

Recommendations from the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee

2016

Office of the Chief Coroner
May 2018

BACKGROUND

Domestic Violence Death Review

In December 2009, the Department of Public Safety, Chief Coroner's Office, established the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to assist the Office of the Chief Coroner in the review of deaths of persons that occur as a result of domestic violence, and to make recommendations to help prevent such deaths in similar circumstances. The Chair of the Committee is the Deputy Chief Coroner with members from law enforcement, Public Prosecutions, health, academia, research, service provision, interested citizens and government.

A domestic violence death is defined as a homicide or suicide that results from violence between intimate partners or ex-partners and may include the death of a child or other familial members.

The committee provides a confidential multi-disciplinary review of domestic violence deaths. It creates and maintains a comprehensive database about the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence fatalities and their circumstances. It helps identify systemic issues, problems, gaps, or shortcomings in each case and may make appropriate recommendations concerning prevention. It helps identify trends, risk factors, and patterns from the cases reviewed to make recommendations for effective intervention and prevention strategies.

For the period 2010 – 2016, the Committee has reviewed and submitted reports on 7 cases to the Chief Coroner. In turn the Chief Coroner has forwarded the reports to government departments and agencies involved in the cases for response. Departments and agencies involved have responded to the Chief Coroner on the actions they intend to take to implement the recommendations. The recommendations and responses for the six cases reviewed to date are available on the Justice and Public Safety website <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/jps/publications.html> The recommendations and departmental responses to the latest case are reported on the following pages.

Improving our understanding of why perpetrators of abuse kill their intimate partners and why victims of abuse are vulnerable and using this information to take action to prevent future deaths is essential to reveal systemic gaps and to reduce and eliminate domestic violence in New Brunswick. The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee has an opportunity to educate government and community agencies in New Brunswick with the goal of preventing future domestic homicides and assaults.

The committee continues to meet and review cases.

Recommendations and Responses

1. The Minister of Social Development provide enhanced training and awareness specific to child protection procedures related to domestic and intimate partner violence, which would include:
 - awareness and education on the indicators of domestic and intimate partner violence and risk factors for serious assault or homicide;
 - awareness specific to the risk of lethal violence to children and to their parents during separation;
 - completion of full assessments to obtain a detailed social history of victims and perpetrators; and
 - intervention practices that promote the safety of victims and their children, and risk management strategies for working with perpetrators.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department has fully implemented a specialized, provincial training module on domestic/intimate partner violence. The training was launched in February 2017 for Child Protection, Family Enhancement and Centralized Intake social workers and supervisors. The objectives of the module are to strengthen social workers' skills in: safely engaging parents around domestic/intimate partner violence issues, understanding the impacts of children's exposure to domestic/intimate partner violence, gathering information to complete the Structure Decision Making® assessment tools and making plans to increase safety for children.

2. The Minister of Social Development adopt a validated assessment tool specific to Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence to complement the current assessment processes. An assessment tool specific to Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence provides a guideline for the gathering of more in depth and specific information in relation to the associated risk factors and involvement of other agencies. This recommendation would provide further assistance in determining the risk of continued Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence and lethality.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department recognizes the importance of assessing danger in domestic/intimate partner violence situations. Being familiar with the risk factors associated with dangerousness is a competency in the Department's newly implemented, specialized training module on domestic/intimate partner violence for child protection social workers. It is emphasized in the training that in circumstances where there is a heightened risk to an adult victim, a referral should be made to community partners who specialize in administering the Danger Assessment, such as victim services, outreach workers, transition house staff and other domestic violence interveners.

The Department becomes involved in situations of domestic/intimate partner violence when there is a question about a child's safety and wellbeing. The Department's role is to assess the safety of a child who may be impacted by living in a domestic violence situation and to safety plan with the family accordingly.

3. That the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Premier, in his role as Minister Responsible for Women's Equality, review and assess the available financial resources for the Love Shouldn't Hurt campaign, with a view to increasing its visibility within all communities in New Brunswick so that individuals can be made more aware of the campaign, and can access its invaluable resource materials.

JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY and the PREMIER, MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Love Shouldn't Hurt is an umbrella campaign which uses a layered, integrated approach that

builds on on-going initiatives of over 50 partner organizations, including the Women's Equality Branch. It involves social media (Facebook and Twitter) and an easy access website with a complete suite of resources, tools, information and services available to victims, abusers and bystanders (government, private sector and non-profit). To date, the campaign has documented contact with over 22,000 New Brunswickers through in-person events, the Love Shouldn't Hurt website, and social media accounts.

The Love Shouldn't Hurt Campaign Committee recognizes that there is more work to be done to educate and engage New Brunswickers in ending intimate partner violence (IPV), and to ensure the Campaign message and resources have greater visibility. In acknowledgment of this, a call for Campaign Champions was made last summer and recently extended. A Love Shouldn't Hurt Champion is expected to initiate at least one activity in their community in a calendar year, such as a community talk, a walk or run, a video screening or any other activity that engages the public and spreads the campaign message and resources. Those who have successfully completed the application process are provided with training on the campaign, as well as a toolkit of resources, promotional items, and up to \$500 from the Crime Prevention Association of New Brunswick to support their proposed activity. The goal of this Champion initiative is to reach every community in the province. To date, there have been nine Champions trained from various New Brunswick Communities, and one activity held in the Moncton region. We expect Champion momentum to build over 2018 with many more activities held and New Brunswickers engaged.

Additionally, where federal funding for the Love Shouldn't Hurt campaign will come to an end in 2019, the Love Shouldn't Hurt Campaign committee and the Roundtable on Crime and Public Safety will be working to identify potential next steps for the campaign, including an assessment of required resources.