Fatality Review: A Tool to Save Lives

 In 2017, over 87,000 intentional femicides were recorded worldwide. Over half of these killings are committed by victims' family members, who take the lives of approximately 137 women each day. Why are these women killed, and why do communities fail to protect them? Fatality Review is a powerful tool for assessing femicides and preventing future deaths.

What is a Fatality Review?

A Fatality Review helps communities save lives by:
- Evaluating the circumstances that led to specific femicides
- Identifying opportunities for interventions that may have prevented the deaths
- Mobilizing communities to implement changes to the system's approach to violence against women

Global Rights for Women's Role

Global Rights for Women (GRW) assists our partners in building capacity to create a Fatality Review Team through trainings and technical assistance. We conduct introductory workshops for partners who are interested in developing a Fatality Review Team in their own countries. Additionally, we can help identify funding sources and assist with gathering and analyzing information about femicides through review of police reports, judicial documents, probation records, medical records, and interviews.

Our GRW team of staff and experts have direct experience with creating and implementing Fatality Review Teams globally.

Why conduct a Fatality Review?

Fatality Review helps to prevent deaths by improving systems' response to violence against women. The purpose of a Fatality Review is to assess femicides in order to develop recommendations for changes to policies, protocols, and coordination that will reduce and eliminate the incidence of violence against women and resulting fatalities.

The focus is not on the job performance of individual practitioners, but rather on how jobs are organized, and the functioning and coordination of agencies and the system as a whole.

Who is involved?

A Fatality Review Team typically includes representatives from the judiciary, the prosecutor's office, law enforcement, and women's NGOs, and can also include the medical examiner, public defender, probation, corrections, and others responsible for intervening in cases of violence against women.

How is a Fatality Review conducted?

1) Representatives from agencies responsible for preventing and responding to violence against women are identified and invited to participate in the Fatality Review Team. Family members and friends of victims can also be invited to provide information and reflections on particular cases.

   GRW helps to create a chronology of each case, including the lives of the victim and perpetrator, the relationship between them, any previous incidents of domestic violence, sexual violence or threats, events that occurred immediately prior to the homicide and the homicide.

2) The Fatality Review Team reviews the chronology and case documents together, and develops a series of observations regarding:

   ● Risk factors and red flags that were, or could have been identified prior to the femicide.
   ● Community agencies that were involved in responding to violence leading up to the femicide and/or to the femicide.
   ● Coordination or lack of coordination amongst agencies.
   ● Gaps in policies, laws/regulations, resources, education/training, or commitment to agency missions that contributed to an ineffective response.

3) The Fatality Review Team identifies opportunities and develops recommendations for interventions that may have prevented the femicide(s).

4) The Fatality Review Team works together to implement changes that will help prevent future deaths.

Annual Reports of the successful Fatality Review Team in Hennepin County, Minnesota, USA can be reviewed at http://www.amatteroflifeanddeath.org.

Where can I learn more?

To find out how Global Rights for Women can help your community develop a Fatality Review Team, contact Melissa Scaia, Director of International Training at mscaia@grwomen.org or Laura Wilson, Staff Attorney at lwilson@grwomen.org.