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

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

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%)


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.cdhpi.ca)

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- Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children
  www.learningtoendabuse.ca
- Learning Network: Education, Research & Resources on Violence Against Women
  www.vawlearningnetwork.ca
- Domestic Violence Risk Assessment and Management Online Curriculum
  www.onlinetraining.learningtoendabuse.ca

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