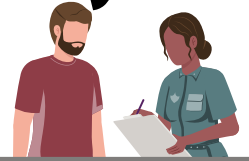


Documenting Danger Executive Summary

What Police Reports Reveal About Brain Injury in Domestic Violence Cases

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Brain injury from domestic violence (DV) is a serious but overlooked public health issue, with survivors facing daily challenges requiring coordinated support. Partner-inflicted brain injury refers to brain injuries caused by an intimate partner through often repeated blows to the head, neck, and face, strangulation, or other assaults that disrupt normal brain function. Police play a pivotal role in initiating processes and documenting evidence that shape case outcomes and victim experiences. This study underscores the need for continued prioritization of training and practices to strengthen law enforcement's ability to respond and document head trauma and strangulation - both of which carry a significant risk of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and hypoxic-anoxic injury (HAI). We assessed 163 public domestic violence-physical assault police reports (involving 166 victims, with August 2022/2023 arraignment dates) obtained from the Columbus City Prosecutor's Office in Franklin County, Ohio.

- TBI/concussion exposures disrupt brain function. Causes can include assaults to the head or face, blunt force trauma, forceful shaking, and whiplash type injuries.
- HAI exposures result in oxygen deprivation to the brain. Causes can include strangulation, suffocation, and other forms of airway and chest compression.
- Victims often experience both TBI and HAI exposures during an assault and suffer repeated injuries during multiple assaults.

In **163** reports, **77.1%** had **at least one** head or facial injury, strangulation, or both.

“ She stated he struck her around 40+ times in the head, neck, shoulder, arms, and back area. She stated he grabbed her around her neck and strangled her, banging her head against the wall. She stated she never lost consciousness during the attacks. She stated the attacks occurred over an approximate 4-hour period. ”

- **About 80%** of victims were female (8 pregnant)
- **Nearly 80%** of suspects were male

- **Only about a third** were evaluated by a medic after the incident

- **Fewer than half** of officers conducted a lethality assessment

- Victim statements were recorded in **just over half** of the cases
- **Fewer than 1 in 5** victims were connected with advocacy services

Promising Practice

Specialized Officer Involvement: Columbus Police Department's Strangulation Team Operation for Prosecution (STOP) officers handled most strangulation cases in 2023. The strong documentation and thorough investigation underscore the effectiveness of specialized training and the need to integrate brain injury education into domestic violence training and police response.

Recommendations

Recognizing Harm: Victims experiencing head injuries and strangulation are at the most risk of severe, life threatening violence and homicide, as well as long term consequences of brain injuries. Brain injuries have both visible and invisible symptoms; behavior changes may reflect trauma and brain injury, not resistance or defiance.

Shift in Understanding: Brain injury is a critical component of domestic violence assaults and responses that incorporate this reality can improve victim safety and system outcomes.

Documentation as Evidence: Detailed observations—visible or not—impact legal outcomes, support access and safety planning.

Medical and Advocacy Needs Are Critical: These incidents may require urgent or follow-up care, even if initially declined.

Ongoing Training: Training on brain injury improves response and documentation supports effective policing, offender accountability and victim access.

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The complete [Documenting Danger](#) report can be found on our website. Please contact Rachel Ramirez at rachelr@odvn.org for any additional questions or comments.



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