

Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee

- Ontario's DVDRC started in 2003
- It is one of the longest standing DVDRC's in the world
- Multi-disciplinary committee reviews “all homicides that involve the death of a person, and/or his or her child(ren) committed by the person's partner or ex-partner from an intimate relationship”
- Based on reviews, makes recommendations to prevent further deaths



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

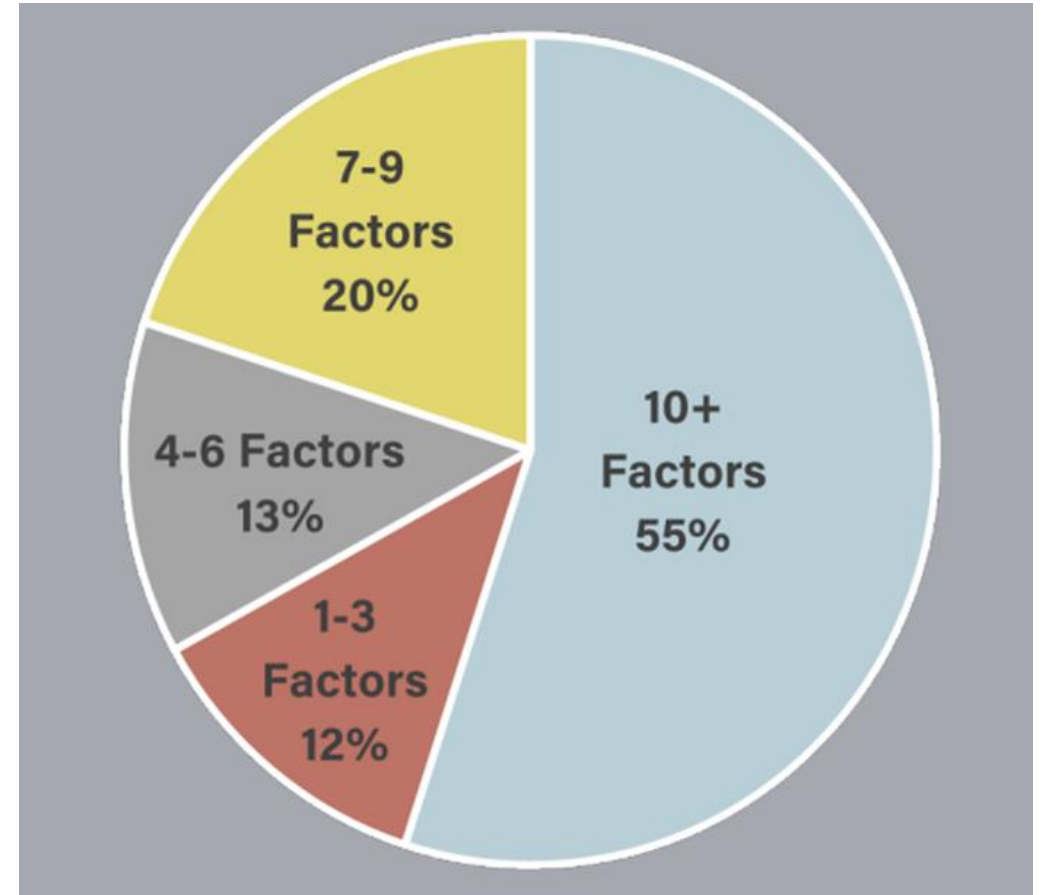
2023 Committee Begins Their Work

- In June 2022, the Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) issued a Call for Members for the DVDRC
- There was a public process to identify suitable candidates
- 15 members were appointed to the committee in 2023 (some new, some continuing) along with two Resource Members
- Members represent Ontario's diverse communities and come from front-line services, academia, public safety, and the legal field

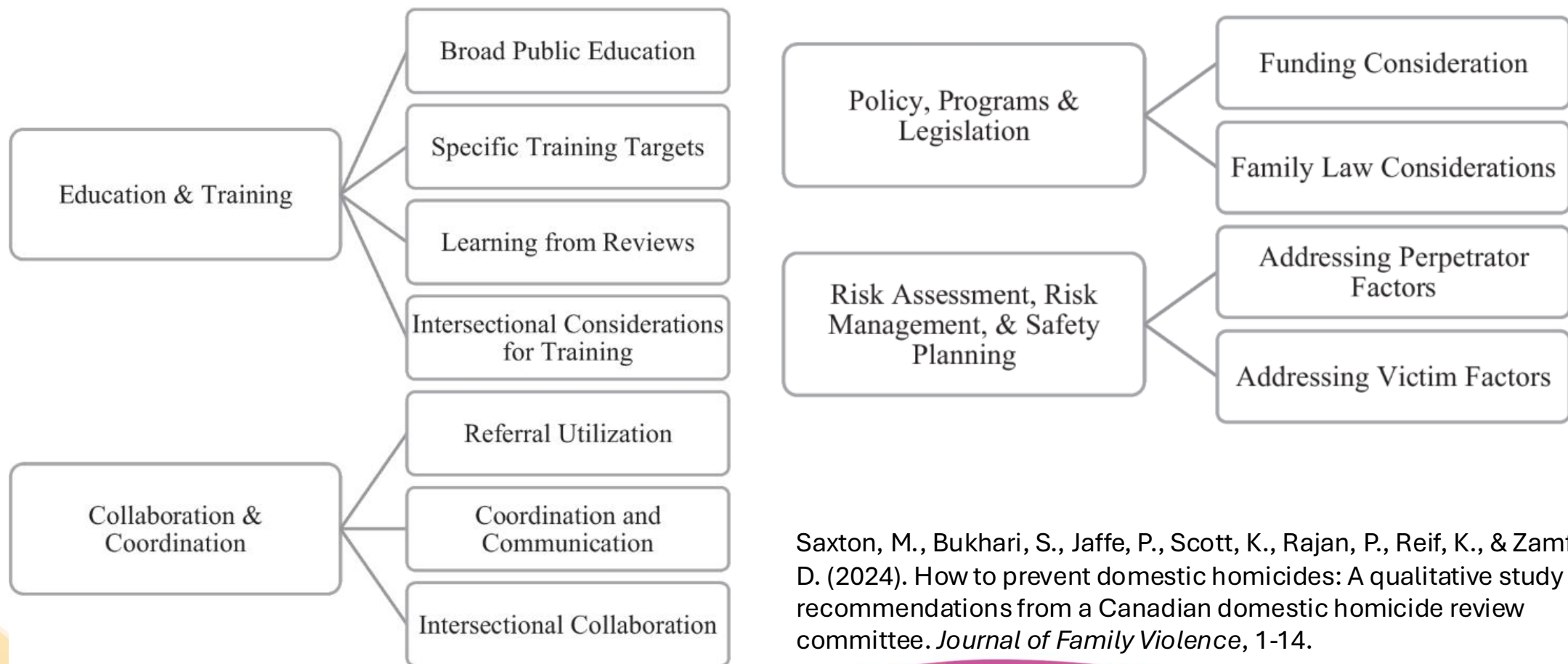
This webinar reflects the experiences and views of members serving on the DVDRC. It does not necessarily represent the views of the Office of the Chief Coroner.

Review of DVDRC Cases over 10 years Between 2010 and 2020

- Between 2010 and 2020, the DVDRC reviewed 219 cases
- Men are perpetrators in 87% of cases
- Women are most frequently victims
- 75% of cases included 7 or more risk factors



Building on Prior Learning – 400 Recommendations



Saxton, M., Bukhari, S., Jaffe, P., Scott, K., Rajan, P., Reif, K., & Zamfir, D. (2024). How to prevent domestic homicides: A qualitative study of recommendations from a Canadian domestic homicide review committee. *Journal of Family Violence*, 1-14.

Value of Specificity – What will it take

Major Findings and Recommendations – Themed chapters

Chapter 2: Children in the Aftermath of Intimate Partner Homicide

Chapter 3: Intimate Partner Homicide and Family Law

Chapter 5: Immigrant, Refugee and Precarious Status Communities Experiencing Intimate Partner Homicide

TRIGGER WARNING

TRAUMATIC CONTENT

VICARIOUS TRAUMA



Chapter 5: Immigrant, Refugee and Precarious Status Communities Experiencing Intimate Partner Homicide

Deepa Mattoo

Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer
Commemorative Clinic



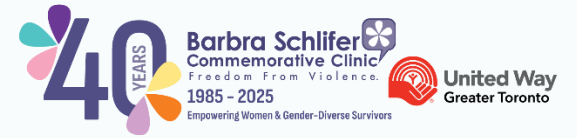
Immigrant, Refugee, and Precarious Status Communities Experiencing Intimate Partner Homicide

Deepa Mattoo

“Homicides with gender-based violence in the background are not isolated acts of violence—they are the culmination of systemic failures and missed opportunities for intervention. DVDRC findings show that established risk factors like separation and a history of abuse intersect with structural inequities, amplifying vulnerability. For immigrant, refugee, and precarious status communities, immigration dependency, fear of deportation, language barriers, and socio-economic marginalization create compounded risks and obstruct pathways to safety. These deaths were preventable. Each case represents a call to action. As we discuss these cases, we do so with deep respect for the lives lost and the families forever changed. This is difficult work, so please take care of yourselves as we move through it—and engage as much as you can, thoughtfully and respectfully. Together, we honor those who are no longer with us and commit to building systems that protect and prevent.”



Prevalence & Scope



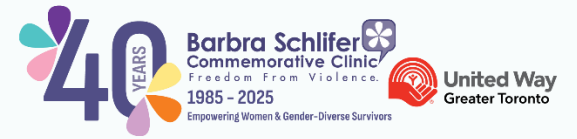
Immigrant and refugee women face higher GBV risk than Canadian-born women, due to intersecting vulnerabilities: immigration status, racism, sexism, and economic precarity.

Nearly 1 in 4 women in Canada are current or former newcomers, and GBV is a frequent experience during migration and settlement journeys.

GBV includes physical, sexual, psychological, financial, and systemic violence, often normalized in non-physical forms (e.g., coercive control, threats of deportation, child apprehension).

COVID-19 amplified IPV risks for immigrant women, trapping them with abusers and limiting access to shelters and legal aid

Precarious Status in Canada: The Hidden Vulnerability



3.02 Million → *Non-Permanent Residents in Canada (7.2% of population)*
(Work permits, students, asylum seekers)

300K–600K → *Undocumented / Non-Status*
(Government estimate; advocacy says up to 2.3M precarious)

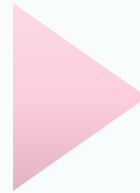
7,300 Deportations in 2024 → *Mostly rejected refugee claimants*

Government aims to reduce temporary residents to **5% of population by the end of 2026**, but for **2025 the cap is 673,650 new arrivals** (down from >800K in 2024).

Immigration status is a risk amplifier



Immigration
status intersects
with mental
health, family law
& cultural stigma,
creating layered
vulnerabilities.



Immigration
status is not a
side issue; it's
one of the core
risk factors for
intimate partner
homicide.

Intersectionality: Compounded Risks

12 of 28 cases (42.9%) of cases involved immigrants, refugees or precarious status

70% of all cases had 7+ risk factors (DVDRC benchmark for high lethality)

Common overlapping risks:

- Immigration dependency
- Mental health and substance use
- Actual or pending separation
- Economic insecurity
- Language barriers

Intersectionality = **layered vulnerability** → **higher lethality risk**

Top 10 most common risk factors in 2022–2023 DVDRC Report



History of domestic violence 89% of cases

Victim vulnerability 82%

Excessive alcohol and/or drug use by the person who caused the death (PWCD) 61%

Perpetrator unemployed 61%

Actual or pending separation 61%

Sexual jealousy 50%

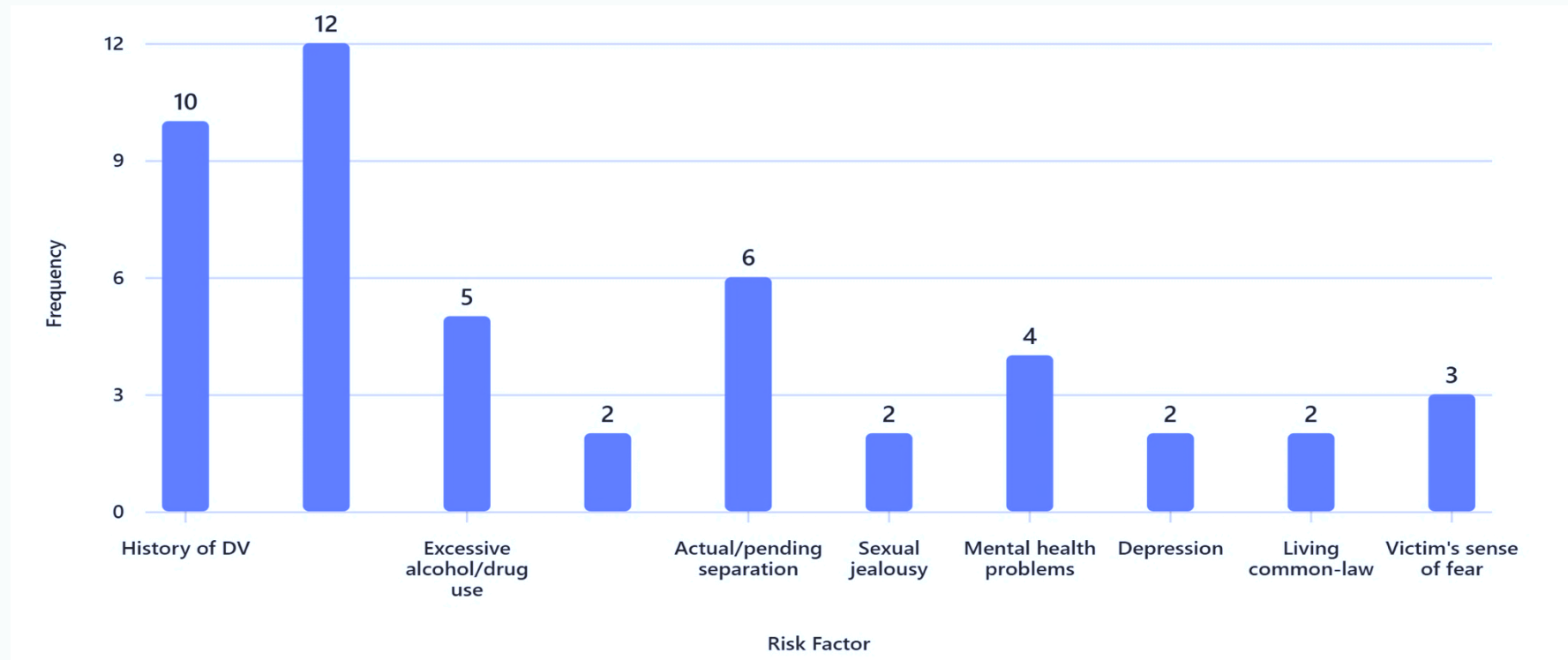
Other mental health or psychiatric problems (PWCD) 50%

Depression (professional or friends/family opinion) 46%

Living common-law 39%

Victim's intuitive sense of fear 39%

Risk Factors in Immigration, Refugee and Precarious Status Communities



At least **8 of the top 10 risk factors** appeared repeatedly across these 12 cases.

Complexity of Cases

Case

- **Victim:** 36-year-old woman
- **Perpetrator:** Male partner (immigrant, applying for Canadian citizenship)
- **Context:**
 - Met online; had one child together
 - Victim was planning to move in with him after his citizenship application was processed
- **Incident:**
 - After spending the evening together, the perpetrator stabbed the victim with a kitchen knife
 - He drove to a motel with their baby and later turned himself in to police.

Case

- **Victim:** 27-year-old woman (international student turned permanent resident)
- **Perpetrator:** 35-year-old ex-partner (refugee claim denied, under deportation order)
- **Context:**
 - Victim ended relationship; perpetrator continued stalking
 - Victim had told friends she was not romantically involved anymore
- **Incident:**
 - Victim was lured to perpetrator's residence
 - Both found deceased in an apparent homicide-suicide

Case

- **Victim:** 6-year-old boy
- **Perpetrator:** 58-year-old father (immigrant, custody dispute)
- **Context:**
 - Parents met online; mother sponsored father to Canada
 - Recent custody ruling favored mother; father angry and jealous
- **Incident:**
 - Child not dropped off at school as expected
 - Mother found father hanging and child deceased in bedroom

Actual or pending separation

Victim vulnerability (immigration status, language barriers, isolation)

Obsessive behaviour by perpetrator

History of domestic violence

Sexual jealousy

Prior threats to kill or harm

Access to victim despite risk (stalking, ignoring no-contact orders)

Economic stress and dependency

Mental health concerns (depression, emotional instability)

Immigration-related coercion (fear of deportation or sponsorship withdrawal)

Recommendations

1. Immigration & Labour Ministries

- Multilingual public education campaigns on IPV risks in sponsored relationships and precarious status.
- Priority immigration pathway for IPV survivors (Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program).
- Increased funding for settlement agencies and grassroots organizations.
- Expand language interpretation services (LIS).

2. Child Protection & Social Services

- Specialized IPV units within child protection services for immigrant/refugee families.
- Trauma-informed training for child protection workers on immigration-related IPV risks.
- Funding for language services and culturally safe supports.

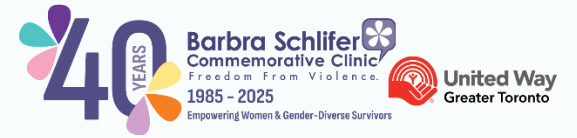
3. Law Enforcement & Border Services

- Trauma-informed IPV training for police officers engaging with immigrant/refugee communities.
- CBSA training to recognize IPV risk and refer individuals to supports.
- Distribute trauma-informed educational materials for police officers engaging with immigrant/refugee communities

4. Education Sector

- Mandatory IPV and rights training for international students during orientation.
- Translate materials into top languages spoken in Ontario
- Develop a comprehensive public education campaign on IPV risks in sponsored relationships, precarious status, and employment vulnerabilities.

Purpose of Recommendations



- **Prevent Further Deaths:** Recommendations aim to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) and prevent future homicides by addressing systemic gaps.
- **Identify Missed Opportunities:** They highlight where interventions could have occurred and propose changes to improve responses.
- **Promote Systemic Change:** Recommendations target policies, practices, and training across sectors—justice, health, social services, immigration, and education.
- **Encourage Collaboration:** They foster cross-sector coordination to ensure survivors have access to culturally safe, trauma-informed, and linguistically accessible supports.
- **Raise Awareness:** Recommendations often include public education campaigns to inform communities about IPV risks and available resources.
- **Non-Binding but Influential:** While not legally enforceable, agencies are asked to respond within six months, and recommendations often influence policy and program development.

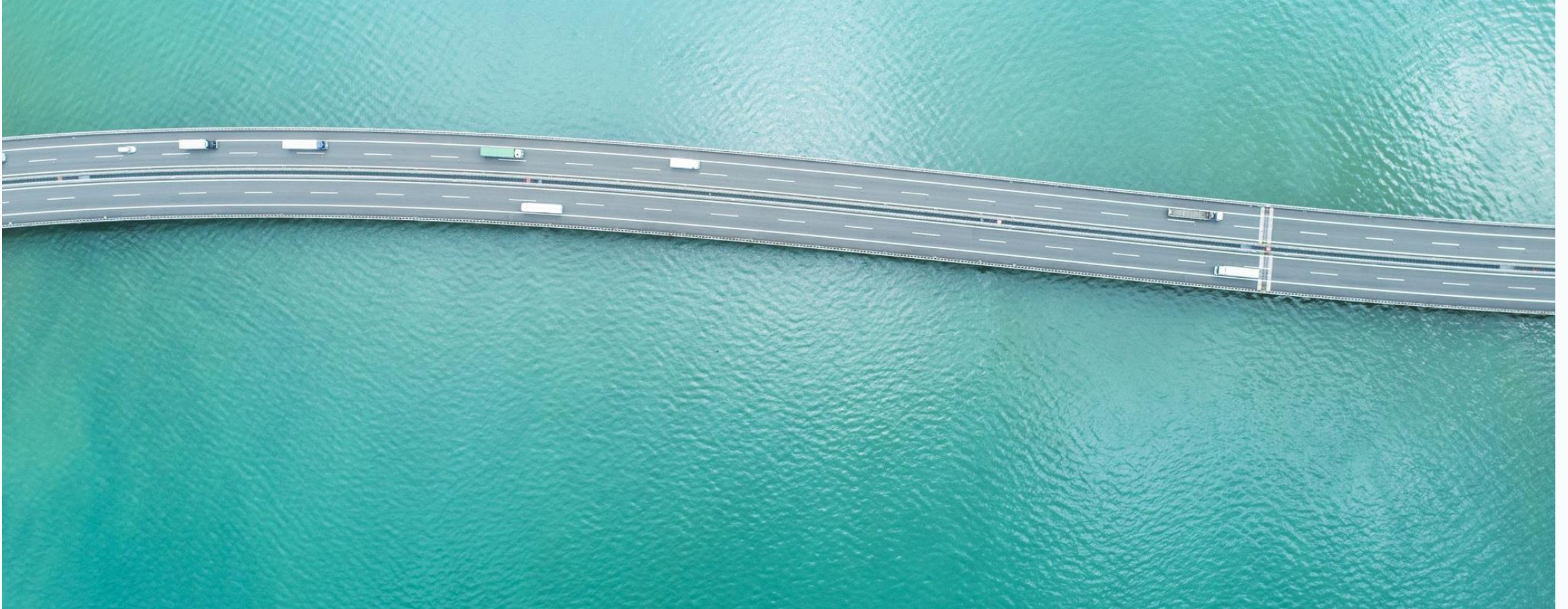
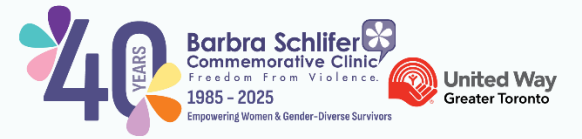


[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

- “Immigration status, particularly when precarious, can significantly heighten an individual’s vulnerability to abuse.”
- “IPV in immigrant, refugee, and precarious status communities cannot be understood through a single lens—it is shaped by immigration policy, gender inequality, economic precarity, cultural stigma, and institutional bias.”
- “Addressing IPV requires a holistic, intersectional approach that centers the voices and needs of those most affected.”



Thank you



Questions & Answers



Chapter 3: Intimate Partner Homicide and Family Law

Pamela Cross



Intimate Partner Homicide & Family Law

Setting the context and sharing learnings from the
DVDRC

Presentation by Pamela Cross

Family Law and IPV

- Family law is critically important in cases involving family violence
- Family law operates on both the federal and provincial levels
- Historically, there has been limited understanding of family violence in the laws and courtrooms
- Changes to the *Divorce Act* and some provincial family laws have provided welcome movement in the right direction

Current challenges

- ▶ Lack of adequate education for lawyers and judges
- ▶ Ongoing myths and stereotypes
- ▶ Lack of legal representation combined with legal bullying
- ▶ Many women underestimate the risk of ongoing abuse, including lethality
- ▶ Can Bill C-223 address any/some/all of these challenges?

DVDRC findings

- ▶ Women and children continue to die after separation
- ▶ Actual or pending separation is the third highest risk factor for lethality, but this is not always understood in the family law context, where focus remains on friendly parenting
- ▶ Trauma interferes with survivor's ability to function well in family court proceedings
- ▶ Lack of representation/financial resources leads too many women to settle for unsafe outcomes

DVDRC recommendations

- ▶ Based on review of seven cases which intersected with family law
- ▶ Several recommendations focus on education/training:
 - * Judicial education
 - * Training for family court professionals
 - * Public education

Questions & Answers



Chapter 2: Children in the Aftermath of Intimate Partner Homicide

Peter Jaffe

Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Education, UWO

Academic Director, Centre for Research &
Education on Violence against Women & Children
2005-2021

Founding Member DVDRC 2003-2025



Children Are Often the Forgotten Victims of IPV



Often Multiple Warning Signs & Missed Opportunities to Intervene



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Beyond PTSD – Moral Injury

When systems and institutions fall short and we witness harm to children and family members in the context of IPV.

Moral injury is the damage done to one's conscience or moral compass when we **witness or fail to prevent IPV = a disruption in our confidence and expectations about systems or others' motivation or capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner.**

Healing is acknowledgment, acceptance, compassion and sharing with others –not blaming and shaming.



Children Affected by IPV

- Exposure to domestic violence
- Exposure to domestic homicide
- Child homicide



EXPOSURE



How do children experience domestic violence?

They:

- See it
- Hear it
- See the aftermath (injuries, damage)
- Hear about it from someone

All of these forms of exposure can adversely affect children, over a long timespan



Recognizing Harm to Children Living with IPV

- Exposure to domestic violence may affect children's well-being at every age and stage of development: PTSD, significant emotional and behavioural problems
- Exposure to domestic violence is one of the most frequent forms of maltreatment = 1 in 3 of substantiated cases annually
- 1 in 3 substantiated case children are age 3 or less
- 1 in 4 children became physically involved as the abusive incident was occurring
- Future Abusers and Victims



Effects of child exposure to domestic violence

Analysis of nearly 50 years of research in 2022

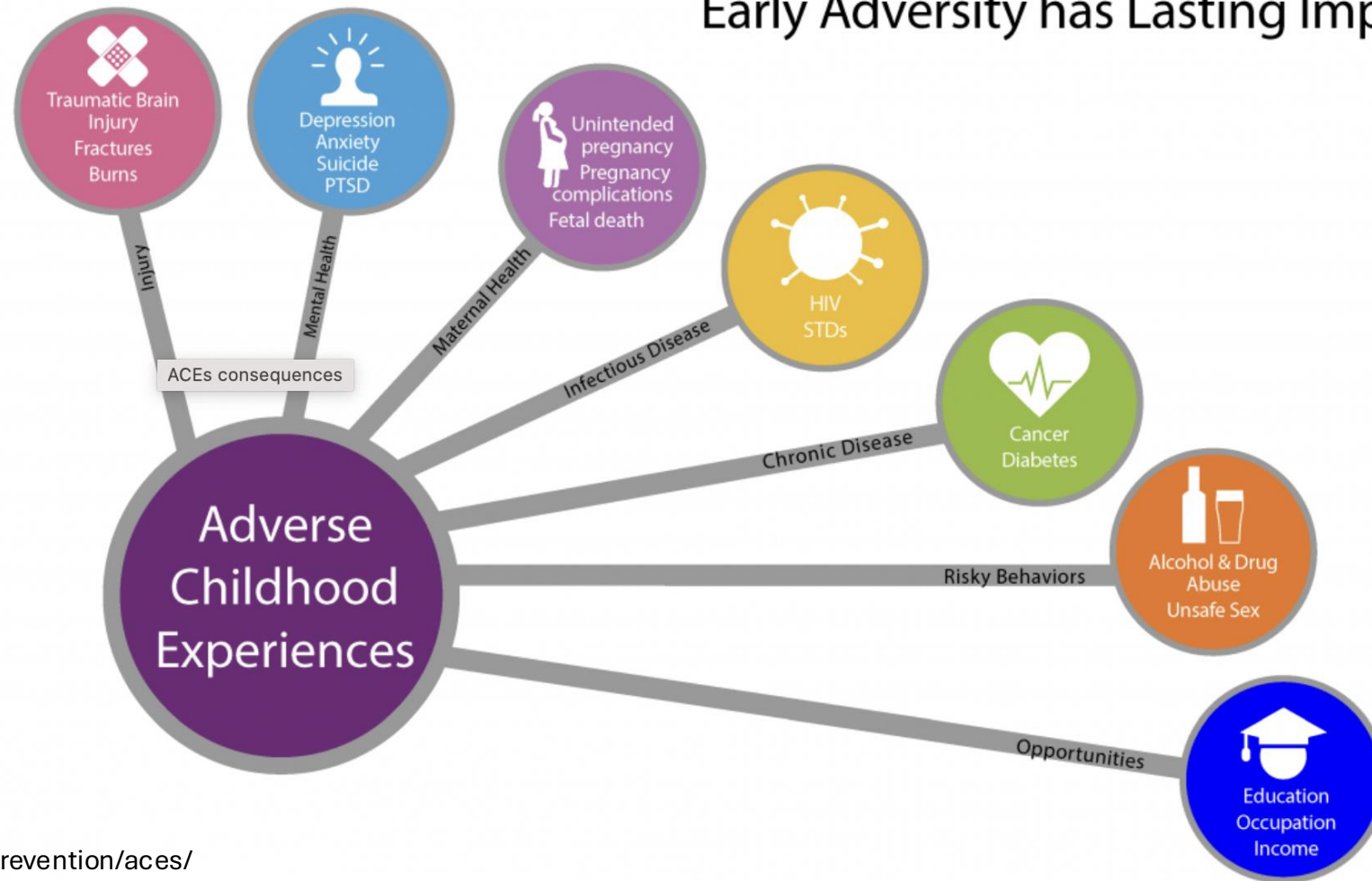
Findings:

- Greater use of medical services, more problems
- Lower socio-emotional competence
- More bullying perpetration and victimization
- More likely to accept DV, more likely to blame self
- Greater hypervigilant stress reactions
- Poorer academic outcomes, especially with combined exposure and abuse



Adverse Child Experiences

Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts



<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/>



CHILD HOMICIDE



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Trends in Filicide Over 50 years in Canada

- From 1961-2011 - 1,612 children under age 18 were killed by their parents; perpetrators.
- Majority of perpetrators during this period were fathers representing 57% of the sample and mothers 43% (61% and 39% in past decade).
- Fathers are more likely to be motivated by jealousy, revenge or retaliation – more often prior history of domestic violence
- Mothers are more likely to kill infants (25% under 1) and suffer from serious mental health problems related to prenatal and postnatal issues.

Dawson, M. (2015). Canadian trends in filicide by gender of the accused, 1961–2011. *Child abuse & neglect*, 47, 162-174.



Children Killed in the Context of Domestic Violence

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

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



Protecting Children Living with Domestic Violence: A Matter of Life & Death

Parental separation is often essential for the long-term protection of victims and children from serious family violence, especially coercive control,
BUT

*separation can increase the immediate risks of serious harm or death from family violence for adult victims and children.
Intervening in family violence cases requires a recognition of the harm to children in these circumstances.*

10-20% of domestic homicide victims are children.

Children who survive are exposed to horrific traumatic events – losing one or both parents disrupts lives forever.



Common Risk Factors in DV Homicide Cases with Children Present

81% actual or pending separation

79% prior history of domestic violence

71% depression

65% obsessive behavior (including stalking the victim)

50% escalation of violence & prior threats to kill victim

32% history of violence/threats toward children

(Reif & Jaffe, 2021)



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Risk factors for lethal violence against children

- When an adult is in danger, children are also in danger
- Overall finding – children can be at severe risk from DV
- Risk of **death** and **irreversible trauma**



Living with the Aftermath of Intimate Partner Homicide



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Domestic Homicide - Harm to Children

“the children at the scene were unharmed” ??

10-20% of domestic homicide victims are children (based on Canada, US, NZ and AU Fatality Reviews)

Many are eye witnesses to horrific tragedy and trauma

Many lose one or both parents – some are caught in subsequent custody disputes between paternal and maternal family systems – few receive counselling



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Children in 50% of ON IPV Homicides

Many of these children

- Call 911
- Find mother injured or killed
- At the scene when police arrive



Child exposure to domestic violence homicide

A study of DV homicides/attempted homicides involving 237 children in 10 U.S. cities found:

Of 146 children whose mothers were murdered:

- 35% witnessed their mother's death
- 37% found their murdered mothers

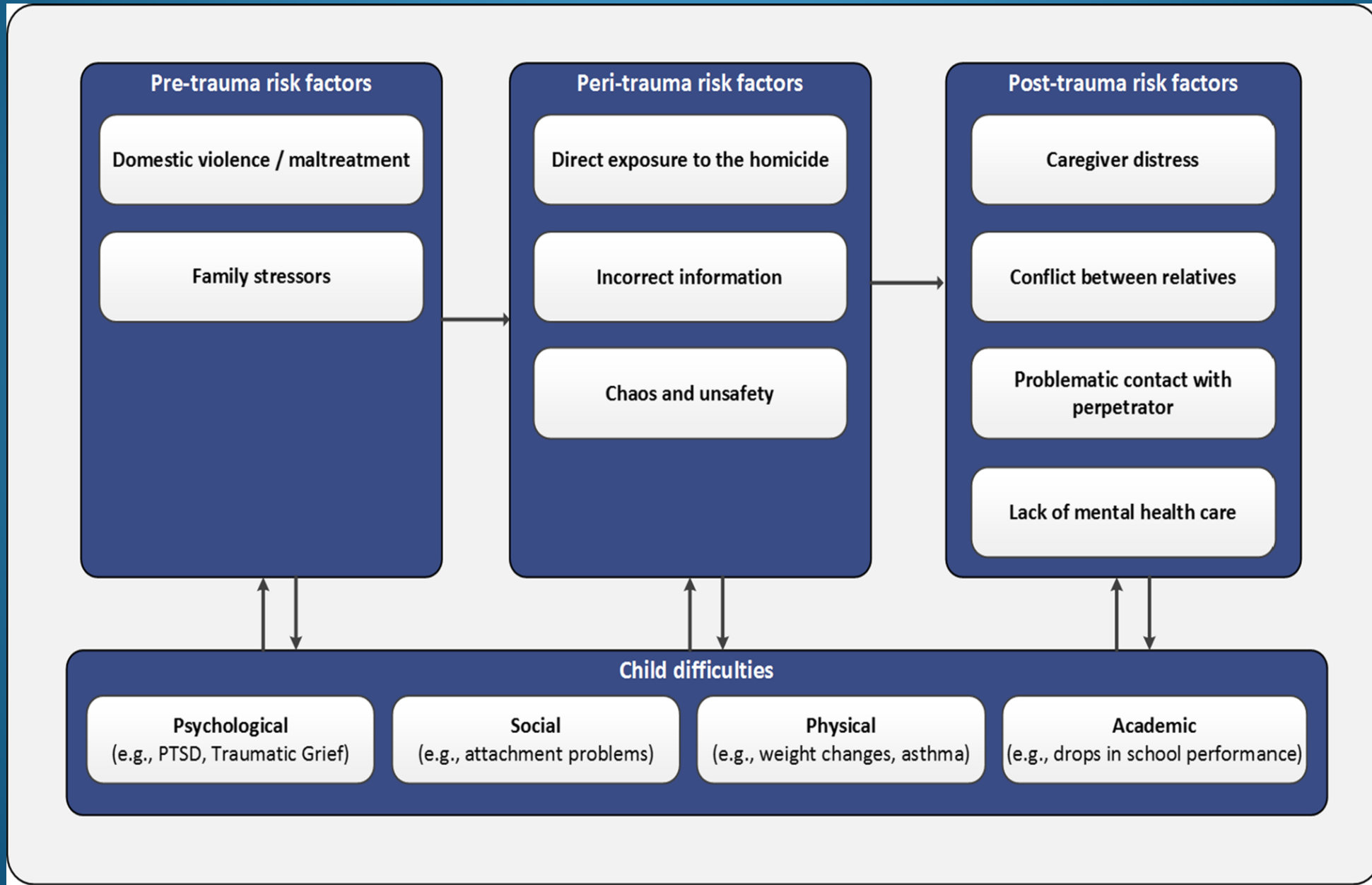
Of 91 children who were party to an attempted homicide:

- 62% witnessed the violent event
- 28% found their mothers afterwards



Model for Understanding Key Risk Factors

(Alisic, Krishna, Groot & Frederick, 2015)



Major DVDRC Recommendations



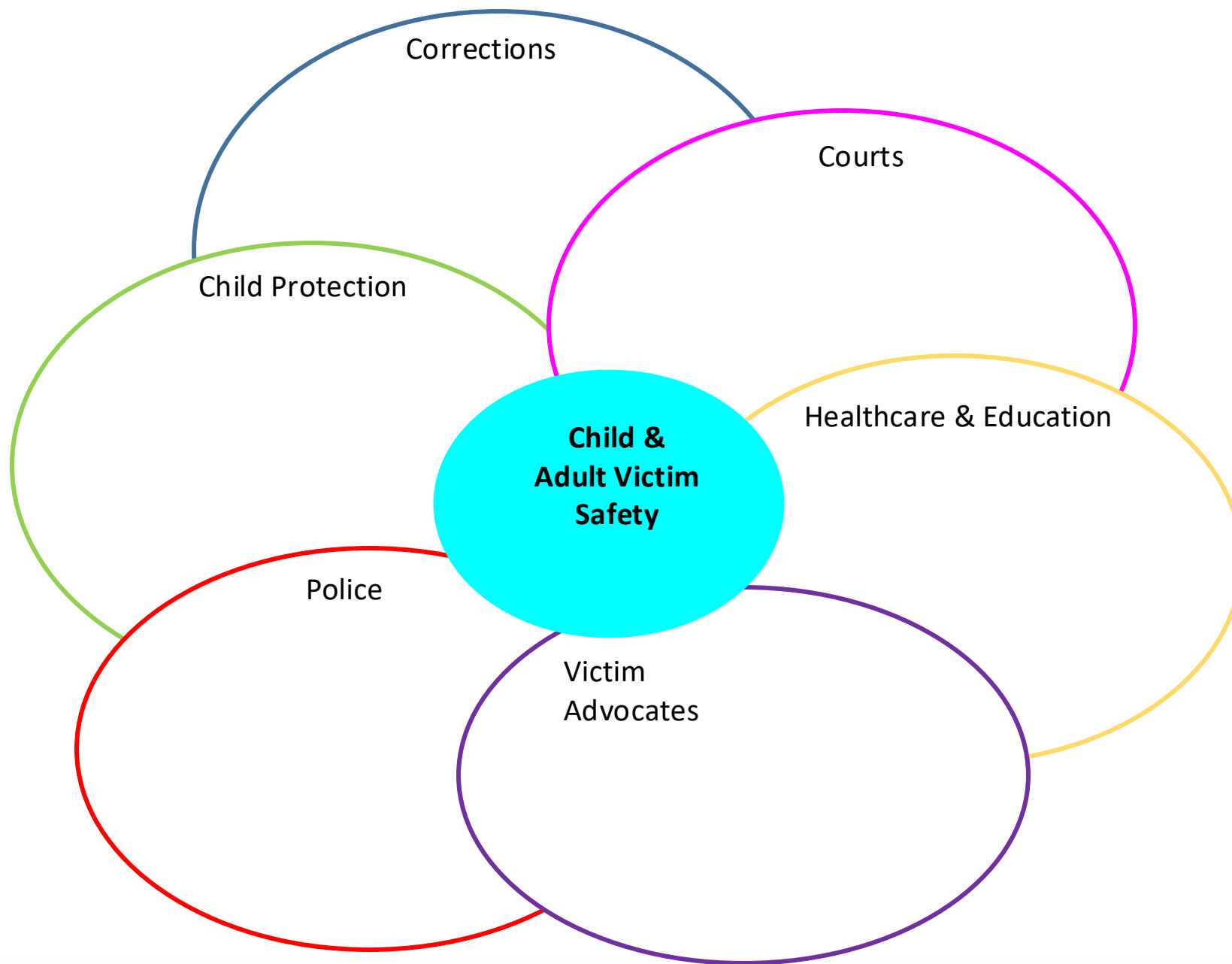
Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Recommendations for Children Living with the Aftermath of Domestic Homicide

- Develop and implement training to promote increased professional awareness regarding the impact of IPV and IP homicide on children, with a particular focus on the ongoing mental health and social needs of these children directly following a traumatic incident.
- Expand funding to adequately fund ongoing counselling
- MCCSS ensure CASs have the resources to support these children
- Specialized training for judges and lawyer on IPV and implications for parenting time and parenting decision-making
- Research to learn from lived experiences of these children like Arizona Child & Adolescent Survivor Initiative (ACASI) and Australian program - Children and Young People Bereaved by Domestic Homicide





Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

References for PowerPoint Slides

Adverse Childhood Conditions <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/>

Children living with aftermath of domestic homicide – major websites: <https://socialwork.asu.edu/family-violence-center/acasi>

<https://mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/centre-for-health-equity/research-group/child-community-wellbeing/research/trauma-and-resilience/children-and-young-people-bereaved-by-domestic-homicide>

“Children Killed in the Context of Domestic Violence: International Perspectives from Death Review Committees” (review of the results from death review committees across multiple countries) https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-56276-0_11 Moral Injury <https://moralinjuryproject.syr.edu/about-moral-injury/>

Dawson, M. (2015). Canadian trends in filicide by gender of the accused, 1961–2011. *Child abuse & neglect*, 47, 162-174.

Holmes, M.R., Berg, K.A., Bender, A.E. *et al.* Nearly 50 Years of Child Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence Empirical Research: Evidence Mapping, Overarching Themes, and Future Directions. *J Fam Viol* **37**, 1207–1219 (2022)

Lewandowski, L.A., McFarlane, J., Campbell, J.C., Gary, F. & Barenski, C. (2004). “He killed my mommy!” Murder or attempted murder of a child’s mother. *Journal of Family Violence*, 19, 211-220.



Peter Jaffe
pjaffe@uwo.ca

**Centre for Research and Education
on Violence Against Women and
Children:** www.learningtoendabuse.ca

**Learning Network: Education,
Research & Resources on Violence
Against Women:**
www.vawlearningnetwork.ca

**Canadian Domestic Homicide
Prevention Initiative:** www.cdhpi.ca

Family Violence Family Law: www.fvfl-vfdf.ca



Questions & Answers



Designing Trauma- and Violence-Informed Policies, Training, and Response Plans to Address Intimate Partner Violence at Work

Presented by: **Rika Sawatsky**

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm ET

EN

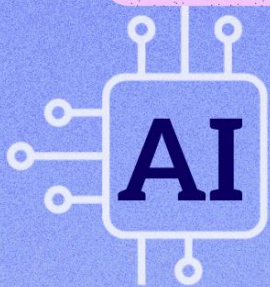
FR

CC



RESPECT
at Work • au travail

VIRTUAL FORUM

A white icon of a computer chip with three connection lines extending from it.

AI & GBV: Harms, Impacts, and Emerging Practices in Prevention & Response

REGISTER NOW!

FEBRUARY 3 & 4, 2026
1:00 - 4:30 PM ET

Western



Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

LEARNING NETWORK



Have your say on AI & GBV

Share your insights on how AI is showing up across GBV prevention, response, and service delivery, including your awareness or experience addressing AI-enabled forms of GBV. Your insights will help inform the LN Virtual Forum and guide future learning and dialogue.

Take the survey: bit.ly/AlandGBVSurvey

Open until Dec. 12, 2025

