



Violence Free Minnesota Analysis on November 7, 2024 Duluth Murders-Suicide

Today we remember and honor the lives of Erin Abramson, 47; her son Jacob Nephew, 15; Kathryn “Kat” Ramsland, 45; and her son Oliver Nephew, 7; and recognize them as the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st known victims of domestic violence homicide in Minnesota in 2024. We also grieve for the loved ones of the man who killed them, who are also suffering a great and unimaginable loss.

We anticipate that some of our community may not understand why we have chosen to recognize Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver as victims of intimate partner homicide and domestic violence homicide, and we are aware some of these questions may stem from information indicating an alleged history of psychosis and mental health concerns prior to these deaths.

We do not seek to point to any one specific factor that resulted in the loss of these four lives; nor do we seek to minimize or obscure the very serious nature of mental health concerns. No one may ever know the full depth and breadth of the circumstances surrounding this tragedy. We also understand that, as with many homicides, an array of often very complex factors may work in tandem to lead to a devastating outcome. However, as the statewide coalition to end relationship abuse, our responsibility and our call is to contextualize a very large percentage of deaths such as these within a broader framework that acknowledges dynamics of male privilege, sexism, and misogyny. This framework may not apply to all such deaths, but it applies to far too many, and is a framework that has been **concerningly absent from media coverage and public conversation surrounding murder-suicides in our state.**

Violence Free Minnesota has documented domestic violence homicides in Minnesota for over 30 years. We are the only agency in the state to capture the full scope of these deaths and the far-reaching, devastating impacts of this social and public health issue. During these 30+ years, we have documented many murder-suicides. In our [30 Year Retrospective Report](#), which examined patterns in domestic violence homicides in our state from 1989–2018, we documented 258 murder-suicides or murder-attempted suicides connected to domestic violence. Only *one* of the cases of murder-suicide involved a woman killing a man who was a current or former intimate partner. **Comparatively, 205 cases (99%) of murder-suicide or murder-attempted suicide in our data from 1989–2018 in Minnesota involved a man killing a woman who was a current or former intimate partner.** This rate is even higher than the [90% national rate](#) of male-perpetrator murder-suicides.

Thus, we speak with conviction when we state that murder-suicides are an overwhelmingly gendered issue that also overwhelmingly involve firearms. **This is not to say such cases are not complex, but to unequivocally express that the root causes of many of these deaths are male privilege and entitlement, misogyny, and the enduring normalization of violence against women and children.**

Mental health concerns are pervasive, stigmatized, and commonly experienced across the American population. We hold all community members affected by mental health concerns with warmth and support. At the same time, we also ask our community to extend a nuanced framework to tragedies like these, and to acknowledge that very frequently in cases of men killing their families, the societal response is to automatically uplift perceptions of mental health involvement and presumed “loss of control/lack of intent,” while neglecting to ask necessary questions about a gendered context. Yet, when women kill their children or other members of their families in cases where a mental health connection is *direct, apparent, supported by extensive evidence, and professionally determined to be the primary driving reason for those deaths*, the automatic framework supplied by society is frequently one of women’s supposed malice, deceit, manipulation, and elaborately planned intent.

One example of such differential messaging is the case of Andrea Yates, who drowned her children in 2001 while *actively experiencing* postpartum psychosis after giving birth, and who, alongside her husband, had been informed by doctors nine months prior that having more children was dangerous and inadvisable due to previous postpartum psychosis. Andrea was maligned in the media and in public opinion after her children's deaths despite her husband intentionally repeatedly leaving her unattended after her diagnosis; pressuring her to have more children against her protests; and coercing her into continuing to have sex against her wishes. Her husband received little blame at all. While this case occurred in 2001, we contrast it with the case of Michael Haight, who killed his wife Tashua, their children, Tashua's mother, and himself in Utah in 2023 after a history of abusing them, yet [received public praise](#) for his "Christlike love and service." His actions were written about by numerous media outlets supplying only suicide hotlines, despite no evidence of any mental health history on his end. **The narrative, then, becomes "good father who did a bad thing" and "monstrous mother who does bad things."**

We must also acknowledge that a gendered double standard exists between cases of murder-suicides and deaths of intimate partners killed in self-defense. Men are often harmfully socialized into a world that compels them to be passive, stoic, and to refrain from sharing their emotions or seeking help. **However, we are all also socialized into a world where men who kill their families are often accorded the kind of grace, compassion, leeway, and minimization of motives—including conscious and unconscious feelings of ownership over women and children in their lives—that women who kill their partners in self-defense are not. Men's commission of murder-suicide and domestic violence homicide is frequently seen as an expression of justified anger or despair, even after long histories of committing prior violence. Conversely, women's use of self-defense or resistive violence is frequently seen as a confirmation of, and a permission to perpetuate, the most deeply held sexist stereotypes.** Women who kill abusive male partners in self-defense are often criminalized and framed as aggressive and "crazy," while abusive men who kill female partners are often privileged with social messaging like "being nagged to the breaking point" and "snapping" after being "provoked."

If murder-suicide were *solely* a mental health issue, then society should question why, in cases of murder-suicide, men so frequently kill their female partners and children, even though women report [greater rates of mental illness](#) in the U.S. We cannot answer this question if we are not willing to examine the social context in which these homicides occur, one of continued gender inequality, male privilege, and male entitlement that is ever-present and recently so chillingly expressed in the current "your body, my choice" mantra surging across social media since the presidential election. Mental health concerns do not cause domestic violence, but may exacerbate, intensify, and escalate controlling dynamics or beliefs. **Any analysis of murder-suicide cases in which men with histories of mental health concerns kill their partners and families must include a discussion of domestic violence. These issues are not mutually exclusive.** And at the end of the day, Anthony Nephew chose to take the lives of Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver in addition to his own. He did not have to make such a choice.

Ultimately, we may never know the full circumstances of this tragedy. What we do know is that two women and two children lost their lives to a man with whom they had current and former intimate and familial relationships, and thus Violence Free Minnesota will acknowledge the murders of Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver as domestic violence homicides. **We also know that just like the hundreds of other individuals in Minnesota who have lost their lives to domestic violence, Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver deserve to be remembered and honored, and we all deserve a violence-free Minnesota where our loved ones can lead full, rich, and joyful lives.**

Resources

- Minnesota 24/7 Day One Hotline: Call 1.866.223.1111 or text 612.399.9995
- Violence Free Minnesota's [Preventive Press: A Guide for Journalists on Responsible Reporting on Domestic Violence](#). Page 18 of this guide addresses murder-suicides. We ask journalists to include the 24/7 Minnesota Day One Hotline in *all* articles about domestic violence-related murder-suicides rather than only including suicide and mental health helplines.



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THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE