

Researchers analyze domestic violence deaths

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A task force that includes researchers from the University of Cincinnati is revealing new findings after examining domestic violence-related deaths in Hamilton County, Ohio, from 1997-2006. Of the 48 people who died of domestic violence over that period, 94 percent of the victims were female, 77 percent were either separated or considering separation from their partner at the time of their death, and 43 percent died of a gunshot wound fired by their spouses.

Forty-four percent of the victims died in a bedroom of their home. The majority of the victims, 57 percent, had endured prior abuse and the highest number of victims, 43 percent, was killed by their spouse than any significant other, according to the findings. The report also found that children were present in 28 percent of these tragedies.

The report, "Intimate Partner Homicide: Hamilton County, Ohio 1997-2006," is the result of a Hamilton County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team that examined public information on intimate partner violence that turned deadly. The report was presented Oct. 26 at the Hamilton County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's annual meeting in Sharonville.

Gary Dick, associate professor for the UC School of Social Work, along with his research assistant, Annie Dick, a graduate student in the School of Social Work, and Ann MacDonald, chair of the Fatality Review Team and executive director of Rape & Crisis Abuse Center of Hamilton County, conducted the research in collaboration with police departments and social service agencies to explore future policies and procedures for

professionals who work with domestic violence victims, such as counselors, courts and safety officers. Similar studies have been conducted in Chicago, Houston and Boston.

“Our purpose of the research was to determine if the risk factors for intimate homicide in the Cincinnati study were comparable to those found by nationally recognized domestic violence researcher Jacqueline Campbell, who conducted a 12-city study on femicide. Campbell developed the Danger Assessment, a research instrument to determine women’s risk for lethality. We found strikingly similar risk factors in the Hamilton County study,” says Dick.

Dick says the report held findings about the victims, the perpetrators (52 percent were employed at the time of the murder; 27 percent were on parole or probation) and the couple’s history pointing to risk factors for intimate partner homicide, with separation from the abuser ranking among the highest risk factors of all.

Findings on Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Homicide (Hamilton County, Ohio)

Separated: 77 percent
Substance abuse: 68 percent
Increase in frequency of abuse: 66 percent
Gun involved: 66 percent
Criminal history: 63 percent
Stalking: 53 percent
Prior domestic violence charge: 48 percent
Threats to kill: 46 percent
Prior history child abuse: 41 percent
Threats of suicide: 41 percent
Perpetrator mental illness: 33 percent
Perpetrator bought a weapon: 33 percent

Property damage: 33 percent
Threats with weapons: 32 percent
Previous serious injury: 28 percent
Sexual assault: 24 percent
Strangulation: 22 percent
Violated protection order: 20 percent
Sadistic/hostage acts: 20 percent
Animal abuse: 5 percent

The report included these recommendations regarding assessment, intervention and education to be incorporated into policy and procedure for counselors, police and other professionals who assist domestic violence victims. Those recommendations include

- Reviewing and assessing the past history of domestic violence
- In assessing a situation, discussing the effects of domestic violence on children
- Conducting a lethality assessment on men arrested for domestic violence prior to their release from jail
- Encouraging and training all health care professionals to screen for domestic violence and to be aware of and recommend community resources for the victims
- Having an experienced domestic violence advocate accompany law enforcement officers when victims are served subpoenas so that they can become aware of supportive services
- Completing a lethality/risk assessment for ongoing cases
- Improving prevention education and outreach to multicultural groups

- Developing a public education campaign about the risk factors that indicate domestic violence situations could turn deadly
- Providing education in high schools on domestic violence
- Increasing community education about elder abuse
- Enhancing education on intervention programs for teen batterers
- Providing domestic violence prevention education to employers

“The Fatality Review process is designed to help us prevent future domestic violence deaths,” says MacDonald. “This collaborative research will have a significant, positive impact on the community at large, victims of intimate partner violence and professionals who work in the field of domestic violence. We still have much work to do in implementing the recommendations. It’s encouraging to have the support of the University of Cincinnati in our efforts to raise awareness and prevent further domestic violence fatalities,” says MacDonald.

Source: University of Cincinnati

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