime rates in part to sophisticated policing methods. But, victim advocates stress that law enforcement strategies that target particular neighborhoods or gang activity do little to prevent domestic violence.

"Unlike other violent crimes, domestic violence typically does not occur out in the streets or in particular locations," said Seger. "Many law enforcement agencies have stepped up their efforts to address domestic violence, but prevention really requires a community-wide effort to ensure that no one suffers silently in their own home.

"We have to see domestic violence as an epidemic. In 2009 in Wisconsin, at least one person died because of domestic violence almost every week of the year," said Seger. "These were not isolated incidents. They are part of a pattern that can only be stopped with systematic responses that provide victims with resources for escape and protection, hold batterers accountable and ultimately change the attitudes that permit abusers to use violence to control and demean their victims."



WCADV will release the annual *Wisconsin Domestic Violence Homicide Report* for 2009 later this year. The report will contain final statistics and analysis of the killings that took place in 2009. The 2008 report is available at: <http://www.wcadv.org/?go=download&id=1179>.

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