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SEPARATION AS A PRECEDENT TO FEMICIDE: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF FEMICIDE REVIEWS

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SEPARATION AS A PRECEDENT TO FEMICIDE: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF FEMICIDE REVIEWS

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to examine the specific risks involved in separating from an intimate partner. Factors examined were whether the perpetrator or victim were financially dependent, whether they had children, whether there was an escalation of violence, whether the victim had a new partner and whether the victim had access to social or community supports. These factors were predicted to be significant in helping the public and professionals understand the risks specific to separating couples and to help keep women safe before, during and after separation. 65 case reviews, provided by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee of Ontario, were coded and analysed. The results showed that women are at risk through the entire process of separation. The perpetrator's isolating and violent behaviour also appeared to increase as the process of separation progressed. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: separation, divorce, domestic homicide, femicide, domestic violence, risk assessment

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Introduction

Prevalence of Femicide

In Canada the majority of femicides occur in a domestic context (Gartner & McCarthy 1991). North American women are more likely to be murdered by an intimate partner than any other type of perpetrator (Campbell et al., 2003). Over 41,000 femicides committed in the United States between 1976 and 2005 were perpetrated by an intimate partner (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). In Canada, between 1979 and 1998 over fourteen hundred women were murdered by their husbands (Dawson, 2001). In 2007 fifty one Canadian women were killed by their spouses (Statistics Canada, 2009). These figures do not consistently take into account dating partners, common-law partners or those who are separated or divorced; therefore the number of intimate partner homicides in Canada is likely to be higher (Dawson, 2001). In response to the high numbers of femicides and their destructive consequences, Domestic Violence Death Review (DVDR) teams have formed in order to look more in depth at individual femicide cases, in the hope of preventing tragedies in future cases with similar circumstances.

Domestic Violence Death Review Teams

A DVDR team can be described as a multidisciplinary committee which reviews all the facts and circumstances surrounding a femicide to examine patterns and trends that would inform prevention efforts (Websdale et al., 1997). One of the primary roles of a DVDR team is to take an in depth look at reported domestic homicide cases to determine

the behaviours and circumstances which preceded the homicide. Although practices vary across jurisdictions, many DVDR teams accomplish their analysis by reviewing the case files as well as speaking to witnesses, both the perpetrator and the victim's family members, as well as any service agencies that the victim or perpetrator may have accessed. The team analyzes this information to uncover common themes which may be predictors of risk and determine where services were successful or lacking. These insights are then communicated through recommendations to several different community members and agencies such as courts, physicians, shelters or the media in an effort to prevent future domestic homicides (DVDRC, 2009).

The first DVDR committee in the United States began in San Francisco in 1991. It formed in response to the Charan case, a high profile femicide which illustrated the need for an investigation into the systemic response to domestic violence (San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women, 1991). There are currently several dozen DVDR teams in the United States which attempt to track and examine the domestic homicides which occur in their respective states (Websdale et al., 1997). There is also a national domestic violence fatality review initiative that is useful in bringing this information together (Websdale, 2003). DVDR teams can capture a regional picture of domestic homicides. This is important since different areas can have different risk factors such as poverty or language barriers (Websdale, 2003). To date, Ontario is the only province in Canada with a Domestic Violence Death Review Committee and it has succeeded in reviewing and collecting detailed information on 77 cases of domestic homicide involving 117 deaths since it was established in 2003 (DVDRC, 2009).

The DVDRC reviews homicide which are the result of domestic violence, specifically cases where a person and/or their children have been killed by the person's current or former intimate partner. In 2007 the DVDRC reviewed 15 cases; however, there were approximately 30 reported domestic homicide cases in Ontario that year. Ideally, the DVDRC would be able to review every domestic homicide that occurs in Ontario, however, it is limited by certain factors. One such factor is the large amount of time and resources needed to review each case. Furthermore, it is not possible to review a case if there are still any active court proceedings. Once a specific case has been selected for review, the DVDRC analyses the facts to develop a greater understanding of the risk factors involved and how future domestic homicides can be prevented (DVDRC, 2009).

The purpose of the present study is to determine if women at certain stages of separation are faced with different challenges and have specific needs. This research was conceived from a feminist theoretical stance which considers domestic violence in the context of systemic patriarchal attitudes and power and control. Hopefully the themes revealed in the cases reviewed by the DVDRC will help inform the public and professionals of the particular risks involved in separating from an intimate partner.

Literature Review

Risk Assessment

The risk factors identified by the DVDRC are helpful for researchers to be aware of so that they can develop risk assessment tools. Risk assessments are useful in determining the severity of abuse as well as the factors that an individual may have in their intimate relationship which put them at risk for future violence or femicide (Glass, et al., 2008). The Danger Assessment Scale (DA) is one such tool that helps determine

whether a woman is in danger of being killed by her intimate partner. It was developed by Jacquelyn Campbell and the majority of studies support its reliability as well as its construct and predictive validity (Campbell, Webster & Glass, 2009). Risk assessment tools such as the DA are important for professionals since they can identify high risk situations and potentially help avoid a femicide from occurring (Kropp, 2008). These tools are also helpful for professionals when creating a safety plan for a woman. A risk assessment can help determine the level of danger a woman is in and what steps need to be taken in order to keep her safe (Kropp, 2008).

Nurses, physicians, police officers, shelter workers, psychologists and counsellors are just some of the professionals who can use a risk assessment tool to help a woman determine if she is in danger (Kropp, 2008). Given that these interventions can potentially make the difference between life and death it is important to have an in depth understanding of each risk factor (Logan & Walker, 2004). Many researchers have attempted to determine risk factors which could assess whether a woman is in danger of being killed by her partner (Koziol-McLain et al., 2006; Dobash et al., 2007; Aldridge & Browne, 2003).

Risk Factors

Prior physical abuse is one such risk factor which has been found in up to 80% of all intimate partner homicides (Campbell et al., 2003). It is estimated that 28% of Canadian women have been assaulted by a current or previous partner (Johnson & Pottie Bunge, 2001) and worldwide the numbers have been reported to be as high as 70% (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002). Physical intimate partner violence has

been defined in many ways and can range from threats of violence to actual violence, such as hitting, shoving, choking, and attacks with a weapon (Romans et al., 2007).

It is vital to assess risk factors pertaining to the perpetrator of such violence since this can give a woman a better idea of whether her partner could be lethally dangerous. The DVDRC lists many in their annual report, some of which are obsessive behaviour displayed by the perpetrator, access to or possession of firearms, control of most or all of victim's daily activities and excessive alcohol and/or drug abuse (DVDRC, 2009). Mental illness is another risk factor which is commonly present in perpetrators of femicide. (Starzomski & Nussbaum, 2000).

It is also important to look at situational factors when attempting to prevent femicide. For instance, women who are leaving their intimate partners are up to six times more likely to become victims of femicide (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). A Statistics Canada survey found that women who were in intact relationships were murdered by their current husbands at a rate of 4.4 per million. Those with current common law partners were killed at a rate of 26.5 per million and those who were separated from their partners were killed at a rate of 38 per million (Johnson & Hotton, 2003). The DVDRC found actual or pending separation to be related to 87% of the domestic homicide cases they reviewed in Ontario in 2008. This was the highest percentage for all of the risk factors which were involved (DVDRC, 2009).

Separation is a very dangerous time for a woman for many reasons. If a man feels that he needs to be in a dominating role, he can feel threatened by his partner's attempt to leave him. He may see this as an act of disobedience or disrespect and decide that violence is the only way to regain power (Brownridge, 2006). Our society sends implicit

and explicit messages about what it means to be masculine. The message that tends to be reinforced by friends, family and the media is that to be valued as a man they need to have traditionally masculine qualities such as being able to maintain control over their families. In this respect, there may be a danger for a woman who plans to leave her partner if she has children. More specifically, those whose current partners fathered their children may have an increased risk of being killed by their partners when they initiate a separation (Daly et al., 1997).

Men who hold patriarchal beliefs feel that they need to have physical, emotional and economic power over their partners and children (George, 2007). If the extended family and community believe in a patriarchal structure, women are at an elevated risk of being killed by their husbands (Adinkrah, 2001). Male peer support can also be a large contributing factor to violence during separation. If a man has support from his friends and family in his patriarchal views or if he feels that he will lose this support if his partner leaves him then he is more likely to become violent (Brownridge, 2006). Men may also receive support in their abusive ways when those close to them allow the abuse to remain private. A man may escalate his violence to prevent his abuse from being publicly exposed during the separation (Hearn & Whitehead, 2006).

Men who have limited access to social support systems could also be at risk for killing their partners. They may feel that since they do not have any ties to the community or any sort of reputation to uphold that they have nothing to lose. This can be dangerous for a woman who is leaving her partner as he could become violent, even publicly to prevent her from leaving (Brownridge, 2006). Similarly, male dependency can be one of the motivating factors for men to become violent with a partner who is leaving them. If

they rely on their partner to completely take care of them then they may do anything to hold onto that primary support including becoming violent (Brownridge, 2006).

A woman who has separated from her partner also has an increased risk for being assaulted if the man suspects that she is dating somebody else (Brownridge, 2006). If men perceive their partner to be interested in other men they are more likely to become possessive and physically violent (Cousins & Gangestad, 2007). Sexual jealousy is one of the most commonly self-reported motivations for femicide as accounted by perpetrators (Wilson & Daly, 1998). Additionally, if a woman begins to become financially and socially independent, she can be at a higher risk for abuse since the perpetrator sees her as moving further away from reconciliation (Brownridge, 2006).

Separation as a Process

Although there is a significant body of knowledge surrounding separation as a risk factor, further exploration and clarification of this issue is needed to ensure that safety plans are tailored to women at all stages of separation. Separation can be seen to have several phases which have psychological and behavioural growth specific to each (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Some examples of these phases are management of the violence by the victim, acknowledgement of the abuse and attempting to disengage from the relationship. It is also important to note a final phase in which long-term separation is successful. This is usually accomplished after returning to the abusive partner and repeating the initial three phases several times (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). The most dangerous time for a woman is when she is leaving her partner, followed by women who were separated from their partner for less than three months (DeKeseredy, 2007). Success in remaining separated is often associated with the number and quality of supports and

personal coping skills a woman can build during this often cyclical process (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

When a woman is considering leaving her partner it is often expected that she will make a single, definite decision, immediately follow through with it and eventually succeed. In reality, separating from an intimate partner is a process which has many elements that can delay or even completely inhibit its resolution regardless of intent. Some of these limiting factors are specific to the stage a woman is at in the process of leaving and some factors, such as living in a patriarchal society or a lack of financial stability, can be universal to women at all stages of separation with or without a history of intimate physical violence (Barnett, 2000).

No Separation

Women who separate from their partners do so within the context of their society which more often than not is heavily influenced by patriarchy, an ideology which can be described as domination of the father over his family and the control of men over women and children (O'Neil & Nadeau, 1999). It is difficult for a woman to decide on and follow through with separation from her partner when she has little personal power or control over much of her life. Women who have been exposed to extreme patriarchal attitudes may even see physical abuse as a normal way for a man to control his wife and children and never see his corporal punishments as a problem (Davies, Ford-Gilboe & Hammerton, 2009).

Women who have experienced trauma early in their lives may also expect violence to be a natural part of an intimate relationship. A 2004 study showed that women with histories of trauma are more likely to perceive certain dangerous situations

or behaviours as normal and are not aware of the level of risk involved in their relationships (Smith, Davis & Fricker-Elhai, 2004). Even when a woman does recognize the abuse as problematic, her partner is likely to blame her for his abusive behaviours (Scott & Straus, 2007). The belief that she is to blame, coupled with traditional notions of love and commitment, can be one of the complex convictions a woman may have if she does not consider leaving her abusive partner (Barnett, 2001).

Traditional underlying principles, such as 'any father is better for children than no father at all', can also keep women who are pregnant or who have children from contemplating separation (Lutz, 2005). This type of belief persists in North America despite extensive research showing the detrimental emotional, behavioural and psychological effects that witnessing domestic violence has on children (Ireland & Smith, 2008; Spilsbury et al., 2008; Martin, 2002). Women who are pregnant may also experience a protective phase during pregnancy where they experience a decrease or absence of intimate partner violence. This can lead a woman to believe that having a child will save the relationship (Taylor & Nabors, 2009).

Pending Separation

Other studies have found that violence can escalate or increase in frequency during pregnancy. A woman in this situation may recognize the increasing danger she is in but feel she needs to stay with her partner due to the importance placed on the family unit by society or simply to ensure that she is financially supported (Chang, Berg, Saltzman, & Herndon, 2005). After her child is born a woman is more likely to consider leaving her partner, however, the reality for many women experiencing intimate partner violence is that both her and her child's survival is dependent on financial support from

her abuser (Lutz, 2005). Women who are thinking of leaving can be at risk of losing their partners support when they separate. A woman may fear that without her partner's resources, she will not be able to care for and therefore possibly lose custody of her children. She may also worry about whether she will be able to find quality supervision for her children at an affordable rate if she is able to obtain employment (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod & Ng, 2003).

Finding employment can be difficult for women who are thinking of leaving their partners as this can be a sign to the abuser that he is losing control of her and that she may succeed in gaining independence from him. The abusive partner will often attempt to prevent his partner from seeking employment by attacking her abilities, threatening her, or even physically harming her so that she cannot make it to interviews or scheduled shifts (Brown, et al., 2005). Even if a woman does have a job during the process of separation her abuser can still make it difficult if not impossible for her to keep that job by stalking her at her place of employment, making a scene or even harassing her co-workers or superiors (Swanberg & Logan, 2005).

Women who are able to obtain employment or keep their current jobs are still at a disadvantage due to gender inequality in the job market. A woman may be making as little as 70% of what her male counterpart would in the same position depending on her job and where she lives (Whitehouse, 2003). This can make the division of assets an especially important procedure, one which is amplified if she also needs to think about supporting her children. Regardless of whether she has children a woman will also need to consider whether or not she will be able to obtain health benefits or cover the cost of health care out of her own pocket (Hendy, 2003). This can be especially important for

women who have experienced domestic abuse as they are more likely to experience health problems related to injury and stress (Campbell, 2002).

Mental health issues, such as depression and post traumatic stress, are also high among victims of violence. A woman who is attempting to leave her abusive partner will come up against obstacles and stressors which can worsen any existing depression or effects of trauma. There are emotional and psychological survival skills that she must develop to manage the steady threat of violence in her life. These can be helpful during times of crisis but they can actually make it even harder for her to develop the coping skills she will need to gain a sense of safety and independence (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Fear may be experienced at any time during the process of separation, and can be especially devastating if the perpetrator is threatening the safety of children, friends, family or pets. The threat of harm is a daily presence in an abusive relationship and since a woman never knows for sure what behaviour or situation will be the trigger for his violent behaviours it is natural to fear his reaction to the possibility of a separation (Lindgren & Renck, 2008). Other sources of fear can be very personal such as the fear that being lonely will be worse than how it feels to be in the unhealthy relationship or that leaving will bring strong feelings of guilt, shame or a sense of failure (Hendy et al., 2003).

Social supports are needed for a woman to safely acknowledge and validate her experience, reframe the abuse and create a plan to keep herself safe (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Unfortunately she is usually forced into isolation during the relationship with most of her friends and family members alienated by his abusive behaviours. Often

the only potential supports she has access to are employers, health care workers or members of her religious community and these individuals can be unprepared to help her create an effective safety plan (Barnett, 2001). Women who have reached out for help are liable to feel hopeless if their attempt at separation was unsuccessful due to a perceived lack of resources or support (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Separations Lasting Less Than Three Months

It can be difficult to navigate social services if they are not coordinated in their efforts to help. A woman may have to visit many different locations and spend a lot of time telling and re-telling her story. It can also be hard to maintain confidence in services if they have limited resources. For example, a woman may attempt to go to a shelter only to find that there are no beds available (Barnett, 2001). While it is incredibly difficult, there are many women who do succeed in separating from their partners, unfortunately, the process of separation does not end when a woman has separated from or divorced her partner. She now has an increased risk being stalked or violently attacked by her ex-partner in an attempt to retaliate for the separation or regain control over her (Ellis & Stuckless, 2006). The first three months following a separation can be very dangerous for a woman (DeKeseredy, 2007) however she may not recognize the danger she is in.

If she does recognize this danger she may try to ensure her safety by obtaining an order of protection, a non-association order or a peace bond (Jordan, 2004). These orders or bonds do not prevent the ex-partner from making contact but rather they are put in place so that if a woman reports a violation of the bond that the perpetrator can be charged and sentenced. Unfortunately the justice system does not always recognize the danger a woman is in and may not properly sentence the perpetrator for all violations. For

instance, a study based in the United States reported that between 50-75% of men who had violated a protection order received no direction to surrender fire arms, were not arrested, incarcerated or even mandated to attend an intervention program for batterers (Diviney, Parekh & Olson, 2009).

The negotiation of child custody and visitation can be a frustrating and potentially dangerous time for a woman. Courts may assume that joint custody is the best option as long as the father's violent behaviour was never towards the children. This arrangement can end up giving the perpetrator opportunities to further victimize and manipulate his ex-partner and children (Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung & Smith, 2005). If the court does not automatically consider joint custody he still may attempt to manipulate the situation. For example, a partner may use his financial resources to convince his ex-partner to request that he be given visitations. It can be difficult to obtain quality childcare on a low-income and his partner may feel that she has no other choice but to accept his help with those costs.

Separations Lasting More Than Three Months

If a woman does have to share custody with her abusive ex-partner he may find ways to continue to use the children to control her. He could threaten her financial stability if he chooses not to show up on the days she has to work where he is scheduled to have the children. He may even stalk and harass her at her work so that she loses her job and has fewer resources to keep the children (Hardesty & Ganong, 2006). Women are also in danger when the children are picked up for or dropped off after visitation with their father as he may use this opportunity to verbally, emotionally or physically abuse or intimidate her.

This continuous threat keeps her on edge, always worrying about her and her children's safety and unable to make plans for her future (Hardesty, 2002). Even if a woman does not have children with her ex-partner it can be difficult to emotionally separate and move on with her life. The fear often remains for a long time, preventing her from making new connections, especially with new intimate partners. If she feels comfortable enough to begin a relationship with a new partner she may not be aware of how dangerous this can be for her (Cousins & Gangestad, 2007).

Method

Purpose

Separation can be a complicated and dangerous process for some abuse victims. It may not be clear to a woman the level of danger she is in or how to keep herself safe (Smith, Davis & Fricker-Elhai, 2004; Cousins & Gangestad, 2007). The purpose of the present study is to determine if women at certain stages of separation are faced with different challenges and have specific needs. Hopefully the themes revealed in the cases reviewed by the DVDRC will help inform the public and professionals of the particular risks involved in separating from an intimate partner.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The cases which were examined had been reviewed between 2003 and 2008 by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee of the Office of the Chief Coroner. A total of 65 DVDRC case summaries and their data summary forms were coded (see Appendix A) to uncover significant trends. The inclusion criteria were all homicides that involved the death of a woman, (and her children if applicable), committed by the woman's partner or ex-partner from an intimate relationship (DVDRC, 2009). This study

looked at cases which fit the most common profile of domestic homicides (adult male as perpetrator and his adult female intimate partner as victim) (Dawson & Gartner, 1998). Cases which were rare, such as same sex couples and cases in which only the children were targeted were excluded. Cases in which certain factors were extreme, for example couples who were teenagers or who were living in nursing homes, were also excluded. The factors in these cases may be specific to each subset and therefore prevent a meaningful analysis.

Procedure

The researcher took an oath of confidentiality, and was granted permission to examine the case summaries by the Chief Coroner and the University of Western Ontario's Ethics Review Board (see Appendix B). All cases were identified by a study code in order to ensure confidentiality. The case summary reviews were stored as electronic files which were located on a password protected computer. A standardized coding instrument was developed in order to consistently examine each case summary (see Appendix A). The coding instrument followed the format of the case summary form utilized by the DVDRC's committee members when reviewing cases.

Additional items were added based on proposed research questions. These items were coded as either present, absent or unknown. The presence of community supports was defined as two or more contacts with community agencies. This is because most women who are leaving their partners will need support from many different agencies such as justice, mental health, social services (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Financial dependence was determined by first looking at whether the victim or perpetrator were

employed and then by taking a more detailed look at the economic and power dynamics in each case.

Inter-Rater Reliability

An inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency among two independent raters. Five cases were randomly selected and coded using the coding instrument (see Appendix A). The subset of cases yielded a 99% overlap in the agreement on data coding.

Sample

The victims in the study were between 18 and 72 years old with a mean age of 38 (SD=11.87) and the perpetrators were between 21 and 68 years old with a mean age of 41 (SD=12.50). The victims and perpetrators were most often employed on a full-time basis however the victims (46.2%) were more often employed on a full-time basis than the perpetrators (38.5%). Unemployment was the second most common employment status for both the victims and perpetrators however the perpetrators (36.9%) were more often unemployed than the victims (21.5%). The perpetrators were more likely to have a criminal history (64.6%) than the victims (12.3%). Both victims and perpetrators were equally likely to have received prior counselling (36.9%) and there were significant life changes in the lives of 83.1% of the victims and 92.3% of the perpetrators (see Table 1).

Table 1: Victim and Perpetrator Characteristics

Category	Variable	Victim (n=65)		Perpetrator (n=65)	
Age	-Minimum	18	-	21	-
	-Maximum	72	-	68	-
	-Mean	38	-	41	-
Employment	-Full-time	30	46.2%	25	38.5%
	-Part-time	9	13.8%	4	6.2%
	-Unemployed	14	21.5%	24	36.9%
	-Other	9	13.8%	11	16.9%
	-Unknown	3	4.6%	1	1.5%
Criminal History	-Yes	8	12.3%	42	64.6%
	-No	55	84.6%	23	35.4%
	-Unknown	2	3.1%	-	-
Prior Counselling	-Yes	24	36.9%	24	36.9%
	-No	29	44.6%	28	43.1%
	-Unknown	12	18.5%	13	20.%
Significant Life Changes	-Yes	54	83.1%	60	92.3%
	-No	10	15.4%	5	7.7%
	-Unknown	1	1.5%	-	-

40% of cases reviewed were classified as homicides, 35.4% were homicide-suicides, 15.4% were attempted homicide-suicides, 4.6% were multiple homicide-suicides and 4.6% were attempted multiple homicide-suicides. The cause of death was most likely to be a gunshot wound (29.2%) or stabbing (27.7%). Of all the homicides reviewed, 80% occurred in the victim and/or the perpetrator's home. The partners in the sample were most likely to be either currently or previous married to one another (53.8%). The relationship was most often one to ten years in length in (53.8%) followed by 11 to 20 years in length (20%) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Situational and Relationship Factors

Category	Variable	Number of Cases	Percentage % (n=65)
Type of Case	-Homicide	26	40%
	-Attempted homicide-suicide	10	15.4%
	-Homicide-suicide	23	35.4%
	-Multiple homicide	3	4.6%
	-Multiple homicide-Suicide	3	4.6%
Cause of Death for Victims	-Stabbing	18	27.7%
	-Gunshot wound	19	29.2%
	-Beating	7	10.8%
	-Strangulation	9	13.8%
	-Blunt force trauma	2	3.1%
	-Other	10	15.4%
Location of Femicide	-Residence, on property	52	80%
	-Urban outdoors	5	7.7%
	-Rural outdoors	2	3.1%
	-Inside, other than residence	6	9.2%
Type of Relationship	-Current or prior spouse	35	53.8%
	-Current or prior common-law partner	13	20%
	-Current or prior Intimate partner (no cohabitation)	17	26.1%
Length of Relationship	-Less than 1 Year	5	7.7%
	-1 - 10 Years	35	53.8%
	-11 - 20 Years	13	20%
	-21 - 30 Years	7	10.8%
	-Over 30 Years	5	7.7%

Data analysis

The researcher used the Chi-Square statistic displayed as a crosstabulation in order to determine any significant relationships amongst the variables and the hypothesised stages of separation (those individuals who had no separation, those who had a pending separation, those who had been separated for less than 3 months and those who had been separated for more than 3 months). Factors examined were, whether the victim and perpetrator had children in common, whether there was a current or prior child custody or access dispute, who had legal and physical custody of the children at the time of the incident, whether the victim had access to social supports, whether there was a new partner in the victim's life and whether there was an escalation of violence against the victim.

Hypotheses

The present study hypothesized that women who are not separated, those who are planning to leave or in the process of leaving, those who have been separated from their partner for less than three months and those who have been separated for more than three months have different needs and require different safety plans and interventions. These groups were chosen based on literature which indicates that women have different experiences and are at different levels of risk during certain stages of separation (Anderson and Saunders, 2003; DeKeseredy, 2007).

For instance, it was predicted that women who were not separated at the time of their death and who were not employed may have felt trapped in their relationship due to their financial dependency on their partner (Barnett, 2000). If she had succeeded in separating from her partner for less than or more than three months it was predicted that

she would be in danger if she was employed since her ex-partner may see this ability to support herself as a threat to his sense of control (Brown, et al., 2005). It was also predicted that if the perpetrator was financially dependent on the victim that she would be in danger if separation was pending (Brownridge, 2006).

It was hypothesized that the victim would be less able to fully disengage from the perpetrator, and therefore be at a higher risk of being killed, if the victim and perpetrator had children in common. For example, women with no separation and who had children may have felt that keeping the family unit intact and maintaining the presence of a father in the home was more important than her own safety (Barnett, 2001; Lutz, 2005). Women who were considering a pending separation may have submitted to the perpetrators demands if it appeared to be best for the children (Lutz, 2005). Women who had been separated for less than three months may have been in danger due to the contact she had with the perpetrator during an ongoing custody battle (Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung & Smith, 2005). Women who had been separated for more than three months may have been in danger if the perpetrator uses visitation as a way of stalking the victim (Hardesty & Ganong, 2006).

This study also hypothesised that while women with no separation may have told friends, family or co-workers about the danger she was in, that she did not have contact with as many community professionals and resources. A man may engage in abusive behaviours around the woman's family and friends so she could have to try to explain or possibly disclose other abuse she has experienced (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). She may also be forced into isolation while she is still in the relationship. The individuals in her community whom she *is* able to make contact with can be unprepared to help her create

an effective safety plan (Barnett, 2001). It was predicted that women who were killed after 3 months may have experienced the most professional interventions but were not aware of the danger they were in and lacked safety planning (Barnett, 2001).

It was also hypothesised that the presence of a new partner would be a dangerous factor for women who had separated from their partner since the perpetrator may feel jealous or that this signifies a concrete end to their relationship. (Cousins & Gangestad, 2007). Finally, this study hypothesised that since the most dangerous time for a woman is when she is leaving her partner, followed by women who were separated from their partner for less than three months (DeKeseredy, 2007), that there would be an escalation of violence in cases where there was a pending or actual separation.

Results

For a risk assessment to effectively identify a woman's risk, it needs to be based on risk factors which were present in cases where a femicide did occur. The Domestic Death Review Committee reviews domestic homicide cases to determine what these risk factors are and makes recommendations based on them. Actual or pending separation is one of the most common factors found in the cases they review (DVDRC, 2009). The present study hypothesised that there are several stages of separation and that women in each stage have experienced risk differently and require different safety plans. Factors which were predicted to affect women during the process of separation were financial dependence, the presence of children, whether there was an escalation of violence, whether the victim had a new partner and whether the victim had access to social or community supports.

Femicide risk factors were analysed and ranked by frequency across all cases reviewed. The risk factors which were most likely to be present in the cases were a history of domestic violence which was known to be true in 75% of cases and an escalation of violence which was known to have occurred before the femicide in 63% of cases. Obsessive behaviour on the part of the perpetrator, such as stalking the victim, was another risk factor which was often present and the perpetrator had actually threatened to kill the victim in 49% of all cases. 62% of the perpetrators had depression or other mental health problems and 48% of perpetrators had threatened or attempted suicide. 43% of all victims had an intuitive sense of fear for their safety.

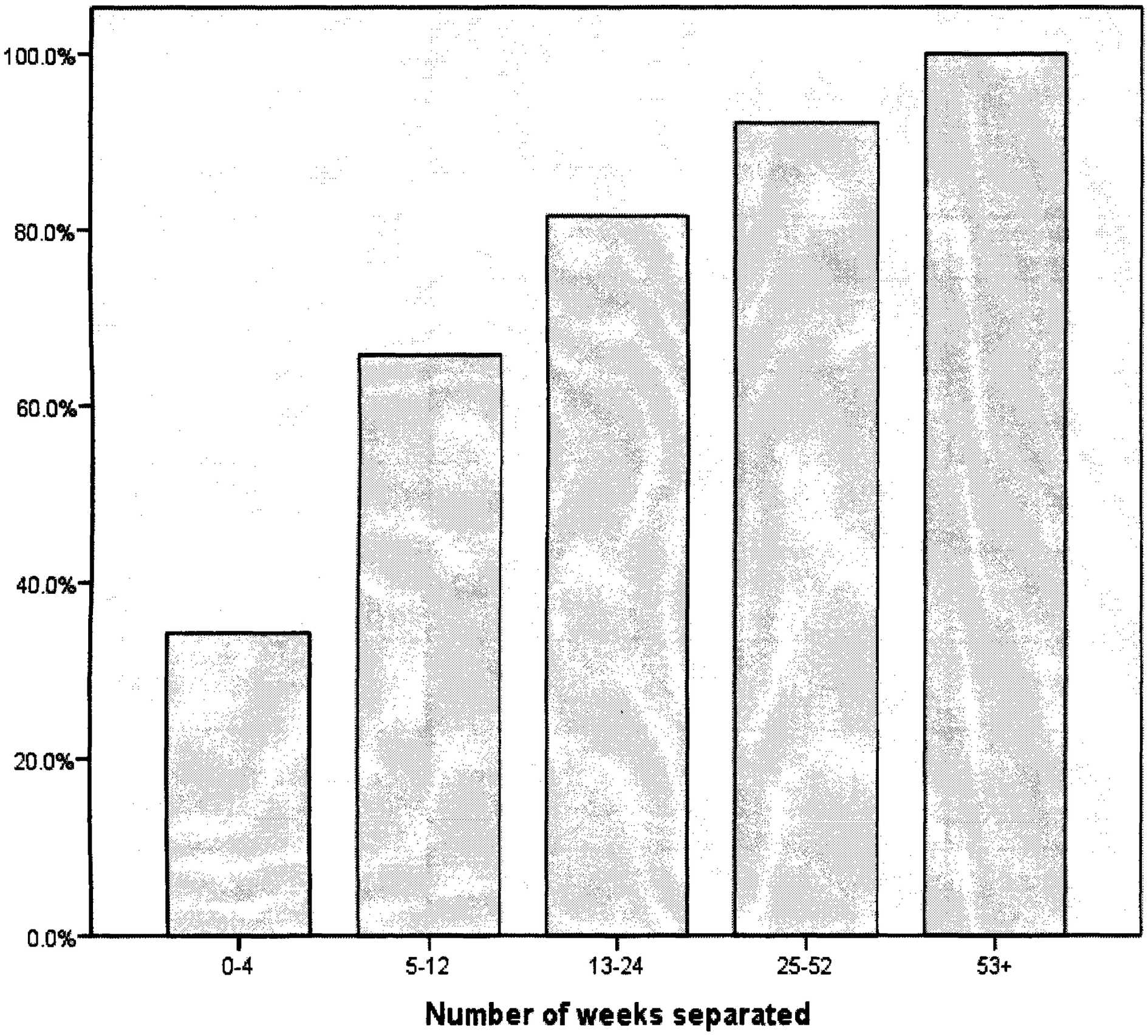
The perpetrators had access to or possession of firearms in 42% of all cases and there was an excessive use of alcohol or drugs on the part of the perpetrator in 40% of cases. The perpetrators were exposed to domestic violence in their homes as children in 32% of all cases. The perpetrators had choked the victim in 23% of all cases, had taken the victim hostage in 20% of all cases and destroyed the victim's property in 14% of all cases. The perpetrator exhibited an extreme level of denial about his abusive behaviours in 25% of cases. (see Table 3).

Table 3: Common Risk Factors from Cases Reviewed

Risk Factors	N (n=65)	Percentage
History of DV	49	75%
Obsessive behaviour (including stalking the victim)	41	63%
Depression or other mental health or psychiatric problems (perpetrator)	40	62%
Prior threats to kill victim	32	49%
Prior threats to commit suicide or attempts to suicide (perpetrator)	31	48%
Victim fears for her safety	28	43%
Access to or possession of firearms (perpetrator)	27	42%
Excessive alcohol and/or drug use (perpetrator)	26	40%
Perpetrator witnessed DV as child	21	32%
Extreme minimization or denial of spousal assault history (perpetrator)	16	25%
Chokes victim	15	23%
Perpetrator held victim hostage	13	20%
Destruction of victim's property	9	14%

Of the 65 cases reviewed 20% had not been separated at the time of death, in 27.7% of the cases separation was pending, 29.2% had been separated for less than three months and the remaining 23.1% had been separated for more than three months. In cases where the victim and perpetrator were separated when the victim was killed, the length of separation in weeks ranged from 1 to 156 weeks, with a mean of 10 weeks (SD=23.40). In 65.8% of all cases where there was a separation, the victim had been killed before the length of separation reached three months, 81.6% were killed before six months and 92.1% were killed before the separation reached one year (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Number of Weeks Separated at Time of Death



It was predicted that the presence of children, financial dependence and the isolation of the victim from social and agency supports would be significantly related to the process of separation. Descriptive frequencies which emerged were that 52.9% of the 65 intimate partners had children in common and the perpetrator had attempted to isolate the victim in 43% of cases. The perpetrator was financially dependent on the victim in 35.3% of cases and the victim was dependent on the perpetrator in 33.8% of cases. The victim had contact with social supports in 80.5% of cases and had contact with social agencies in 60.3% of the 65 cases reviewed. There was a new partner, real or perceived,

in the victim's life in 43.1% of all cases. In 63% of all cases, there was an escalation of violence before the femicide (see Table 4).

Table 4: Frequency of Risk Factors Predicted to be Related to Separation

Category	Variable	Number of Cases	Percentage % (n=65)
Children in Common	-Yes	35	53.8%
Child access or custody dispute	-Yes	8	12.3%
Attempts to isolate the victim	-Yes	27	41.5%
Victim has Social Supports	-Yes	53	81.5%
Victim has Agency Supports	-Yes	40	61.5%
Perpetrator controlled victims daily activities	-Yes	34	52.3%
Perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of victim	-Yes	21	32.3%
Perpetrator monitored the victims whereabouts	-Yes	31	47.4%
Financial Dependence	-Victim dependent on perpetrator	23	35.4%
	-Perpetrator dependent on victim	14	21.5%
	-Equal	22	33.8%
	-Unknown	6	9.2%
There was a real/perceived new partner in victim's life	-Yes	28	43.1%
Escalation of violence	-Yes	41	63%

Factors Predicted to be Related to Separation

Children in Common

An analysis of whether the victim and perpetrator had children in common ($\chi^2(3) = 1.668$, ns) and whether there was a current or prior child custody or access dispute ($\chi^2(6) = 5.436$, ns) involving the four different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 5).

Isolation from Social and Community Resources

It was known that the perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of the victim in none of the cases where there was no separation, 33.3% where there was pending separation, 36.8% where there was a separation of less than three months and 53.3% where there was a separation of more than three months $\chi^2(6) = 13.845$, $p < 0.05$.

The perpetrator was known to monitor the victims whereabouts in 7.7% of cases where there was no separation, in 44.4% of cases where there was pending separation, 57.9% in cases where there was a separation of less than three months and 73.3% in cases where there was a separation of more than three months $\chi^2(6) = 14.471$, $p < 0.025$.

An analysis of whether the victim had accessed social ($\chi^2(3) = 4.919$, ns) or agency supports ($\chi^2(3) = 2.044$, ns), whether the perpetrator had previously attempted to isolate the victim ($\chi^2(6) = 6.500$, ns) and whether the perpetrator was known to control most or all of the victim's daily activities ($\chi^2(6) = 12.355$, ns) involving the four different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 5).

Financial Dependence

An analysis of financial dependence ($\chi^2(9) = 10.468$, ns) involving the four different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 5).

Presence of a new partner

There was a real or perceived new partner in the victim's life at the time of death in 7.7% of those who were not separated and 33.3% of those who had pending separation, 52.6% of those who had been separated for less than three months and 73.3% of those who had been separated less than three months $\chi^2(6) = 16.179$, $p < 0.025$ (see Table 5).

Escalation of violence

An analysis of an escalation of violence ($\chi^2(6) = 11.361$, ns) involving the four different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 5).

Table 5: Presence of Factors across Four Stages of Separation

	Stage in the process of separation			
	No Separation	**Pending Separation**	**Separated < 3 Months**	**Separated > 3 Months**
Perpetrator and victim had children in common +	69.2%	50%	47.4%	53.3%
Child custody or access dispute +	0%	11.1%	15.8%	20%
Perpetrator attempted to isolate the victim +	30.8%	44.4%	31.6%	60%
Victim had contact with social supports +	61.5%	88.9%	89.5%	80%
Victim had contact with agency supports +	53.8%	66.7%	52.6%	73.3%
Perpetrator controlled victims daily activities +	23.1%	55.6%	47.4%	80%
Perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of victim *	0%	33.3%	36.8%	53.3%
Perpetrator monitored the victims whereabouts **	7.7%	44.4%	57.9%	73.3%
Victim was dependant on perpetrator +	38.5%	50%	36.8%	13.3%
Perpetrator was dependant on victim +	15.4%	22.2%	21.1%	26.7%
The victim and the perpetrator were in a similar financial position +	23.1%	27.8%	31.6%	53.3%
There was a real/perceived new partner in victim's life **	7.7%	33.3%	52.6%	73.3%
Escalation of violence +	46.2%	50%	68.4%	86.7%

+ non-significant

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.025$

Secondary Analysis: Two Groups

Since there had been hypotheses developed from the existing literature not confirmed by the 4 group comparison, a secondary analysis was done to explore the possibility of significant findings for just 2 groups - separation and no separation. It was possible that the different stages of separation were not as critical a factor as simply examining separation as a discrete variable.

Children in Common

An analysis of whether the victim and perpetrator had children in common ($\chi^2(1) = 0.424$, ns) and whether there was a current or prior child custody or access dispute ($\chi^2(2) = 2.939$, ns) involving the two different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 6).

Isolation from Social and Community Resources

It was known that the perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of the victim in 19.4% of cases where there was no separation or pending separation and 44.1% where there was a separation $\chi^2(2) = 7.127$, $p < 0.05$.

The perpetrator was known to monitor the victims whereabouts in 29% of cases where there was no separation or pending separation and 64.7% where there was a separation $\chi^2(2) = 8.277$, $p < 0.025$.

An analysis of whether the victim had accessed social ($\chi^2(1) = 0.668$, ns) or agency supports ($\chi^2(1) = 0.002$, ns), whether the perpetrator had previously attempted to isolate the victim ($\chi^2(2) = 0.195$, ns) and whether the perpetrator was known to control most or all of the victim's daily activities ($\chi^2(2) = 3.284$, ns) involving the two different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 6).

Financial Dependence

An analysis of financial dependence ($\chi^2(3) = 2.877$, ns) involving the two different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 6).

Presence of a new partner

There was a real or perceived new partner in the victim's life at the time of death in 22.6% of those who were not separated or who had pending separation and 61.8% of those who were separated $\chi^2(2) = 11.830$, $p < 0.005$ (see Table 6).

Escalation of violence

An analysis of an escalation of violence ($\chi^2(2) = 5.625$, ns) involving the two different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 6).

Table 6: Presence of Factors across Two Stages of Separation

	No Separation/ Pending	**Separated**
Perpetrator and victim had children in common +	58.1%	50%
Child custody or access dispute +	6.5%	17.6%
Perpetrator attempted to isolate the victim +	38.7%	44.1%
Victim had contact with social supports +	77.4%	85.3%
Victim had contact with agency supports +	61.3%	61.8%
Perpetrator controlled victims daily activities +	41.9%	61.8%
Perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of victim *	19.4%	44.1%
Perpetrator monitored the victims whereabouts **	29%	64.7%
Victim was dependant on perpetrator +	45.2%	26.5%
Perpetrator was dependant on victim +	19.4%	23.5%
The victim and the perpetrator were in a similar financial position +	25.8%	41.2%
There was a real/perceived new partner in victim's life ****	22.6%	61.8%
Escalation of violence +	48.4%	76.5%

\+ non-significant

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.025$

**** $p < 0.005$

It was not always known whether the victim was planning to leave the perpetrator because she did not explicitly state her intentions to anyone. However, in some cases where there was a pending separation, the perpetrator was aware that his partner was planning to leave him and this put her at more risk. Pending separation therefore may be different from no separation, as originally hypothesised, since she may be signalling that she is leaving. A further analysis was done to explore the possibility of significant findings for 3 groups - no separation, pending separation and actual separation.

Children in Common

An analysis of whether the victim and perpetrator had children in common ($\chi^2(2) = 1.548$, ns) and whether there was a current or prior child custody or access dispute ($\chi^2(4) = 3.805$, ns) involving the two different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 7).

Isolation from Social and Community Resources

It was known that the perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of the victim in none of the cases where there was no separation, 33.3% of the cases where there was a pending separation and 44.1% of cases where there was an actual separation $\chi^2(4) = 12.606$, $p < 0.025$.

The perpetrator was known to monitor the victims whereabouts in 7.7% of the cases where there was no separation, 44.4% of the cases where there was a pending separation and 64.7% of cases where there was an actual separation $\chi^2(4) = 12.386$, $p < 0.025$.

An analysis of whether the victim had accessed social ($\chi^2(2) = 4.419$, ns) or agency supports ($\chi^2(2) = 0.526$, ns), whether the perpetrator had previously attempted to

isolate the victim ($\chi^2(4) = 1.796$, ns) and whether the perpetrator was known to control most or all of the victim's daily activities ($\chi^2(4) = 8.714$, ns) involving the three different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 7).

Financial Dependence

An analysis of financial dependence ($\chi^2(6) = 7.729$, ns) involving the three different types of separation showed no significant results (see Table 7).

Presence of a new partner

There was a real or perceived new partner in the victim's life at the time of death in 7.7% of those who were not separated, 33.3% of those who had pending separation and 61.8% of those who were separated $\chi^2(4) = 14.445$, $p < 0.01$ (see Table 7).

Escalation of violence

There was an escalation of violence in 46.2% of those cases where there was no separation, 50% of those cases where there was a pending separation and 76.5% of those cases where there was an actual separation $\chi^2(4) = 10.082$, $p < 0.05$ (see Table 7).

Table 7: Presence of Factors across Three Stages of Separation

	Stage in the process of separation		
	No Separation	**Pending Separation**	**Separated**
Perpetrator and victim had children in common +	69.2%	50%	50%
Child custody or access dispute +	0%	11.1%	17.6%
Perpetrator attempted to isolate the victim +	30.8%	44.4%	44.1%
Victim had contact with social supports +	61.5%	88.9%	85.3%
Victim had contact with agency supports +	53.8%	66.7%	61.8%
Perpetrator controlled victims daily activities +	23.1%	55.6%	61.8%
Perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of victim **	0%	33.3%	44.1%
Perpetrator monitored the victims whereabouts **	7.7%	44.4%	64.7%
Victim was dependant on perpetrator +	38.5%	50%	26.5 %
Perpetrator was dependant on victim +	15.4%	22.2%	23.5%
The victim and the perpetrator were in a similar financial position +	23.1%	27.8%	41.2%
There was a real/perceived new partner in victim's life ***	7.7%	33.3%	61.8%
Escalation of violence *	46.2%	50%	76.5%

\+ non-significant

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.025$

*** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

Summary of Significant Results

Isolating Behaviours by the Perpetrator

It was known that the perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of the victim in none of the cases where there was no separation, approximately a third where there was pending separation, slightly more than a third where there was a separation of less than three months and more than half where there was a separation of more than three months $\chi^2(6) = 13.845$, $p < 0.05$.

Isolating Behaviours by the Perpetrator

The perpetrator was known to monitor the victim's whereabouts in less than a tenth of cases where there was no separation, in nearly half of cases where there was pending separation.

In cases where there was a separation of less than three months this number increased by approx 14% and in three quarters of cases where there was a separation of more than three months the perpetrator was known to monitor the victim's whereabouts $\chi^2(6) = 14.471$, $p < 0.025$.

Presence of a New Partner

There was a real or perceived new partner in the victim's life at the time of death in less than a tenth of cases where there was no separation, a third of those who had pending separation, just over half of those who had been separated for less than three months and almost three quarters of those who had been separated for more than three months $\chi^2(6) = 16.179$, $p < 0.025$.

Escalation of Violence

There was an escalation of violence in approximately half of cases where there was no or pending separation and more than three quarters of the cases with actual separation

$\chi^2(4) = 10.082$, $p < 0.05$.

The purpose of the present study is to help professionals as well as the general public understand the risks involved in separating from an intimate partner. Hopefully the insights gained can translate into better services and social support for women who are in the process of separating from her abusive partner. The cases which were examined had been reviewed between 2003 and 2008 by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee of the Office of the Chief Coroner. A total of 65 DVDRC case summaries and their data summary forms (Appendix A) were looked at to uncover significant trends.

The frequencies of descriptive and relationship factors were examined. Women who were not separated, those who were planning to leave or in the process of leaving, those who were separated from their partner for less than three months and those who were separated for more than three months were predicted to have had different needs and therefore have required different safety plans and interventions. These groups were chosen based on literature which indicates that women have different experiences and are at different levels of risk during certain stages of separation (Anderson and Saunders, 2003; DeKeseredy, 2007).

It was hypothesised that women who were not separated at the time of their death and who were not employed may have felt trapped in their relationship if they were financially dependency on their partner (Barnett, 2000). If she had succeeded in

separating from her partner for less than or more than three months it was predicted that she would have been in danger if she was employed since her ex-partner may have seen this ability to support herself as a threat to his sense of control (Brown, et al., 2005). It was also predicted that if the perpetrator was financially dependent on the victim that she would have been in danger if separation was pending since he may have seen the loss of her income as a threat to his ability to survive (Brownridge, 2006).

It was hypothesized that the victim would have been in danger if she had children in common with the perpetrator. This study also predicted that women with no separation may not have had contact with as many community professionals and resources. Women who were killed after 3 months may have been in contact with the most agencies but may not have been aware of the danger they were in (Barnett, 2001). It was also hypothesised that it would have been dangerous for a woman if the perpetrator was aware of a new partner in her life (Cousins & Gangestad, 2007). Finally, this study hypothesised that since the most dangerous time for a woman is when she is leaving her partner, followed by women who were separated from their partner for less than three months (DeKeseredy, 2007) that there would have been an escalation of violence in cases where there was a pending or actual separation.

Crosstabulations were run in order to examine the frequencies of demographic information and risk factors in each of the hypothesised stages of separation (those individuals who had no separation, those who had a pending separation, those who had been separated for less than 3 months and those who had been separated for more than 3 months). Chi-squared analyses were run to determine any significant relationships amongst the variables consistent with the hypotheses.

Major theme

The major theme which emerged out of the results was that the perpetrator's violent attacks and attempts to control or isolate the victim increased as the process of separation progressed and if there were signs that she was becoming autonomous. If a woman does not reconcile with her partner her social, financial or emotional independence has a logical tendency to increase as the process of separation progresses. This may be dangerous if the perpetrator feels his power and control over the victim is in jeopardy. (Davies, Ford-Gilboe & Hammerton, 2009; Brewster, 2003)

Women with partners who are physically abusive and who exhibit controlling behaviours are more likely to be stalked by their partner or ex-partner. Separation can therefore be a dangerous time for a woman who has a controlling partner (Melton, 2007). In 65.8% of all cases where there was a separation, the victim had been killed before the length of separation reached 3 months. This is consistent with the theory that the most dangerous time for a woman in an abusive relationship is when she is leaving her partner, followed by women who were separated from their partner for less than three months (DeKeseredy, 2007). The danger, however, does not end at three months, support and safety planning can still be important. In the present study 92.1% of victims who were separated from the perpetrator were killed before the separation reached a year in length.

Women were increasingly more likely to have had a real or perceived new partner in their life as the process of separation progressed. This could simply be a function of the fact that the victim was moving on; the new partner may even have been a protective factor at times (Fleury, Sullivan & Bybee, 2000). On the other hand, the new partner may have been an indicator to the perpetrator that he could no longer control the victim. The

perpetrator may have hoped for reconciliation at some point and may have seen the new partner as a threat to that ever happening (Campbell et al., 2003) One case involved a woman who felt confident that she could safely tell her ex-partner about her new partner. A close friend advised her that it may have been dangerous but she had already shared this information with the perpetrator. The perpetrator, who frequented the victim's residence to care for the children, overhead a conversation between the victim and her new partner, became extremely distressed and killed the victim and their two children.

The known levels of certain isolating factors experienced by the victims increased from no separation, to pending separation, to separated for less than three months, with women who had been separated from their partners for more than three months having been the most likely to experience these factors. The aforementioned isolating factors included the perpetrator having controlled most or all of the victim's daily activities, the perpetrator having been violently and constantly jealous of the victim and the perpetrator having monitored the victim's whereabouts (DVDRC, 2009).

These results may reveal a trend of underreporting in the earlier stages of separation. It may be that there were more cases of controlling activities, jealousy, and monitoring of the victim's whereabouts in cases where there was no separation but since the relationship was still intact she did not feel safe reporting this. If the victim was afraid to or unable to tell anyone about the isolation this may indicate that perpetrator was successful in isolating the victim with his controlling behaviours (Barnett, 2001). In one case where the perpetrator isolated the victim, he forced his partner to stay in his car for long periods of time while he went on social visits. In another case the perpetrator would not allow the victim to see her friends and family and if he did ever allow that to happen,

he insisted that he be present during the encounters. In these types of cases the victim may have felt safer as she disengaged from the relationship and therefore have been more likely to report his controlling behaviour (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007).

If these results are representative of an actual increase in the likelihood of isolating behaviours on the part of the perpetrator then it could have been that the perpetrator realized that, although a certain stage of separation had been achieved, he could still successfully harass and threaten the victim. This once more confirms the theory that as the process of separation progresses and a victim becomes more independent, the perpetrator becomes more aggressive in his controlling behaviours (Brownridge, 2006). The perpetrator may have wanted to send the message that he was not just going to go away and that he still had the power to keep her from moving on with her life. If the perpetrator had become more controlling and isolating, the victim may have become more aware of her increasing risk. She may therefore have been more likely to reach out for help or disclose his abuse with others (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005).

An additional analysis was done to explore the possibility of significant findings for 3 groups and there were unique significant results for the escalation of violence by the perpetrator. In 53.8% of cases in which there was no separation and in 50 % of cases where there was pending separation, the victim did not report an escalation of violence to anyone prior to the femicide. She could be afraid that if she told anyone about an escalation in violence that there would be a risk of the perpetrator finding out which could provoke more violence. This would be especially frightening if the victim had already reported violence to an agency, not received the service she needed and had been

forced to return to the perpetrator (Fleury-Steiner, Bybee, Sullivan, Belknap & Melton, 2006).

In cases where there was a separation, more than three quarters had reported an escalation of violence. These results represent those victims who had felt safe enough to reach out about the violent attacks. The high number of cases where there was a separation and where violence escalated before the femicide illustrates how important it can be to take partner stalking cases seriously. Unfortunately in domestic violence stalking cases non-association orders or protective orders are not always strictly enforced and can still give the perpetrator the opportunity to access the victim at least once and require that this be reported before there are any consequences (Diviney, Parekh & Olson, 2009).

Descriptive frequencies for all 65 cases were analyzed and several trends emerged. The victims and perpetrators were most often employed on a full-time basis however the victims (46.2%) were more often employed on a full-time basis than the perpetrators (38.5%). Unemployment was the second most common employment status for both the victims and perpetrators however the perpetrators (36.9%) were more often unemployed than the victims (21.5%). This is consistent with the theory that men who were dependent on their partner viewed separation as an abandonment or betrayal since their financial needs would longer be met by their partner (Brownridge, 2006). The perpetrator may have realized at that point that the separation was really going to happen, and may have also realized that the process was going to be a very difficult transition. One case involved a woman who worked as a hairdresser full-time and felt that her partner, who worked part-time as a bus driver needed to be less dependent on her. He

may not have had perspective that he could have been independent and may have felt that he would not be able to live without her (Brownridge, 2006).

There are many complex dependencies that one partner can have on another. For example, if neither the victim nor the perpetrator were financially dependent then it could point to an emotional dependency rather than a financial one. One case involved a perpetrator and a victim who were both financially independent. Before killing himself, his ex-partner and their three children he left a suicide note detailing his emotional loss. After the chaos of separating had subsided the perpetrator may have had time for it to sink in that the separation was going to be permanent. If the perpetrator was not able to accept the emotional loss then this realization could have been a triggering factor for him (Aldridge & Browne, 2003).

In some cases the victim may have been unemployed or simply dependent on the perpetrators part-time wages. In one case, the victim had never worked outside the home and the perpetrator had supported the family on his part-time wages. This type of case would support the theory of the perpetrator using his financial resources to exploit her financial needs to maintain contact and control over the victim (Barnett, 2000). If he has always been the one to make more money then he may have used his financial resources to gain access to her. He could have agreed to help with the burden of separation related expenses or even her living expenses to maintain a sense of control over her. Another case involved a woman who had to continually contact the perpetrator to ask him for money and food after they were separated. If the perpetrator had seen his partner emotionally distancing from him then this type of contact could have given the perpetrator more opportunity to manipulate, attack or kill the victim (Brown, et al., 2005).

In more than half of all cases the victim and perpetrator were married. It could be that perpetrators felt more invested in the marriage and therefore reacted more violently in cases where they were aware of the separation. If the perpetrator noticed signs of the victim becoming more independent then he may feel that his sense of control was threatened (Brownridge, 2006). Marriage could symbolize another layer of control over the victim, which would fit the profile of a perpetrator who had been physically abusive in an attempt to gain power and control (Brewster, 2003).

In 75% of all cases there was a known history of domestic violence. This may be accurate; however, this may be lower than the actual number of relationships that involved domestic violence. There may have been violence that no one was aware of or there may have been emotional, financial or verbal abuse in these cases. The femicides occurred in the residence of the victim and/or perpetrator in 80.9% of cases. This illustrates how important it can be for women to be cognisant of the risk they are in within the shared home if they are in an abusive relationship (Brownridge, 2008). A woman may believe that she is safe if she and the perpetrator live in separate rooms. These numbers also show that even if a woman has left her partner and is living in her own residence that she still has a risk of being killed. In one case a victim felt sorry for the perpetrator so she allowed him to come over for family dinners with her and the children after they had separated. This exemplifies how important it can be for a woman to attempt to cut all contact with her abusive partner (Campbell et al., 2003).

It could have been especially difficult for a woman who had children to completely disengage from her abusive partner since she was still likely to have had contact with him during custody battles and visitations (Hardesty & Ganong, 2006).

While there were no significant results when the presence of children was analyzed by comparing the different stages of separation, there were descriptive factors involving children for the entire sample. In 53.8% of the intimate partner relationships studied, the victim and perpetrator had children in common and 12.3% were involved in a child custody battle. The victim may have stayed in an unsafe relationship in order to maintain a two parent home for their children. If she did decide to leave she may have had to stay in contact with her abusive ex-partner in order to negotiate child support, child custody or visitations (Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung & Smith, 2005).

There was an extreme minimization and/or denial of any abusive behaviour by the perpetrator in 25% of all cases. This may have been very confusing for the victim and could have caused her to feel that she was overestimating the perpetrators abusive behaviour or had even caused the abuse. This is one of the reasons that it is so important for effective risk assessments to be done, particularly in cases where the victim is minimizing the abuse since this could be a reflection of her abusers denial, minimization and blaming (Scott & Straus, 2007).

In 43% of all cases the victim had an intuitive sense of fear about her safety. This is consistent with the theory that women underestimate the level of danger they are in. It is important to take a woman seriously if she disclosed that she fears for her life. If a woman says that she does not fear for her safety, it can still be important to evaluate risk if you recognize any risk factors (Campbell, 2004).

Role of Professionals

The perpetrator had attempted to isolate the victim from family, friends or social agencies in 41.5% of all cases. Despite the many barriers there were to accessing

supports, the victim had contact with social supports in 81.5% of all cases and had contact with social agencies in 61.5% of the 65 cases reviewed. These numbers illustrate the potential there was to prevent these tragedies. There were several risk factors present in the cases reviewed, which, if identified in a timely manner using the suitable risk assessment, could have been instrumental in developing an appropriate safety plan. Some of the risk factors were, past history of domestic violence, the escalation of violence, child custody battles and the presence of a new partner in the victim's life.

There are many different professionals that a woman may reach out to when she decides to seek help in leaving her partner (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005). Some common professionals whom women may turn to are nurses, doctors, other health care practitioners, social workers, counsellors or other social service workers. These professionals are likely to attempt to have an understanding and empathetic approach to much of their work so this may help survivors in feeling safe enough to discuss the subject of abuse. These professionals, if properly trained can also look for signs of abuse and offer a risk assessment (Davila, 2006). It is therefore important for different professionals to have access to a good risk assessment tool so that they can properly assist a woman with this process.

One such risk assessment tool is the Danger Assessment Scale (DA) which was first developed by Jacquelyn Campbell in 1986 and has since been updated to reflect current research in femicide risk factors. One important aspect of the DA is that it attempts to assess whether a woman is at risk for being seriously injured or killed by her partner while other risk assessment tools often only focus on a risk for violence. Another essential component of the DA is that it gives different risk factors different weights

depending on how potentially dangerous they are. For instance, separation, threats with a weapon and the perpetrators unemployment are all weighted heavily as risk factors (Campbell, Webster & Glass, 2009).

The end score of the DA gives the professional an idea of what kind of help may be needed. Categories of risk range from variable danger, to increased, severe and finally extreme danger. Interventions based on those categories range from educating a woman on how to recognize an escalation of risk to safety planning to direct action involving criminal justice (Campbell, Webster & Glass, 2009). It is then important for the victim to receive support throughout the legal process as it can be quite intimidating. The criminal justice system also needs to protect women who have been brave enough to attempt to leave a partner who is at risk for severe violence or murder. This can be in the form of the perpetrator being arrested, charged and then sentenced with time in jail or in cases where the risk is lower, intense counselling and treatment. Child custody decisions should also be informed by valid and reliable risk assessments (Jordan, 2004).

Implications

In 26.3% of all cases where there was a separation, the victim had been killed after the separation had reached 3 months and before it had reached a year. This illustrates the need to stay vigilant about support after separation. Both the public and professionals should not assume that because she has separated from her abusive partner that she is safe. Victims are known to underestimate the level of danger they are in (Campbell, 2004). Even if a woman claims she is not worried about her partner's behaviour, the professional she comes into contact with needs to have an objective measure of the risk factors that are present for her. When a professional does perform a

risk assessment it also has to be approachable for the victim and shouldn't be full of jargon or complicated measures (Campbell, Webster & Glass, 2009).

She may make first contact with a variety of professionals, such as justice, health care, mental health or social services (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005). Women had been seen in the health care system before they were killed in 44 to 47 percent of femicide cases (Wadman & Muelleman, 1999; Campbell, 2002). This illustrates why a variety of individual organizations need to make training in risk assessment and safety planning a priority for those individuals who may have the opportunity to do so.

Different assessment tools are necessary since one does not always fit all different organizations or individuals. For example police would need a different tool if they were assessing risk with the offender than if a domestic violence worker were to use a tool with a victim. Different organizations may also want to measure different types of risk such as the risk of future violence versus the risk of femicide. The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) can be helpful for professionals such as police officers to assess whether there is a risk of future violence (Hilton, et al., 2004). The Danger Assessment Scale (DA) can also be useful for different professionals to use when assessing the risk of femicide with the victim (Campbell, Webster & Glass, 2009).

Different individuals coming into contact with victims at different points of time who identify risks can create an overall picture of the risk that the woman is in. A unique risk factor for separating couples is that if the perpetrator was abusive and controlling he will be likely to see separation as a loss of control (Davies, Ford-Gilboe & Hammerton, 2009; Brewster, 2003). The presence of a new partner can also be a dangerous factor for

women who are separated from their partner since the perpetrator may feel jealous or that this signifies a concrete end to their relationship. (Cousins & Gangestad, 2007).

The implication for the practice of family and criminal justice, child welfare, police, mental health services, social services, domestic violence workers and health care services is to become more coordinated in their efforts to assess risk and develop a safety plan. This study found that 61.5% of the women who were killed had contacted at least two agencies regarding domestic violence. This shows that there may have been a breakdown somewhere and that there needs to be a more collaborated and organized effort which is followed up on. Data from the cases reviewed by the DVDRC illustrates how many murders may have been predictable and preventable.

Intensive assistance for both the victim and the perpetrator is needed to keep her safe. There needs to be public and professional awareness of the risk that women are in during and after a separation from an abusive partner. When collaborating on a safety plan, professionals need to take into account the unique needs that separating couples have such as the danger a woman may be in during a child custody dispute or even when the children are exchanged for visitations (Daly et al., 1997; Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung & Smith, 2005). It would also be important for a professional to inform a woman of her particular risks, such as the danger she is in when she has a new partner in her life. This type of information can help empower a woman to do everything that she can to keep herself safe. Ongoing monitoring and support is necessary for victims during the separation and after the separation has occurred.

A good example of the collaboration of agencies within a community is the Family Violence Project Waterloo Region. They were one of the first to create a location

where there are several services from several different sectors such as legal, police, mental health, domestic violence and financial. The Family Violence Project of Waterloo Region responds to the unique needs of couples separating since there is the opportunity to access a service which is unrelated to domestic violence. This may be helpful if her partner is controlling and knows where she is at all times. This type of appointment may not raise suspicion in the perpetrator but still give the victim a chance to contact other agencies within that building which do deal with domestic violence specifically. For example she could access justice to learn about her rights or deal with child custody issues. She could receive counselling, provide a victim statement to the police, or enter a nearby shelter. Since the agencies are all in the same place, she can get what she needs quickly.

On the other hand, if a woman doesn't believe that they are a victim of domestic violence, it is unlikely that she would go to a centre for domestic violence victims. To address this and access a wide range of clients, the Family Violence Project has several different services that are not specifically related to domestic violence. If a woman visits one of these agencies, the individual with whom she interacts can assess whether or not she is at risk. There is also a victim centred attitude which allows women to come with their own understanding of their situation.

The collaborated and co-located model of the Family Violence Project is also important for building the victim's confidence in her community supports. If a woman has attempted to get help and it is unsuccessful due to lack of continued or consistent support, she can lose faith in what a particular agency can do for her (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Co-location and communication between agencies can help

professionals to understand the complicated details of each couples separation. This in turn allows them to accurately target what is needed to keep victims and their children safe and to prevent the perpetrator from behaving in an abusive or violent way in the future. This is not entire solution but is a critical and fundamental part of the solution to end family violence.

It is also crucial to involve the public in the effort to prevent these tragedies. If friends, co-workers, family or neighbours are aware of the significance of certain risk factors then they can help one or both partners prevent future violence. A family member could help a woman understand why she is at risk and what that means. While a woman may not choose to get help right away it is still important for her to have a safe person to discuss her experiences with. A workplace could help either partner access services. A friend could report violence to the authorities (Neighbours, Friends and Families, 2007). The Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign makes information on risk factors and prevention available to the public. More funding for projects such as this could be helpful in raising this vital public awareness.

Limitations

It is important to consider the small sample size this study had when interpreting the results. These results may be representative of trends within the larger society however they may also be very specific to those who reside in Ontario. This also limited the power of my analysis to find certain significant differences. For example, it would have been interesting to look at the differences between different age groups, cultural or socioeconomic groups.

It is of note that a control group of women who were not murdered who were otherwise matched on all other factors was not possible due to time and resource constraints on the part of the researcher. This would have been helpful in knowing whether certain risk prevention strategies could help prevent a femicide.

The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee reviews the case files and any information from witnesses, the perpetrator's and the victim's family members, as well as any service agencies that the victim or perpetrator may have accessed. In some cases there was incomplete information available from these sources and consequently some unknown factors. For that reason, the groups may differ in significant ways other than those which were hypothesised to be related to separation. The info may also have been limited in some ways. For example, the police officers who collected the majority of the info may have asked different questions than a counsellor or domestic violence advocate or researcher would have.

It can also be very difficult to define the different stages of separation. Efforts were made to gather accurate and complete information after the femicide. However, there are circumstances in which it may have been impossible to gather certain details. For example, a woman who was not separating may have been thinking about separation or making a plan which she hid from those around her.

Future Research

More funding for domestic violence prevention and community collaboration and co-location could help further efforts to examine the process of separation. Future research could focus on ways in which agencies could collaborate to create a more complete picture of risk. If there is a full and accurate picture of the risk factors and what

has been implemented, then it will be easier to determine what is keeping women and their children safe.

An important step to take in the research of separation would be to take a large sample of femicide victims and their perpetrators and compare them to survivors who had similar demographic and situational factors and experiences of abuse. A focus group could be formed to explore the experiences of women who have survived in several different situations. For instance the focus groups could include women who feel they cannot leave, women who believe they can remain safe living in same home and different rooms, women who are trying to leave and women who have been separated for different lengths of time. This could help to inform public and professionals about how to create systems which communicate with each other to help keep women safe before and after separation.

More effort also needs to be put into interventions aimed at managing the risk factors presented by the perpetrator. For example, factors which were present in this study which could have been managed were his mental health issues, his refusal to comply with court orders to stay away from the victim or his extreme denial of his abusive behaviours.

Summary

Separation can be a very dangerous time for a woman. It is important for friends, family, neighbours and co-workers to be educated about what different risk factors mean and how they can make a difference. Professionals in many different areas of practice need the proper training on how to recognize and assess a woman's risk for future harm or femicide. The risk for femicide does not necessarily end when a woman separates from

her abusive partner. Support is needed during and after separation to ensure the safety of a woman and her children. It could be helpful for different organizations such as justice, mental health and social services to coordinate their efforts to create a clear picture of risk and to ensure that everything is being done to prevent future violence. Although more effort needs to be placed on risk assessment and safety planning after separation, interventions also have to manage the risk factors presented by the perpetrator.

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Appendix A: Coding Instrument

Coder:

Participant Code:

Descriptive data

Age

___ Victim

___ Perpetrator

Victim Employment Status

___ Full-time

___ Part-time

___ Unemployed

___ Other

___ Unknown

Perpetrator Employment Status

___ Full-time

___ Part-time

___ Unemployed

___ Other

___ Unknown

Criminal History Victim

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Criminal History Perpetrator

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Prior Counselling Victim

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Prior Counselling Perpetrator

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Significant Life Changes Victim

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Significant Life Changes Perpetrator

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Type of Case

___ Homicide

___ Attempted homicide-suicide

___ Homicide-suicide

___ Multiple homicide

___ Multiple homicide-suicide

Cause of Death for Victims

___ Stabbing

___ Gunshot wound

___ Beating

___ Strangulation

___ Blunt force trauma

___ Other

Location of Domestic Homicide

___ Residence, on property

___ Urban outdoors

___ Rural outdoors

___ Inside, other than residence

Type of Relationship

___ Current or prior spouse

___ Current or prior common-law partner

___ Current or prior Intimate partner (no cohabitation)

Length of Relationship

___ Less than 1 Year

___ 1 - 10 Years

___ 11 - 20 Years

___ 21 - 30 Years

___ Over 30 Years

This is a summary checklist. (*Check all the risk markers that were present in this case)*

____ Prior history of DV

____ Prior threats to kill victim or threats with a weapon

____ Prior threats to commit suicide or attempts to suicide by perpetrator

____ Obsessive behaviour (including stalking the victim)

____ Access to or possession of firearms

____ Excessive alcohol and/or drug use

____ Depression (or other mental health or psychiatric problems)

____ Hostage-taking

____ Destruction of victim's property

____ Extreme minimization or denial of spousal assault history

____ Chokes victim

____ Perpetrator witnessed DV as child

____ Victim had an Intuitive Sense of Fear for her Safety

Factors Hypothesised to be Related to Separation

Children in Common

1) **Did the perpetrator and victim have children in common**

___ Yes

___ No

___ **Unknown**

2) **Was there a child custody or access dispute?**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Isolation

1) **Prior attempts to isolate the victim**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

2) **Did the victim have contact with social supports? (eg. Family or friends)**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

3) **Did the victim have contact with agency supports? (eg. Justice, health care, social services)**

___ Yes, two or more contacts

___ No, minimal (1) to no contacts

___ Unknown

4) **Perpetrator controlled victim's daily activities**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

5) **Perpetrator was violently and constantly jealous of victim**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

6) **Perpetrator monitored the victim's whereabouts**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Financial Dependence

1) **Is one partner more employed than the other? (eg. Full-time vs. part-time, full-time vs. unemployed, part-time vs. unemployed)**

___ Perpetrator more employed than victim

___ Victim more employed than perpetrator

___ Equal level of employment

___ Unknown

2) **Is the partner who is working less financially dependent on the partner who is working more?**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Equal

___Unknown

3) **Is one partner financially dependent on the other?**

___ Victim dependent on perpetrator

___ Perpetrator dependent on victim

___ Equal

___ Unknown

New Partner

1) **Was there a new partner real or perceived in the victim's life?**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

Escalation

1) **Was there an escalation of violence in the relationship prior to the incident?**

___ Yes

___ No

___ Unknown

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Review Number: 0906-5
Applicant: Elizabeth Willits
Supervisor: Peter Jaffe
Title: *Separation as a precedent to domestic homicide: an analysis of homicide reviews.*
Expiry Date: August 31, 2010
Type: M. Ed. Thesis
Ethics Approval Date: June 25, 2009
Revision #:
Documents Reviewed & Approved: UWO Protocol

This is to notify yon that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

No deviations from, or changes to, the research project as described in this protocol may be initiated without prior written approval, except for minor administrative aspects. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information and consent documentation, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Jason Brown (Chair)

2008-2009 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Jason Brown	**Faculty (Chair)**
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Dr. Jerry Paquette	**UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (*ex officio*)**

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