

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue and white top, is looking out a window with white horizontal blinds. Her hand is raised, touching the blinds. The background shows a bright blue sky and some greenery.

Recognizing and Responding to Risk Factors for Domestic Homicide in New Brunswick

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**PCPC Conference:
Family Violence: Strategies for
Healthy Living & Healthy Relationships**

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Purpose of the presentation – making sense of the senseless

- 1) By providing a brief overview of the risk factors associated with the NB domestic homicides & murder-suicides (**NB Silent Witness Project**) and reflecting on differences in urban and rural experiences of abuse (**Research – Doherty and Hornosty**)
- 2) By exploring some unique rural-based solutions that may help to foster community based solutions
- 4) Questions and Answers

Couple died in murder-suicide in Oak Bay, RCMP confirm

Husband recently finished probation after being convicted

Last Updated: Monday, July 23, 2007 | 3:48 PM AT
CBC News

Man pleads guilty in common-law wife's death

January 7, 2008 | 2:48 PM AT

Elderly couple found dead in Miramichi-area home

Staff Aug 24, 2007

Autopsy confirms murder-suicide

CBC News

Autopsy results confirm that a Moncton couple died as a result of a murder-suicide.

RCMP say 34-year-old Paul Blackman, common-law wife, Monique Breau, shot him before turning the gun on himself. Shootings took place around 9 p.m. and were discovered at approximately 10 p.m.

Harcourt man, Moncton woman found dead in residence on Saturday

BY CRAIG BABSTOCK

TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

Two people found dead in a Harcourt residence on Saturday were shot to death in a murder-suicide, according to the RCMP.

N.B. man sentenced to life for murder-suicide

Last Updated: Tuesday, January 4, 2011 | 5:38 PM AT
CBC News

A Saint John, N.B., man was sentenced to life in prison for the murder-suicide of his wife.

Charlo couple died in murder-suicide, police say

CBC News
Posted: Sep 12, 2011 3:10 PM AT
Last Updated: Sep 12, 2011 5:17 PM AT

A man and a woman found dead Saturday in Charlo, N.B., died as the result of a murder-suicide, police said.

Memramcook couple died in murder-suicide, police say

Last Updated: Tuesday, November 13, 2007 | 12:08 PM AT
CBC News

Domestic Homicides in NB

- 40 NB women have lost their lives at the hands of an intimate partner over the past 22 years (since 1990). Over half of the deaths were murder-suicides – most by firearms (www.silentwitness.ca).
- Currently, 2 trials in progress, 2 unconfirmed DV murder-suicides, and just a week ago, another confirmed murder-suicide.
- Anyone can be a victim – victims came from diverse backgrounds, cultures, occupations and educational levels.
- Patterns are emerging that suggest that we need to respond much earlier to the risk factors that signal the escalation of abuse into lethal violence.

Domestic Homicide Risk Factors

- Analysis of risk factors associated with female intimate partner deaths in NB largely consistent with those in other studies. Included, but not limited to:
 - Relationship Status (married, common-law or boyfriend)
 - Cohabitation status (separated or living together)
 - Urban / rural
 - History of domestic violence
 - Criminal Record (of accused)
 - Weapon/ firearms
 - Escalation of violence
 - Health /Mental health (including threats of suicide, depression, etc.)
 - Presence of children (step children, custody disputes, etc)
 - Alcohol and/or drug addictions
 - Employment status/education/economic stressors
 - Personal attributes
 - Blaming of victim/Entitlement
 - Community supports

Emerging patterns associated with these risk factors in NB

- Leaving can be a dangerous time – 37% NB women killed after separation.
- But staying is the norm in NB and the majority of women (67%) were killed by partners while living together
- Some common factors were:
 - The majority were in common-law or boyfriend type relationships
 - Majority lived in small towns and rural communities.
 - Majority of perpetrators were drinking heavily – many had serious addictions.
 - Most victims had been living with family violence for years and several had left and returned various times
 - Over half the perpetrators killed their partners with hunting rifles/shotguns
 - Many of the perpetrators had health or mental health problems including depression and many had threatened suicide
 - Many of the perpetrators blamed the women for provoking them – arguing, not obeying, fighting back.
 - Many perpetrators claimed they were jealous - couldn't live without her
 - The majority of women killed were between 29 and 60 years of age.

Do these patterns differ from national patterns?

- Risk factors are risk factors...but how they cluster and the patterns that emerge are different
- The most common factors experienced by murdered women in NB was sometimes quite different than national data or findings of Ontario Domestic Homicide Death Review Report (2008)
- Ontario deaths tend to reflect national statistics which are very urban-centric

Location (Urban – Rural)

- 70% killed in small towns or rural communities with population base of 10,000 or less

(In Ontario, vast majority of domestic homicides happened in urban areas - 55% occurred in cities with pops of 500,000 to over a million– less than 10% killed in small communities)



Relationship Status

- The majority of women, about 68%, were killed while in common-law or boyfriend type relationships

(In Ontario, 48% killed by common-law or boyfriend)



Cohabitation Status

(Pending or actual separation)

- Leaving abuse can be a dangerous time – 37% NB women killed after separation.
(In Ontario, separation was the #1 common factor - 81% of the women killed at or after separation)
- In NB, staying is the norm; the majority of women (63%) were killed by partners while living together.
- Safety planning must address both situations.



Cause of death – firearms

- Firearms in the home can be deadly. Over 50% of the NB women killed by firearms, mostly hunting rifles/shotguns.

(In Ontario, 25% of the deaths firearms related)

Criminal Record

- Close to 65% of perpetrators had known criminal records - ranging from impaired driving, assaults, uttering threats, and break and enter arson, and probation breaches.

(In Ontario, 80% of perpetrators had prior criminal record)



Addictions

- The majority of perpetrators were drinking heavily at the time (70%) – many had serious addictions - this often resulted in manslaughter convictions.
(In Ontario, 42% of cases involved excessive alcohol)
- This speaks to the need to develop societal responses to abusive behavior that do not minimize or make excuses.



Mental Health Issues

- In court cases, about 40% of accused said to be depressed and/or had a history of mental illness – suicide attempts, sleeplessness

(Ontario – greater access to data shows)

- 60% displayed obsessive behaviour /40% depressed in opinion of professional/60% threatened suicide
- 40% controlled victims activities / 51% threatened to kill the victim /32% threatened with weapon /17% prior assault with a weapon



Blaming the victim - entitlement

- Court files show that majority of perpetrators had excuses ...they blamed the women for provoking them, making them jealous, the stress of an illness, arguing, not obeying or fighting back.
(In Ontario, 27% denied family violence; 19% had attitude of entitlement; 31% extreme jealousy)
- Common to read in transcripts that perpetrator minimized /denied prior abuse and blamed victim
 - *“she made me do it”*
 - *“I’m a victim of loving her too much”*
 - *“I kissed her and told her I loved her everyday”.*
 - *“I’m guilty of falling in love with her. Two and half years she ran around on me. I did and still do love [her]. She knows, she knows I love her.”*
 - *“My biggest crime was loving her too much.”*
 - *“She was my sweetheart...my best friend”*
 - *“I just needed to get some sleep and she wouldn’t let me.”*
 - *“I gave her everything but nothing I did for her was good enough.”*
 - *“I was drinking and passed out. When I woke up, she was dead”*

Exploring Solutions for Caring Communities

- Our greatest challenge is to understand how our response to domestic violence fosters a climate of tolerance to, or rejection of, the use of force in intimate relationships.

Are you ready to respond or reach out?

- Let's review some of the barriers and practical ways that community can become part of the SOLUTION!

Know the signs of abuse and name it for what it is – wrong!

- Know the signs of abuse...and the various forms that it can take. Take them seriously.
- Recognize the situational risks such as unemployment, poverty, isolation, lack of services, community and/or cultural values that devalue women.
- Remember, that when an abused woman reaches out for help, she is most likely to turn to a family member, friend, neighbour, or co-worker.

Recognize how our attitudes can shut down a victim of abuse

- Tendency to blame the victim ***“What did you do to push his buttons?”***
- Tendency to normalize the abuse ***“He’s a nice guy. He wouldn’t act like that [controlling] if he didn’t love you so much!”*** or ***“That’s the way men are – what’s wrong with you?”***
- Tendency to minimize the abuse ***“He’s only mean when he’s been drinking”***
- Tendency to make excuses for the abuser ***“He was just blowing off steam.”*** ***“He just lost his job and is under a lot of stress...give him a break.”***

Offer help - don't assume an abused woman will take action if gets "really bad" – it may be too late by then

"People don't know, they don't take it seriously enough...if you go around saying you were abused ... they're just 'Oh, that must have been bad.' And that's it. You know, they really don't take notice."

"They could see me with bruises...they seen his hand print was bruised in my neck...they said, "You're a big girl. If you want out, you leave."

(Interviews, Abused Women)

(Doherty, D. and Hornosty, J., 2007)

Reach out first

- If you see signs of abuse, you need not wait until that person asks for help.
- Don't worry that you might be wrong, that it might embarrass her, or she might get mad at you. That's better than learning that something worse happened to her.
- Sometimes all you have to say at first is "What I see happening is wrong and it is not your fault". Assure her that you care and offer to be there for her. Ask her how you can help (babysit, take in her pet, give her a ride, let her use your computer, tell her about the local transition house/outreach, loan her some money, etc.).

Recognize that a cavalier attitude to gun safety puts abused women at great risk

- Be careful not to “normalize” unsafe firearms practices just because they are in rural homes and they are hunting rifles/shot guns.
- Encourage abused women who may feel desensitized to the danger of having a firearm in the home, that they are at risk...especially if there are threats of suicide.

*“ ...the lack of attention to the safety of abused women is partly explained by the high tolerance to firearms abuse in rural homes – even by professionals.”
(Doherty and Hornosty, 2008)*

Take threats of harm and suicide seriously

- Recognize that threats to kill a partner if they leave or to commit suicide are a powerful form of control...
 - “I can’t live without you” “if I can’t have you nobody can”
- Presence of firearms make those threats all the more probable.
- Encourage her to take such threats seriously, and suggest that she let the police know that she is fearful and that there are firearms in the home.

Encourage safety planning (for leaving abuse and living with abuse)

- Suggest that she talk to a professional to help her make a safety plan to strategically assess her personal risks and find ways to mitigate those risks or to stay safe after leaving.
- Ask her if she would like to leave a packed bag at your home for emergencies.
- Suggest that you have a “code word” that she can use that means she is in danger and you should call the police.

Counter the abuser's sense of denial

- Perpetrators often deny wrong doing - they blame the victim for cheating, arguing, putting them down, or simply leaving. They may blame addictions, health or mental health problems, unemployment, and other hardships.
- No matter what problems exist, there is NO EXCUSE for abuse...and we need to say that over and over, both to the victim and the abuser.

Understand that “risk factors” do NOT cause violence – but the more there are, the more likely something harmful will happen

- Many people confuse risk factors with CAUSES. Many people mistakenly believe, for example, that alcohol/drug addictions or mental illness are the underlying causes of family violence. They may believe that someone who treats a partner in a demeaning way is just reflecting his own personal attitudes or flaws.
- When people attribute the power of causation to risk factors, they may feel helpless to make a difference. “I can’t make him stop drinking. There’s nothing I can do”

Realize there is a complex relationship between addictions, mental health & domestic violence

- DV, substance abuse and mental health issues should be understood and treated as independently problems. Cannot reduce DV to the familiar language and treatments of other problems.
- Because these are frequently occurring problems, they often overlap; we must look for holistic solutions to social problems.

Recap

- **We must all learn to name abuse for what it is and speak out when we see it.**
- **We must reach out to women experiencing violence in an intimate relationship – say: *“I care about you. I believe you.”***
- **We must validate her pain and suffering. Assure her, *“It’s not your fault –you are not to blame”*.**
- **We must offer whatever help in any way we can.**

- **We must all learn to recognize factors that are correlated with a higher risk of domestic homicide - past violence is a good predictor of future violence.**
- **We must recognize the potential for an escalation of violence for women experiencing family violence in homes with firearms, alcohol/drug addictions, mental health problems and suicide threats.**

- **We must recognize that children who witness family violence suffer too and conflicts over custody create higher risks for lethality.**
- **Remember that pets be can part of the cycle of violence too.**
- **We must learn how to hold the abuser accountable –but support his efforts to change**

- **We must advocate for appropriate services and resources**
- **We must learn to address those factors which are amenable to change.**
- **We must begin the dialogue.**

Be part of the solution!

- Are **YOU** prepared to recognize the abusive tactics that signal the potential for the escalation of family violence into lethality?
- Are **YOU** prepared to offer help to someone experiencing abuse in non-judgmental manner? What might that consist of?
- Are **YOU** prepared to speak out about the harm that family violence creates throughout our society?
- Are **YOU** aware of the services and resources available to help families end the violence in their lives?

Consider participating in the
Safer Families...Safer Communities campaign.

Safer Families...Safer Communities



Safer Families...Safer Communities

A public awareness campaign to promote safe and violence free homes and communities



1

There are usually warning signs that suggest a friend, family member, co-worker or neighbour is being abused. Know what these signs are and take them seriously

Learn what is being done in your community and elsewhere to help prevent and respond to abuse. Become a volunteer, or make a contribution to support these efforts.

2



3

Speak out when someone hurts an animal - they may be hurting others in their family too.

Most injuries and deaths from firearms are preventable. Use safe practices when storing, handling and transporting guns.

4



5

Know how the law can help people living with abuse or violence in their lives.

For more information on this campaign, visit www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca or call Toll-free 1-888-236-2444

To learn more on these topics, you can contact the following local organization(s):

Thank you for your time.



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