

“52 Days of Domestic Violence Flu in America”
By Casey Gwinn, Esq.

This week I have been reflecting on those that would choose to ignore the importance of dealing with domestic violence in America. After over 30 years of the modern domestic violence movement, we still struggle for funding, we face budget cuts and reductions when the economy goes bad (though domestic violence rises) and we rarely are the primary focus of public policy makers in America. This week the news is consumed with coverage of the swine flu, an important public health issue in America. As of May 2, there have been 167 confirmed cases of the swine flu in the United States and one death. But there has been little news about the mass killings of 68 people across America in the last 52 days, with men doing all the killing and virtually all related to men with a history of violence against women.

Public health officials in the United States fear a global pandemic from the so-called H1-N1 virus. A pandemic is defined as a global outbreak of disease that causes serious illness or death and then spreads easily from person to person worldwide. Pandemics differ from seasonal outbreaks of an illness. The news this week quoted many officials talking about high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss from pandemics. We must all be vigilant about addressing swine flu in the days ahead. But the pandemic of violence by men against women, men, and children has killed more people in the last 52 days in America than swine flu. This pandemic has been going on now for hundreds of years causing high levels of mental and physical illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss.

There have been 12 mass killings in the last 52 days in the United States. In 11 of the 12, the killer had a history of abuse against women or they were directly related to or defined as domestic violence. 68 people have been killed in those mass killings including 20 children and 7 police officers.

Let’s honor those who have been killed in the pandemic of domestic violence flu by identifying their killer and listing them:

March 10 – Michael McLendon, 28, killed ten people, including his mother, grandmother, aunt and uncle, and the wife and child of a local sheriff’s deputy in rural Alabama. He then killed himself. The worst mass killing in the history of Alabama killed: Virginia White, 74; James White, 55; Tracy Wise, 34; Dean Wise, 15; James Starling, 34; Lisa McClendon, Michael’s mom; Bruce Maloy, 51; Andrea Myers, 31; and Corrine Gracy Myers, 18 months.

March 21 – Lovelle Mixon, a parolee with a history of violence against women, sexual assault, and other violent crimes shot and killed four heroic Oakland police officers – Sgt. Mark Dunakin, 40; Officer John Hege, 41, SWAT Sgt. Ervin Romans, 43; and SWAT Sgt. Daniel Sakai, 35 before he was shot and killed by police.

March 29 – Robert Stewart, 45, shot and killed eight people at Pinelake Health and Rehab Center in Robbins, North Carolina. He came to the center seeking to kill his wife, Wanda Neal, 43, a nurse’s assistant. She was working in the Alzheimers Unit when he entered the facility and survived after herding residents into the TV Room and locking the door. The dead included: Tessie Garner, 88; Lillian Dunn, 89; Jessie Musser, 88; Bessie Hendrick, 78; John Goldston, 78; Margaret Johnson, 89; Louise Decker, 98; and Jerry Avent, 39. Jerry was a newly hired nurse at the facility. He was shot 27 times but continued protecting patients until the final shot. Police estimated his efforts saved at least ten others patients and staff members.

March 30 – Devan Kalathat killed six people in a murder-suicide in Santa Clara, California including his children. During his rampage he shot his wife, but she still clings to life in critical condition. Police identified the victims as Kalathat's children: 11-year-old Akhil Dev and 4-year-old Negha Dev; Kalathat's brother-in-law Ashok Appu Poothemkandi, 35, Poothemkandi's wife, Suchitra Sivaraman, 25; and the Poothemkandis' infant daughter, Ahana Ashok.

April 4 – Pittsburgh police officers Eric Kelly, Stephen Mayhle, and Paul Scullo were shot and killed responding to a “domestic disturbance” call. They were ambushed by Richard Poplawski when they arrived at the house. Officer Eric Kelly was not on duty. He was on his way home to his wife and three daughters when he heard the call on his radio and responded to support his fellow officers.

April 5 – James Harrison killed his five children in Pierce County, WA while his wife was at work. Police confirmed that the couple had a domestic violence incident earlier in the day and the wife had left. The husband demanded that she return and while she was away he methodically shot Maxine, Samantha, Heather, Jamie, and James. The first four children were shot in their beds. The last child was shot as she was running toward the bathroom.

April 5 – Kirby Revelus, 23, killed his 17 year old sister, Samantha and his five year old sister, Bianca. Police officers responding to a domestic violence incident shot and killed him as he was trying to kill his 9 year old sister Sarafina.

April 7 – Kevin Garner fled Greenville, Alabama late in the afternoon after setting fire to his wife’s home and car. Hours later, police found his wife and daughter, and her sister and her sister’s son shot to death inside the burning home. Garner later shot himself before being apprehended.

April 10 – Two students at Henry Ford Community College were found dead in a murder-suicide in the Fine Arts Building on campus in Dearborn, Michigan. Police determined that Anthony Powell, 28, killed Asia McGowan, 20 with a shotgun and then turned the gun on himself.

April 18 – Christopher Allan Wood, 34, an accountant for a railroad operator, killed his wife, Frances, and his three children in Middletown, Maryland before taking his own life with gunshot to the head. Chandler was 5 years old, Gavin was 4, and his daughter, Fiona, was 2 years old when she was shot and stabbed by her Dad.

April 19 – William Parente, 59, killed his wife, Betty, 58, and daughters Catherine, 11, and Stephanie, 19 before killing himself in Garden City, New York. Each of the victims was killed by asphyxiation and blunt force trauma.

April 25 – University of Georgia professor George Zinkhans shot and killed his wife, Marie Bruce, and two of her friends from a local community theatre group in Bogart, Georgia. Two others were seriously injured by bullet fragments. Her two murdered colleagues were: Ben Teague, 63, and Tom Tanner, 40. More than 200 police officers are currently searching for him the dense woods near Bogart, 60 miles east of Atlanta. Police believe Marie was preparing to get a restraining order, file for divorce, and leave him after a history of domestic violence.

So, we are not done. We all must re-double our efforts to raise awareness, call for more resources in the war by men against women and children. We must call it what it is...it is not Violence Against Women. It is most often Violence By Men Against Women. All the killers in the mass killings of the last 52 days have been men.

The next time you hear someone say they cannot afford to keep a Family Justice Center or domestic violence shelter program open because of the economy, ask them to read this article. Next time, you hear someone say that we don't need any new, evolving, innovative approaches to family violence prevention because our current service delivery models are doing the job well; ask them to read the list of 68 names from the most recent 52 bloody days of domestic violence in 2009. Don't be silent; don't let elected officials, or policy makers, or bureaucrats, or disinterested community members ignore the tragedy of domestic violence. We must address swine flu in America and around the world but we must also take guns away from men who are violent and start spending the time, energy, and money necessary to stop the pandemic of violence by men against women that is destroying families, killing women, men, and children, and continuing to destroy the lives of so many.

(Casey Gwinn is the former San Diego City Attorney. He founded the internationally recognized San Diego Family Justice Center which is credited with reducing domestic violence homicides in San Diego by over 60%. He currently serves as the President of the National Family Justice Center Alliance which is developing specialized, multi-agency Centers to stop domestic violence across the United States and around the world. He is the co-author of *"Hope for Hurting Families: Creating Family Justice Centers Across America"* (Volcano Press, 2006). For more information, go to www.familyjusticecenter.org).

