



Franklin County Forensic Science Center

Office of the Coroner

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Franklin County Domestic Violence Fatalities Data Brief: 2018-2021

Introduction

Over the past few years Ohio has been experiencing an increase in domestic violence, including domestic violence incidences resulting in the victim's death. According to the Ohio Domestic Violence Network there were 131 people who died this past year from domestic violence in Ohio, this was a 20% increase compared to the previous year and 62% increase from two years ago (Chow, 2021).

While the exact causes and correlates of the increase in domestic violence fatality are pending further study, one potential factor that is posited to have led to the increase in domestic violence is Covid-19. Covid-19 has been found to be used by abusers to instill fear and keep the victim at home (Kofman & Garfin, 2020). This makes it difficult for the victim to seek help. Additionally, the stay-at-home order made it so that the victim was less likely to have time apart from the abuser, which created further difficulties in seeking help. Stay-at-home orders also increased the levels of confinement. Confinement has been linked to increases in anger, depression, anxiety and frustration levels (Mengin et al., 2020). These behaviors could contribute to the incidence of domestic violence. Outside of changes in behavior, there have also been increased levels of financial instability, which can also lead to increased levels of domestic violence (Leguizamon et al., 2017).

Definitions

Domestic violence has a range of definitions. According to the Department of Justice, domestic violence "includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse or intimate partner, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws..., or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws" (Department of Justice).

In Ohio, domestic violence includes acts of violence against family or a household member, attempts to recklessly cause bodily injury, placing another person in fear of serious physical harm due to threats, any act in which a child can be considered an abused child, sexually oriented offense, and any of these acts against a person who has been in or is currently in a dating relationship with the respondent (Ohio Laws and Administrative Rules, 2019).

Given these two definitions, Franklin County homicides were considered domestic violence related if the victim's death was due to the acts of an intimate partner, family member, parent, child, housemate/roommate, or a bystander to a domestic dispute. Intimate partner cases include cases in which the perpetrator was romantically involved with the victim. Family member cases include cases in which there was familial tie in between the victim and perpetrator, such as siblings, grandchild-grandparent, uncle-nephew, etc. Child-Parent/Caretaker cases were identified when the victim was the



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child, and the perpetrator was the parent. Parent-Child cases were identified when the victim was the parent, and the perpetrator was the child. Housemate/roommate cases were classified as “other” and were identified when the victim and perpetrator had been living together but were not romantically involved. Bystander cases were identified when the victim was not directly involved with the domestic dispute but killed as result of the domestic dispute.

Data Reviewed

A domestic violence year is from July 1st to June 30th of the next year, as that is when data are collected. To evaluate if Franklin County is following national trends, homicides from the domestic violence years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021 were further analyzed and evaluated to see if they could be considered a homicide related to domestic violence.

Our data brief is a short summary of the domestic violence fatalities Franklin County, Ohio experienced from July 1st, 2018, to June 30th, 2021. Data for this report were derived from Franklin County coroner reports.



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Yearly Totals

Franklin County has experienced a steady increase in domestic violence cases within the last 3 years, as is illustrated in Figure 1. From July 1st, 2018, to June 30th, 2021, there was a 166.7% increase in the number of domestic violence cases. In the year 2018-2019, there were 15 domestic violence cases. Of those 15 cases, 66.7% of them were related to intimate partner violence. During the year 2019-2020, there were 26 domestic violence cases. Of those 26 cases, 46.2% of them were related to intimate partner violence. In the year 2020-2021, there were 40 domestic violence cases. Of those 40 cases, 52.5% of them were related to intimate partner violence. From July 1st, 2018, to June 30th, 2021, there was a 110% increase in intimate partner cases. Further breakdown of the number of cases by case type and year is present in Figure 2.

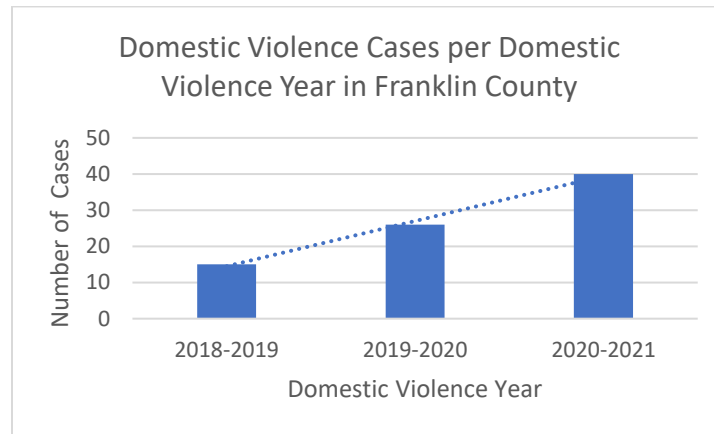


Figure 1. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. The number of domestic violence cases per domestic violence year with a line of best fit.

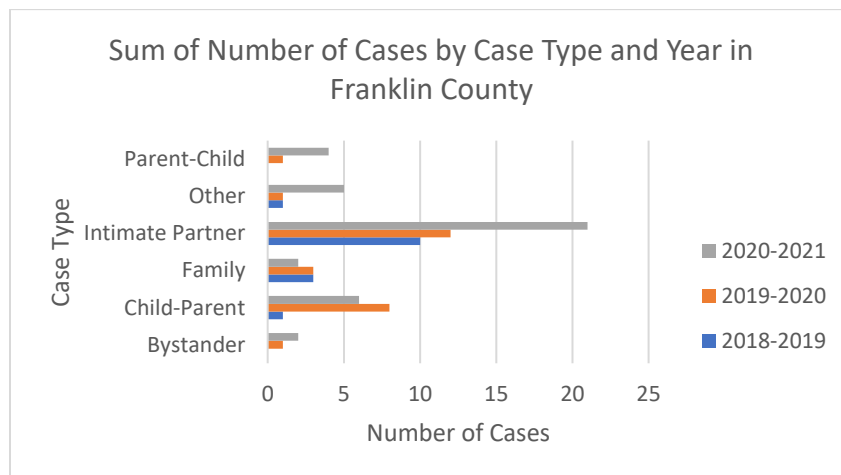


Figure 2. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Breakdown of the number of cases by case type per domestic violence year.



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Quarterly Breakdown

To assess any seasonal changes among the number of domestic violence homicides, the year was broken into quarters and the number of cases per quarter were evaluated. Quarter 1 ranges from July 1st through September 30th. Quarter 2 ranges from October 1st to December 31st. Quarter 3 ranges from January 1st through March 31st. Quarter 4 ranges from April 1st to June 30th. These quarters were assigned based off the timeframe of a domestic violence year. For the year 2018-2019, the highest number of cases was seen in quarter 1 and the lowest number of cases was seen in quarter 2. In 2018-2019 there were 0 domestic violence cases during quarter 2. This contrasts what is seen for the years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. In 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, there was an increase in cases in quarters 2 and 3. The figure below demonstrates this trend.

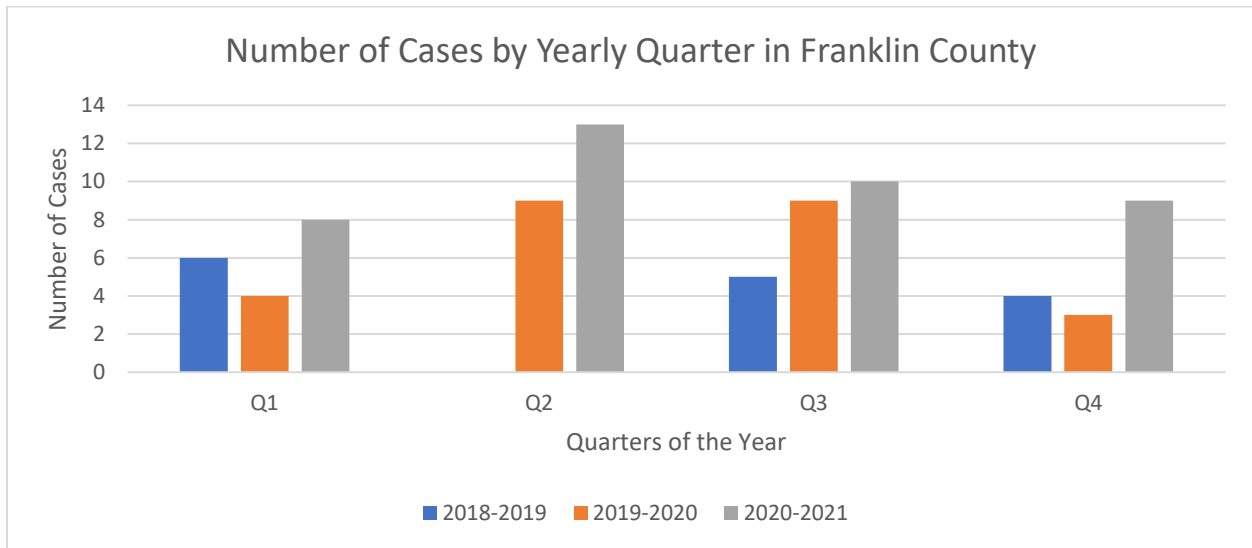


Figure 3. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases per year by quarter.



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In the figure below, the number of cases per quarter are further broken down by case type. For the year 2018-2019 there does not appear to be a noticeable trend, but intimate partner cases were most prevalent during quarter 1 followed by quarter 4. During the year 2019-2020, both child-parent and intimate partner categories show an increase in cases during quarters 2 and 3 followed by a decrease in quarter 4. The year 2020-2021 also showcases an increase in intimate partner cases during quarters 2 and 3 followed by a decrease in quarter 4. The other case types in 2020-2021 do not show any noticeable trends.

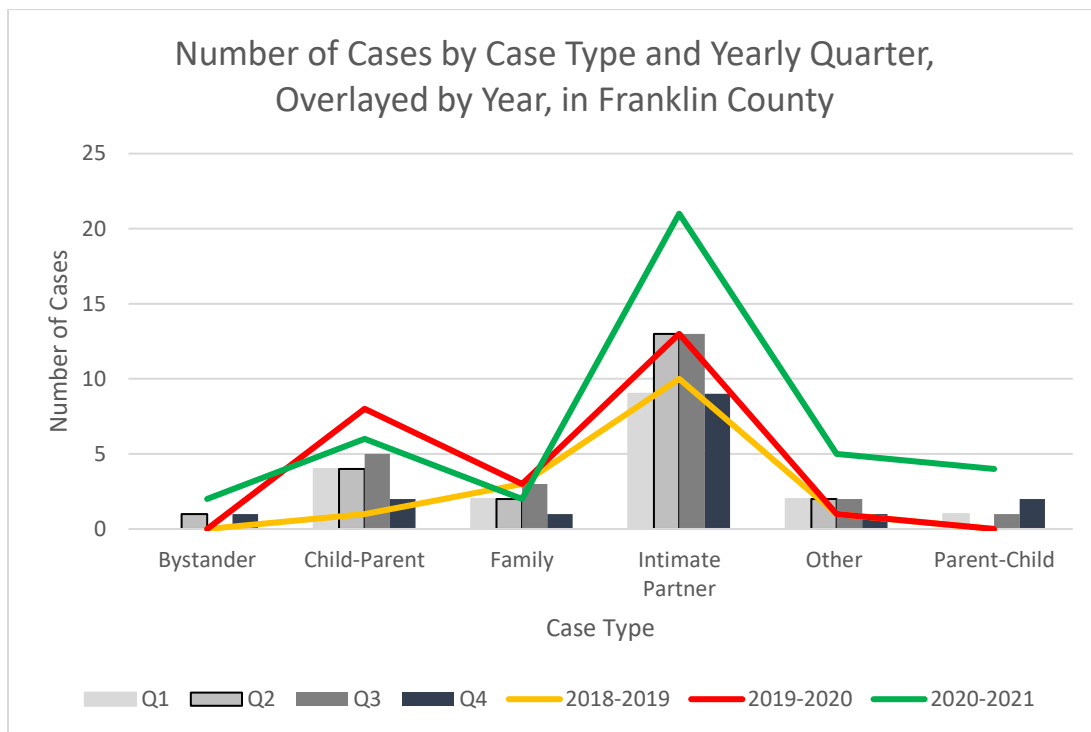


Figure 4. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Breakdown of the number of cases per year by case type and quarter.



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The Covid-19 shutdown in Ohio started during 2019-2020 quarter 3 and continued through 2020-2021 quarter 4. In the figure below we can see that there was an increase of domestic violence cases during the Covid-19 shutdown. Prior to the Covid-19 shutdown, there was a total of 28 domestic violence cases, and during the Covid-19 shutdown there was a total of 52 cases. This means there was an 85.7% increase in reported domestic violence cases in Franklin County during the Covid-19 shutdown. In the figure below the number of cases before and during the Covid-19 shutdown is displayed.

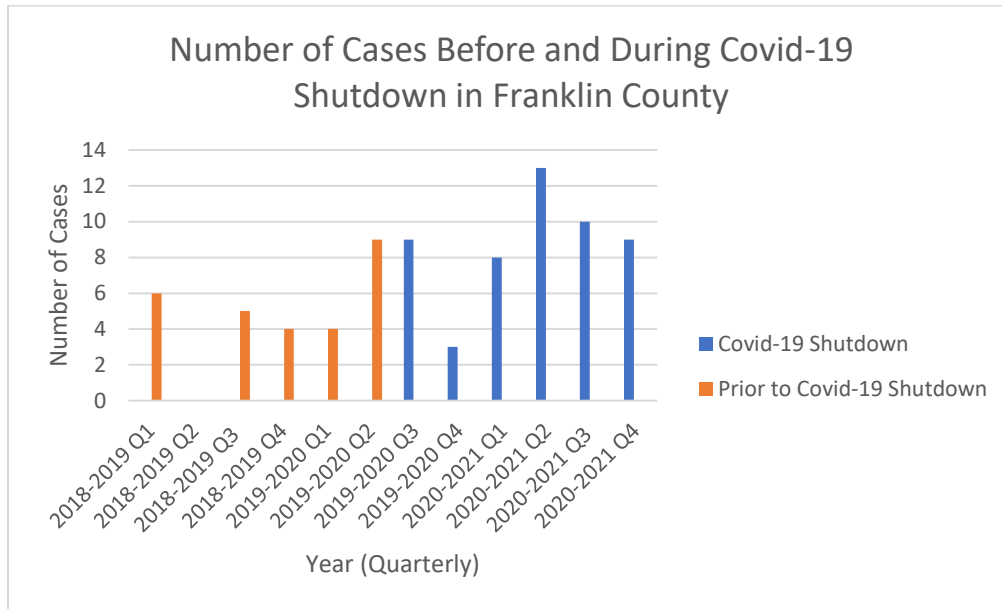


Figure 5. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of Cases before Covid-19 shutdown (2018-2019 Q1-2019-2020 Q2) and during the Covid-19 shutdown (2019-2020 Q3-2020-2021 Q4)



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Gender

The figures below display the gender differences of decedents by case type and year. Intimate partner violence has the highest number of cases for both males and females. For the years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, males and females had the same number of intimate partner cases. In 2020-2021 there was a 33.3% increase in female decedents involved in reported intimate partner violence. The next highest number of cases for both males and females fall in the “child-parent” categorization.

Overall, men have a higher likelihood of being involved in a domestic violence case. In 2018-2019, men were 33.3% more likely to be victims of domestic violence than females. In 2019-2020, men were 37.5% more likely to be victims of domestic violence than females. In 2020-2021, men were 26.1% more likely to be victims of domestic violence than females. As stated previously, this is not the same trend seen in intimate partner cases. Males were more likely to be involved in child-parent, family, parent-child, other and bystander cases than females.

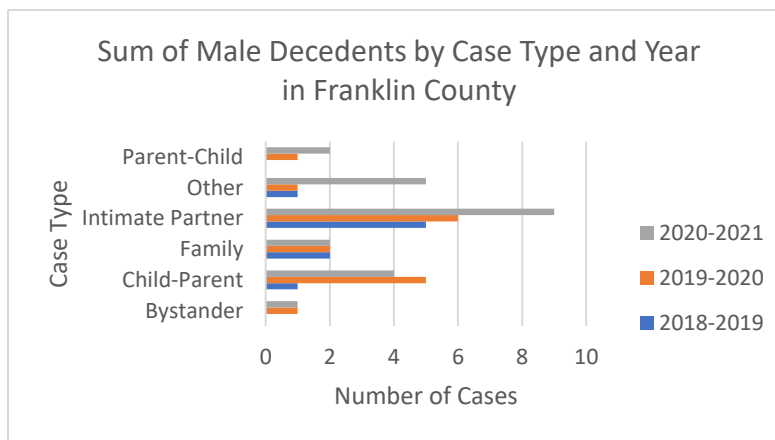


Figure 6. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type with male decedents.

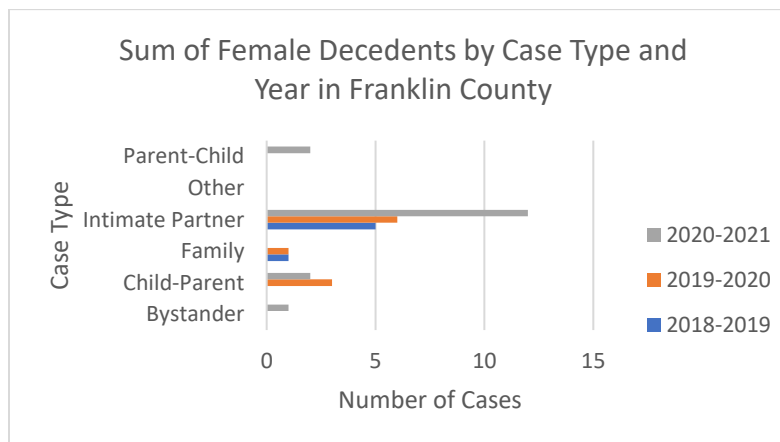


Figure 7. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type with female decedents.



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Race/Ethnicity

A large portion of domestic violence cases tend to have White victims or African American/Black victims. During the 3 years that data were gathered, 27 were White victims, 55 were African American/Black victims and 9 were other races/ethnicities. Among White victims, 59.26% were related to intimate partner violence. Among African American/Black victims 41.82% were related to intimate partner violence. Other race/ethnicities did not have many cases, but deaths related to intimate partner violence for other race/ethnicity groups were 44.44%. In the figures below, a breakdown of case type by year for each race/ethnicity are displayed.

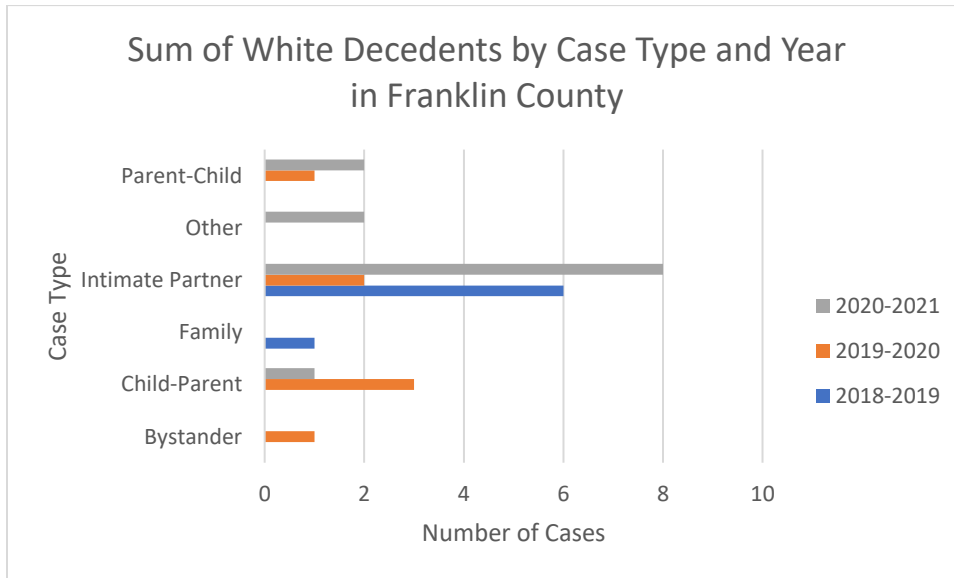


Figure 8. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type with a White decedent.



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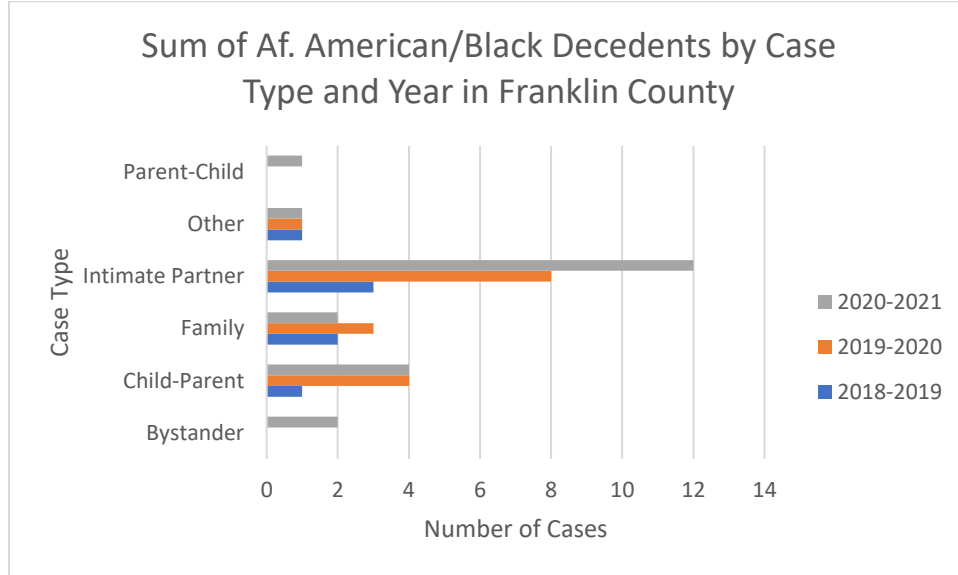


Figure 9. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type with an African American/Black decedent.

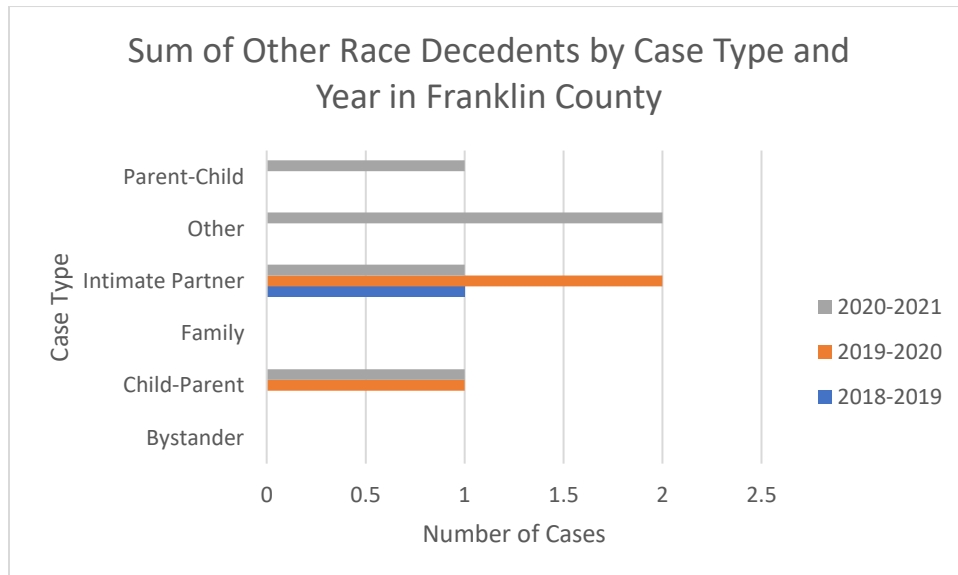


Figure 10. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type with a decedent who is not White or African American/Black.



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Age

Next, we will evaluate the age of the decedents by the case type. The age groups were grouped 0-18, 19-41, 42-64, and greater than 65. An initial consideration was made for shifting the age groups to 0-15 and 16-41 in order to include young relationships, but upon further review there were no intimate partner cases in decedents younger than 18 in Franklin County. In 2018-2019, the age group 19-41 and 42-64 had the same number of intimate partner cases but in the next 2 years the age group 19-41 continued to grow larger than the age group 42-64. The number of intimate partner cases among the age group 19-41 doubled in 2020-2021 when compared to 2019-2020. The age group 0-18 had the largest number of decedents among child-parent cases and a few other decedents involved in family cases. The age group 42-64 had decedents primarily among intimate partner cases followed by parent-child cases. The age group 65+ did not have more than one case per case type by year.

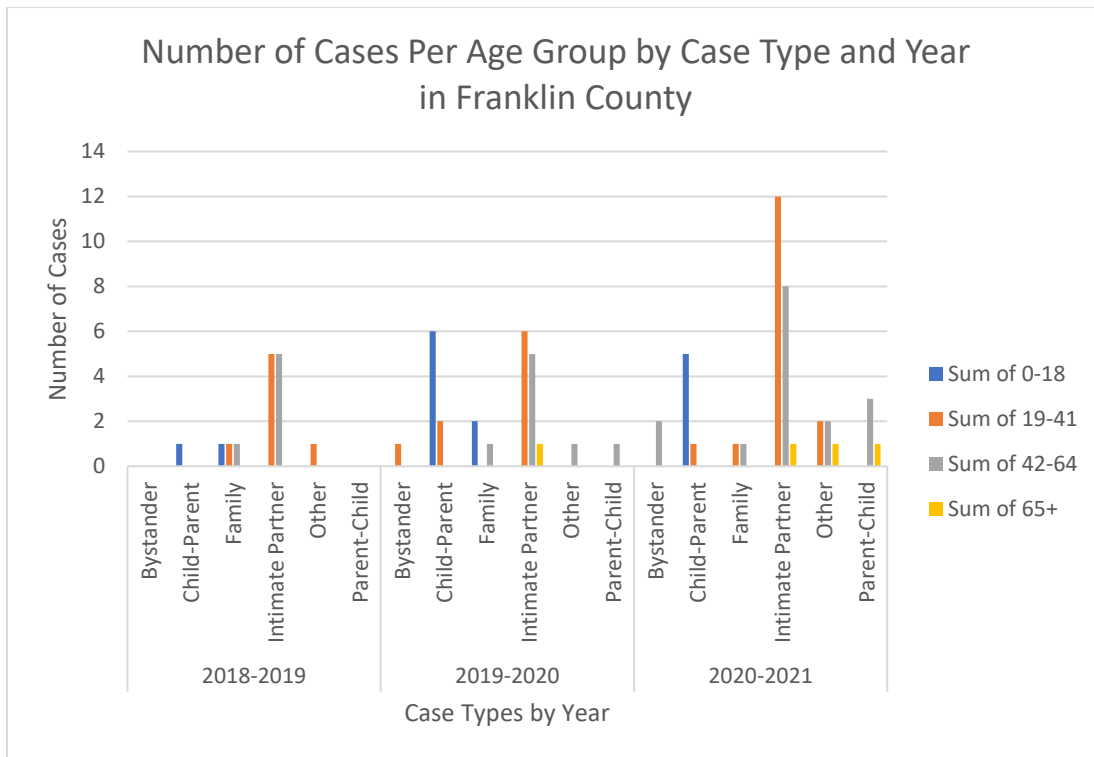


Figure 11. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type and year, sorted by age groups.



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Mechanism

The most prevalent cause of death among all three years is the use of a firearm. Following the use of a firearm is the use of sharp force and blunt force trauma were most prevalent. There appears to be a large jump in firearm usage in 2020-2021. In 2018-2019 there was a total of 7 domestic violence deaths due to firearms, in 2019-2020 there was a total of 13 domestic violence deaths due to firearms and in 2020-2021 there was a total of 25 domestic violence deaths due to firearms. This is a significant increase in death due to firearms but during this time there was also an increase in firearm purchases, it was “estimated that there were 4.3 million excess firearm purchases nationally from March through July 2020” (Schleimer, et al., 2021). Covid-19 is the main reason behind this increase in firearm purchases and from a recent study it was found that the increase in firearm purchases did not increase the magnitude of firearm violence but could “have contributed to additional firearm injuries from domestic violence in April and May” (Schleimer, et al., 2021). In the figure 12, the mechanism by case type and year is displayed. On the next page, figure 13 displays the number of cases by case type and year where the cause of death was related to a firearm.

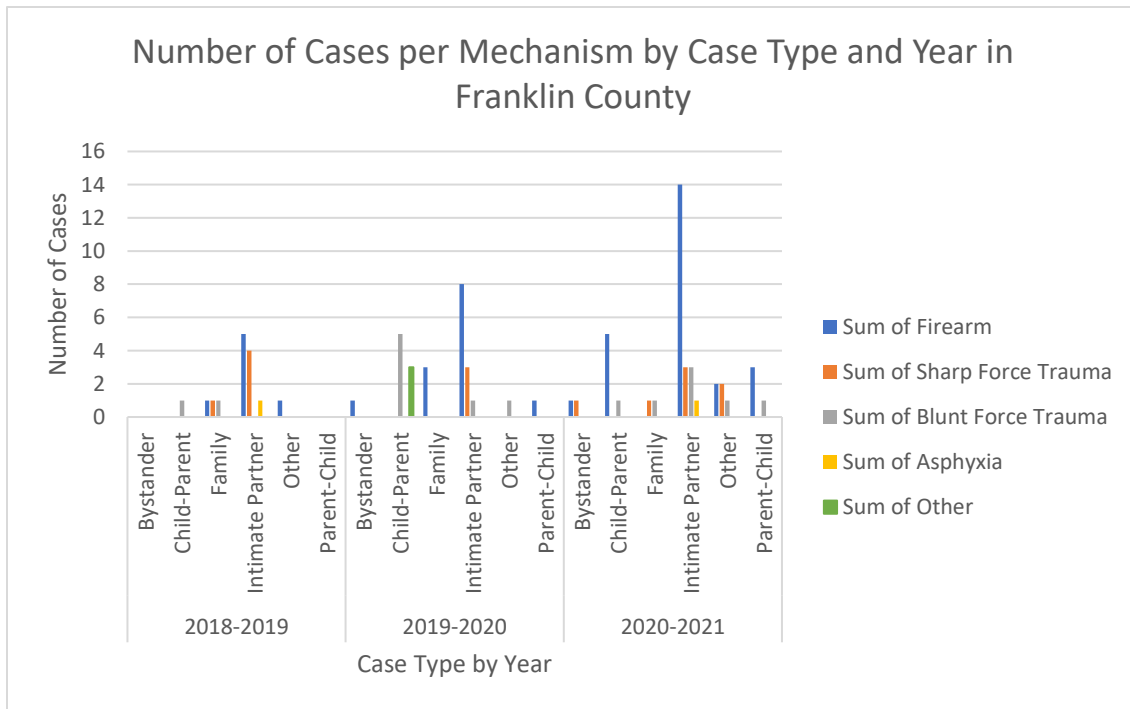


Figure 12. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type and year, sorted by mechanism used to kill the decedent.



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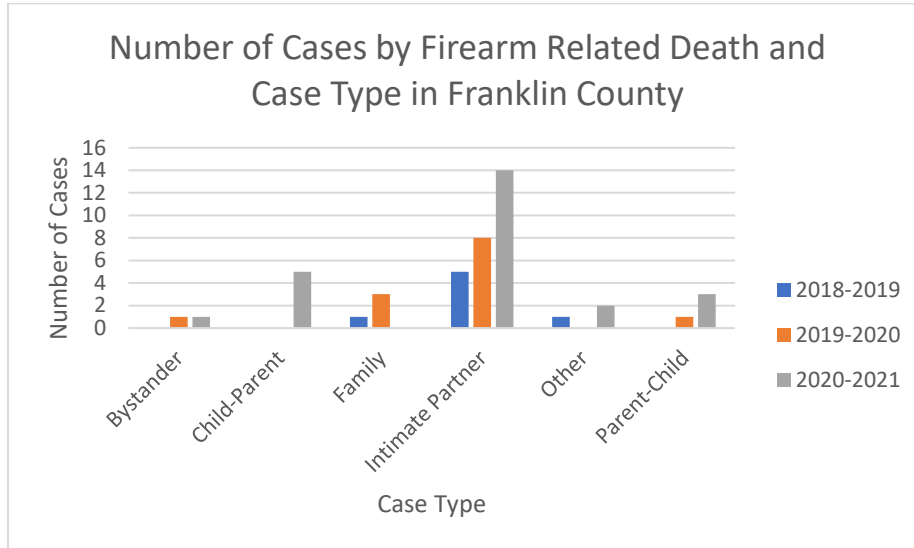


Figure 13. Sources: Justice Trax 2018-2020 and MDI 2021. Number of cases by case type and year, where the cause of death was due to a firearm



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