

# Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children

*Learning to End Abuse*



Western  
Education



**Peter Jaffe, Western University**

**Evaluating Risk: Who Needs to Know  
What, When & How Do You Get It**

**VAW and CAS Collaboration – September 19, 2013**

[learningtoendabuse.ca](http://learningtoendabuse.ca)



# Children Living with Domestic Violence: Progress in the Field

- Psychological harm & trauma from exposure
- Overlap with other forms of child maltreatment
- Impact on infants, children & adolescents
- VAW-CAS on the road to collaboration
- Emerging Issue - Risk of homicide - “retaliating filicide”- child being killed to punish a spouse (Bourget et al., 2007)

# Complex Research Conundrum





# Limits and Benefits of Risk Assessment

## Limitations

- Retrospective rather than prospective studies
- Propensity towards “false positives”
- Risk is dynamic rather than static

## Benefits

- Development of common language across systems
- Assists in the prioritization of limited resources
- Assists with safety planning strategies - may save lives

# Preventing Tragedies



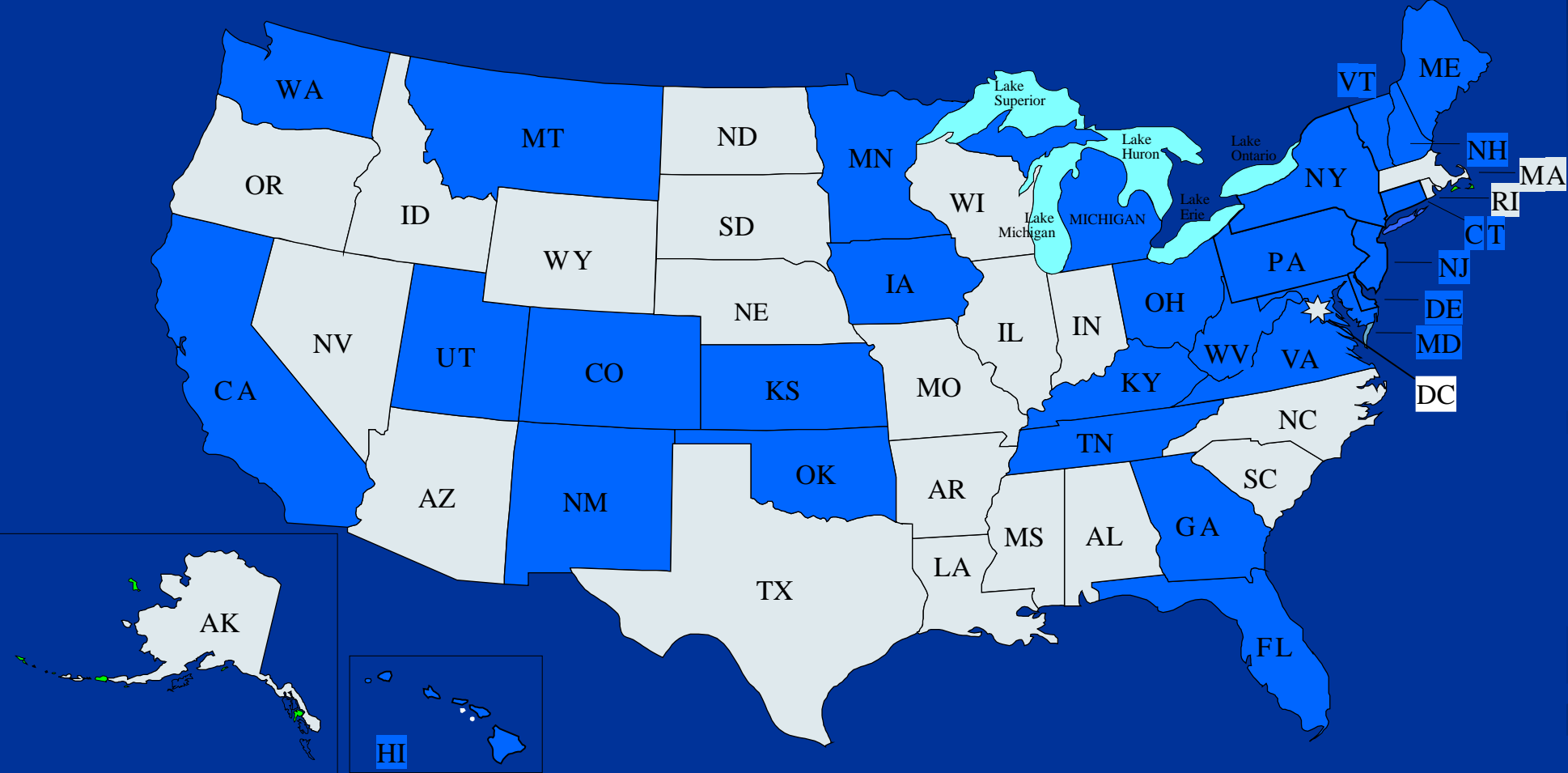
# Ontario Chief Coroner's Office

## Domestic Violence Death Review Committee

*“We Speak for the Dead to Protect the Living”*



# Active DVFRTs





# *DVDRC* Purpose

To assist the Office of the Chief Coroner in the investigation and review of deaths of persons that occur as a direct result of domestic violence, and to make recommendations to help prevent such deaths in similar circumstances.

# *DVDRC Objectives*

- Confidential review of DV deaths
- Offer expert opinion to Chief Coroner
- Create / maintain a comprehensive database
- Identify trends, risks and patterns
- Identify systemic gaps and shortcomings
- Make recommendations

# Are DV Homicides Predictable & Preventable?

- 84% of the cases had at least 7 risk markers
- Critical information held by family, work colleagues, front-line professionals
- Children are the victims in a number of ways
- Critical need to collaborate between child protection and VAW services as well as the justice system (criminal and family court)

# DVDRC 2002-2012

- 164 cases (90 homicides and 74 homicide-suicides)
- 251 tragic deaths involving intimate partner violence
- Victims: 80% Female, 12% Children, 8% Male

# Challenges in DVDRC

- Creating a climate of trust and understanding rather than shame and blame
- Access to all relevant information
- Engaging each sector and discipline
- Gender analysis – context and meaning of violence
- Auditing implementation of recommendations



# Children Killed in the Context of Domestic Violence

Based on DVDRC reports (US/Canada) 3 situations in which children were killed within the context of domestic violence

1. Indirectly as a result of attempting to protect a parent during a violent episode
2. Directly as part of an overall murder–suicide plan by a parent who decides to kill the entire family
3. Directly as revenge against the partner who decided to end the relationship or for some other perceived betrayal.

# Paternal Filicide in the Context of Domestic Violence

- The Problem – Often Ignored
- Risk Factors?
- Risk Assessment Tools?
- Response of the Criminal Justice System
- Response of the Family Justice System – Child Protection & Child Custody

# Are Paternal Filicides Predictable & Preventable?

- 76% of the cases had at least 7 risk markers
- Critical information held by family & friends, work colleagues, front-line professionals
- Children are the victims in a number of ways
- Collaboration amongst professionals & agencies is critical - including the justice system (criminal and family court)

# Common Risk Markers

**74%** - Prior history of domestic violence

**72%** - Actual or pending separation

**56%** - Obsessive behavior (including stalking the victim)

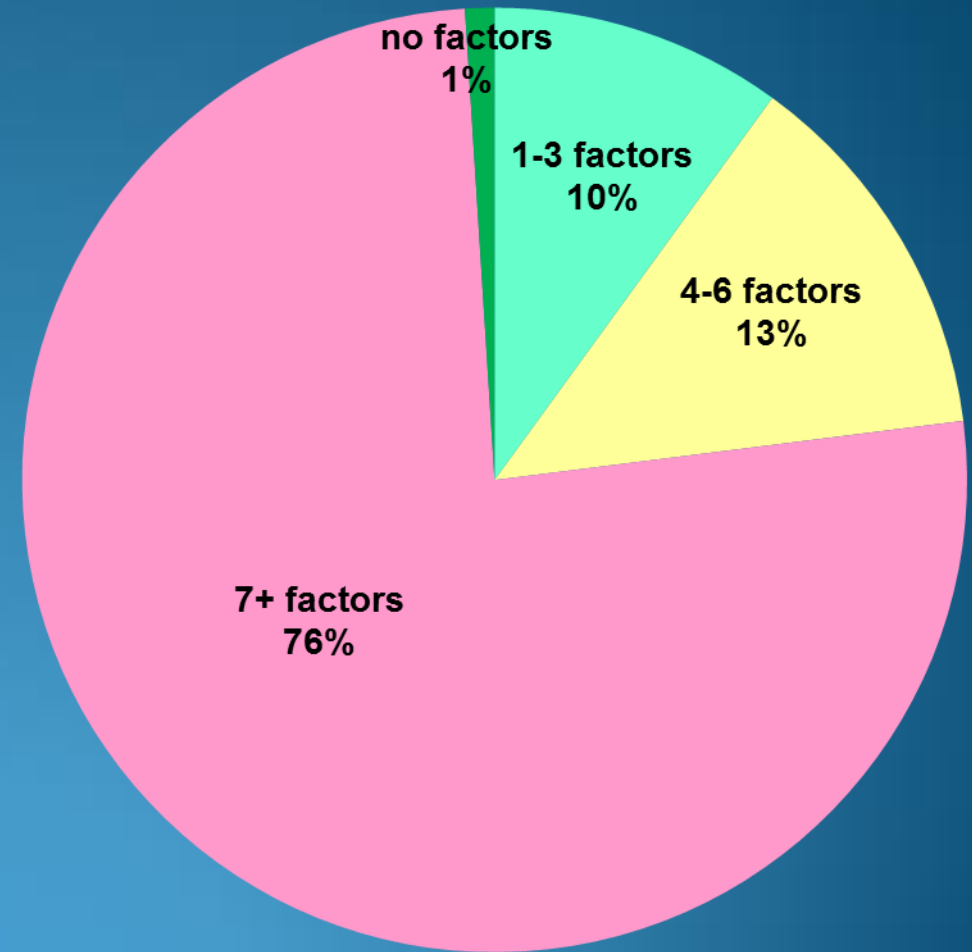
**56%** - Depression (or other mental health problems)

**51%** - Prior threats to commit suicide or attempt

**47%** - Escalation of violence

# Multiple Risk Factors

- 1) History of Domestic Violence
- 2) Actual or pending separation
- 3) Obsessive behaviour displayed by perpetrator
- 4) Perpetrator depressed
- 5) Prior threats/attempts to commit suicide
- 6) Escalation of violence
- 7) Victim had intuitive sense of fear
- 8) Prior threats to kill victim
- 9) Perpetrator unemployed
- 10) Prior attempts to isolate victim





# Research on Risk Factors for Child Homicide in the Context of Domestic Violence

- Perpetrator unemployment, separation, psychological instability, substance abuse & prior history of DV (Marleau et al. 1999; Brandon, 2009)
- Antecedents include history of child abuse, prior family involvement with agencies & domestic violence in the family (Websdale, 1999)
- Often child victims are 4 years of age or younger (Division of Criminal Justice Services Office of Justice Research and Performance, 2008)

# Characteristics of domestic homicide cases involving child deaths

(Based on 10 cases reviewed by the Ontario DVDRC between 2003 and 2009)

- 50% homicide-suicide cases; 50% homicide cases
- 80% of the homicides were perpetrated by a male
- 80% of the cases had 7 or more risk factors
  - Most common risk factors: prior history of DV; separation; obsessive behaviour; and depression

# Who Knows What?

- Family 73%
- Friends 65%
- Police 57%
- Lawyer 42%
- Co-workers 33%
- Medical 22%
- DV agency 15%
- CAS 10%
- Clergy 4%

# Agency Involvement in Domestic Homicide Cases With and Without Child Victims

Category	No Child In Home (n=44)	No Child Target (n=27)	Child Target (n=13)
All Agency Contact**	4.07	6.30	9.31
Perpetrator Only**	2.75	4.52	6.69
Victim Only*	2.57	3.37	5.77
Perpetrator & Victim**	1.25	1.89	3.31
Children	n/a	0.52	1.08
**p<.001 *p<.01	Data based on 84 domestic homicide cases reviewed by the Ontario DVDRG from 2003 to 2009		

Hamilton, L.H.A., Jaffe, P.G. & Campbell, M. (2013). Assessing children's risk for homicide in the context of domestic violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 28(2), 179-89.

# Missed Opportunities for Community Intervention

- Number of agencies involved with child homicide cases significantly higher (9.31 vs. 6.30 vs. 4.07) - higher number of agencies for perpetrator and victims
- Almost no risk assessment or safety planning for child and/or adult victim

(Hamilton, Jaffe & Campbell, 2012)



# Risk Assessment Tools?

- Study on effectiveness of Danger Assessment, Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment, Spousal Assault Risk Assessment for 13 child homicides vs. 27 adult DV homicide
- No overall differences – when mothers were at risk, children were at risk
- Individual factors – “prior threats to harm children” from DA (69% vs. 37%) and “intimate relationship problem” from SARA (77% vs. 33%)

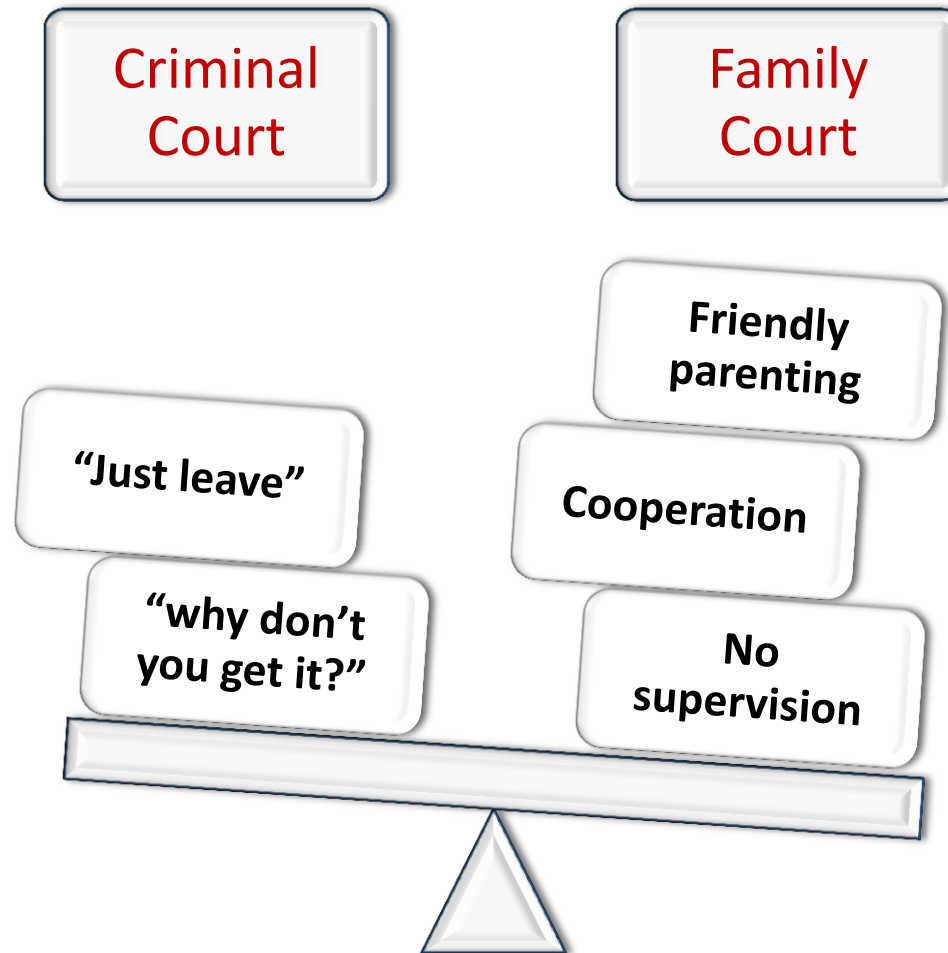
# Who, What, When & How?

- Who?
  - All front-line professionals and neighbours, friends, family and co-workers
- What?
  - Presence of children & vulnerabilities – Risk Assessment & Safety Planning
  - ASAP
- When?
- How?
  - **Collaboration & Information Sharing**

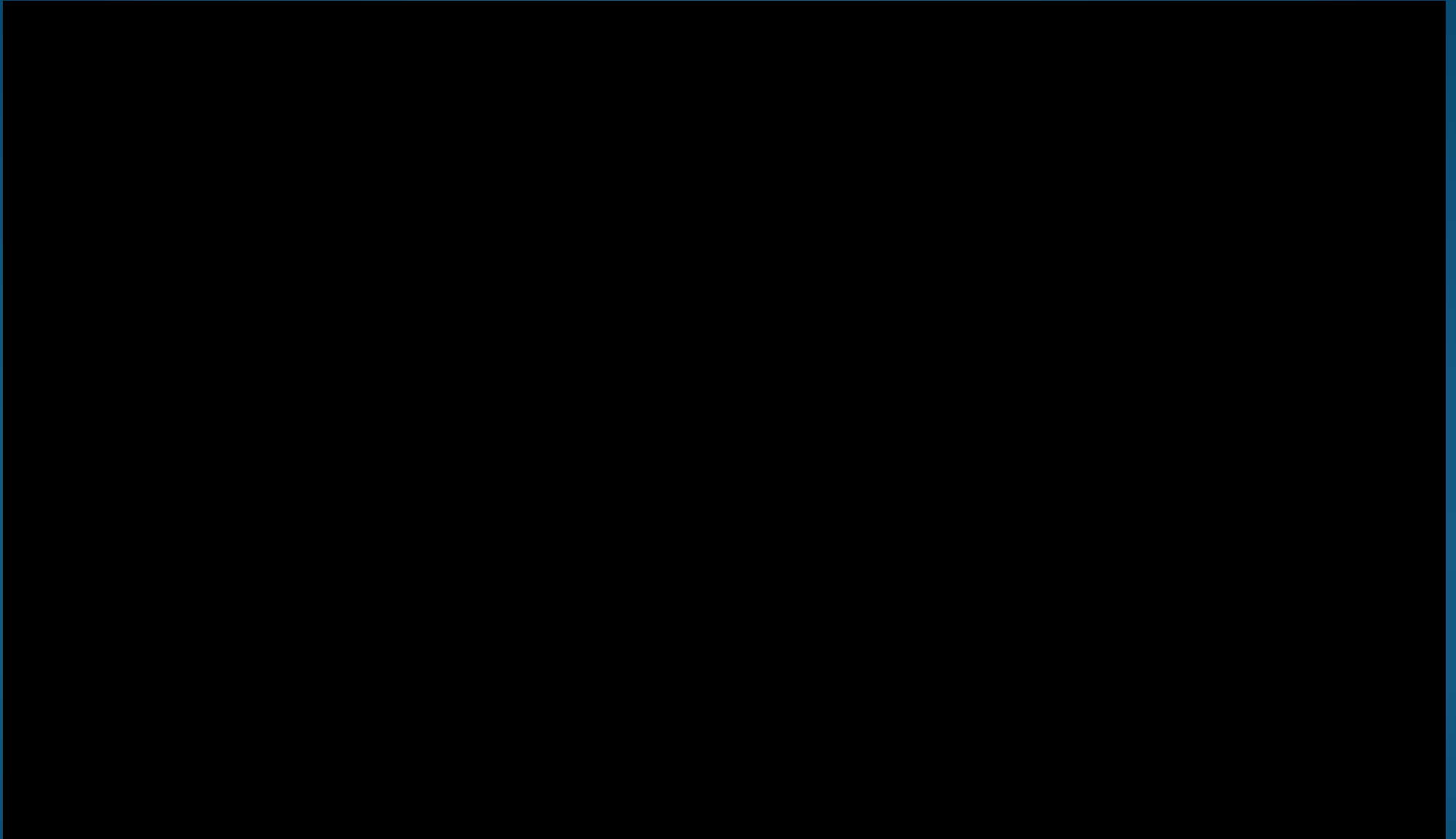
# Recommendations

- Public & professional awareness of risks to children
- Risk assessment & safety planning
- Risk management & reduction with perpetrators – DV programs, focus on parenting
- Supervised or no access – even on interim basis in criminal and family law hearings
- Collaboration within family law – child protection and child custody hearing
- Collaboration with family and criminal justice systems

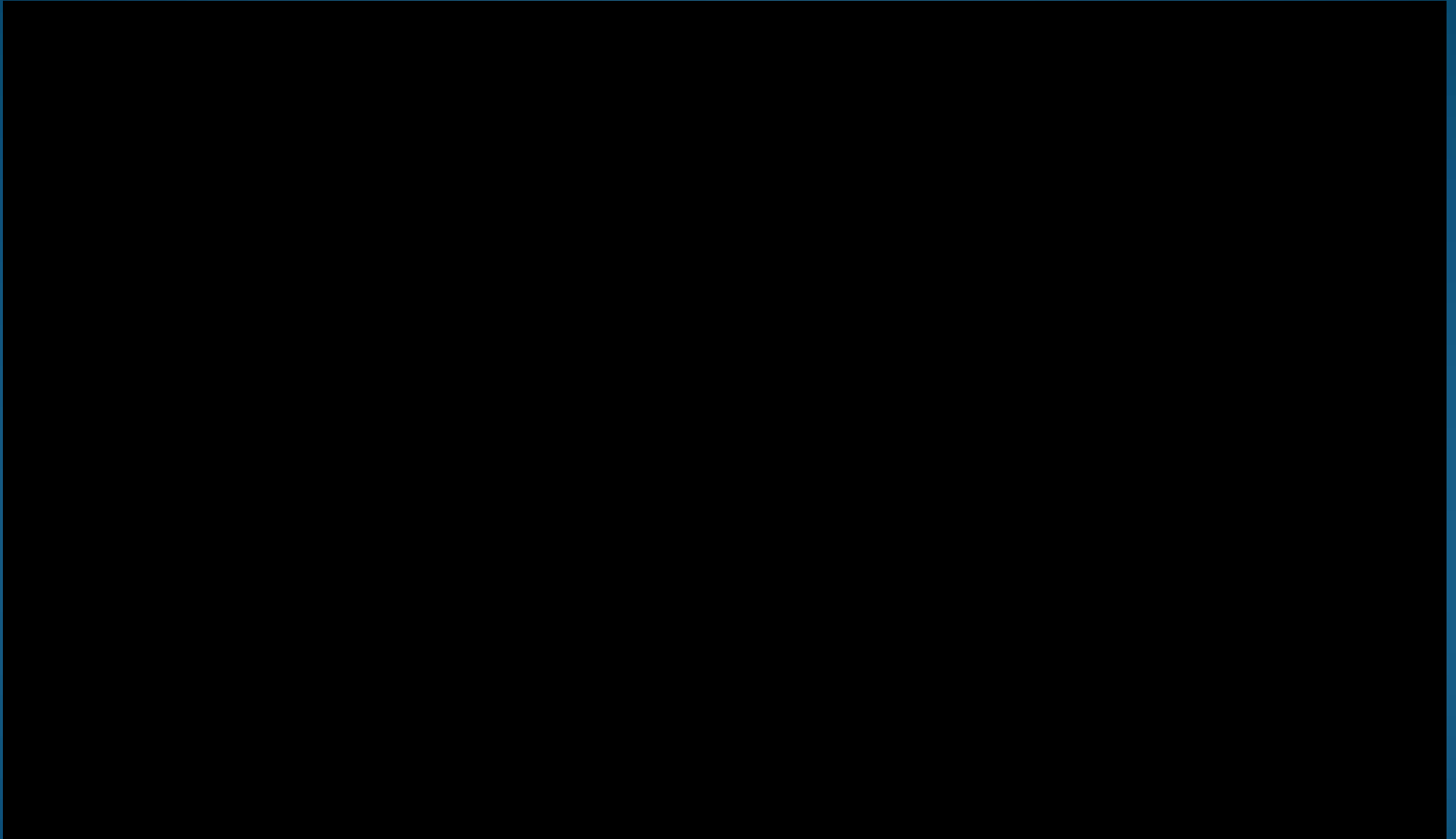
# System's Mixed Messages to Victims



# Risk Assessment & Risk Management Scenarios



# Risk Assessment & Risk Management Intervention





# Thank You!

## Peter Jaffe

pjaffe@uwo.ca

- Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children

[www.learningtoendabuse.ca](http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca)



- Learning Network: Education, Research & Resources on Violence Against Women

[www.vawlearningnetwork.ca](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca)

- Domestic Violence Risk Assessment and Management Online Curriculum

[www.onlinetraining.learningtoendabuse.ca](http://www.onlinetraining.learningtoendabuse.ca)

- Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative

[www.cdhpi.org](http://www.cdhpi.org)