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**Preventing Domestic Homicides: Lessons Learned from Tragedies**  
December 10, 2015

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*Learning to End Abuse*

Western Education



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Lessons Learned from Tragedies  
Learning Network Webinar: December 10, 2015

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What Should We Have Learned about Domestic Violence in the Past 40 Years?

- Significant problem that impacts the whole community
- Victims, perpetrators and children are a very heterogeneous group that defy stereotypes
- Key strategies have to include safety, accountability and healing
- Coordination/integration of court and community services is essential

Learning from Tragedies



Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC)

- A multi-disciplinary advisory committee within the Office of the Chief Coroner
- Established in 2002 in response to recommendations made from 2 major inquests into the deaths of *Arlene May/Randy Iles* and *Gillian and Ralph Hadley*.

*We Speak for the Dead to Protect the Living*



### 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.
- Since its inception in 2003, the DVDRC has reviewed 199 cases, involving 290 deaths (61% homicides & 39% homicides/suicides)
- Ontario overall total - 273 cases & 375 deaths during this period (not all reviewed yet).

### Are DV Homicides Predictable & Preventable?

- 80% of the cases had at least 7 risk markers
- Gendered nature of domestic homicides – 82% women, 10% men & 8% children
- Critical information held by family, work colleagues, front-line professionals
- Critical need to share information and collaborate amongst police, community services and the criminal and family courts

### Common Risk Factors

80% of cases had seven or more risk factors identified

- 73% Prior history of domestic violence
- 69% Actual or pending separation
- 54% Perpetrator depressed
- 53% Obsessive behaviour displayed by perpetrator
- 49% Escalation of violence
- 44% Prior threats/attempts of suicide
- 44% Prior threats to kill the victim
- 42% Prior attempts to isolate victim
- 38% Victim had intuitive sense of fear

### 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.



### Who Knew What?

- Family 75%
- Friends 53%
- Police 41%
- Medical 28%
- Lawyers 25%
- CAS 19%
- Co-workers 19%
- DV agency 15%

### Missed Opportunities for Community Intervention

- Number of agencies involved with child homicide cases more than double compared to adult homicide (9.31 vs. 4.07 - number of agencies/professionals for perpetrator and victims\*)
- **Almost no risk assessment or safety planning for child and/or adult victim**

\*Hamilton, L; Jaffe, P; Campbell, M. (2013) Assessing children's risk for homicide in the context of domestic violence. *Journal of Family Violence*. 28 (2) 179-189

## 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%)

\*Jaffe, P., Campbell, M., Olszowy, L., Hamilton, L.H.A. (2014) Paternal filicide in the context of domestic violence: Challenges in risk assessment and risk management for community and justice professionals. *Child Abuse Review*, 23 (2) 142-153

## 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 & family and criminal justice systems

## Challenges & Future Directions: National Collaboration

- Creating a climate of trust and understanding rather than shame and blame
- Engaging each sector and discipline
- Research with vulnerable populations
- Auditing implementation of recommendations
- National collaboration - Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative ([www.cdhipi.ca](http://www.cdhipi.ca))

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## Questions or Comments?

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