COMMUNITY VALIDATION OF A SAFETY PLANNING TOOL FOR WOMEN LIVING IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: LEARNING AND INNOVATING TOGETHER
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This presentation will explore:

- Challenges of understanding and responding to domestic homicide risk factors in a rural context
- Development of a safety planning tool for NB women living in abusive relationships
- Research study to assess validity of the Tool
- Key findings
- Proposed dissemination strategies
Risk factors associated with female intimate partner deaths in NB largely consistent with those in other studies, such as:

- Relationship Status (married, common-law or boyfriend)
- Cohabitation status (separated or living together)
- Urban / rural
- History of domestic violence
- Weapon/ firearms
- Escalation of violence
- Health /Mental health issues (threats of suicide, depression, etc.)
- Age
- Alcohol and/or drugs
- Employment status/education/economic stressors
- Blaming of victim
- Criminal Record (of accused)


NB Silent Witness Project - Domestic homicide research explores risk factors faced by NB women. See factsheet Domestic Homicides: The Witness Speak Out


D. Doherty, Loving Her to Death: Understanding and Preventing Domestic Homicide in Rural Communities, Presented across NB and various DH conferences and at Whitecourt, Alberta, April 2011
WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT IPV IN A RURAL CONTEXT?

- Clustering/occurrence of risk factors in NB sometimes differs from national statistics and more urban provinces (Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Report, 2008)
A FEW DIFFERENCES – FEMALE DOMESTIC HOMICIDES IN NB AND CANADA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NB</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>National</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.silentwitness.ca/swadmin/assets/documents/statistics%202012%20english%20updated.pdf">link</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.crvawc.ca/section-research/domestic_death_review_committee.html">link</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11738-eng.htm#a7">link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>69% occurred in small town/rural areas with pops under 10,000</td>
<td>9.5% occurred in rural/small towns - pops under 10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>37% killed at or after separation</td>
<td>81% killed at or after separation</td>
<td>50% killed by separated or divorced spouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>66% killed by common-law or ex-common-law partner or ex-boyfriend</td>
<td>48% killed by common-law partner or boyfriend</td>
<td>48% killed by common-law or ex-common-law spouse</td>
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<td>55% killed with firearms, all but one were hunting rifles or shotguns</td>
<td>25% killed with firearms (stabbing most common cause of death)</td>
<td>Stabbing most common cause (except in murder-suicides - 53% firearms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>56% were murder-suicides</td>
<td>33% were murder-suicides</td>
<td>Most victims killed by current partner...NB reported the highest rate of spousal murder-suicides among the provinces,</td>
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<td>75% involved alcohol/drugs</td>
<td>42% involved excessive alcohol</td>
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<td>65% of perpetrators had prior criminal records</td>
<td>85% had prior criminal records</td>
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The vast majority of people working to understand and prevent domestic homicides, embrace national findings as normative, and develop responses and interventions that tend to reflect an extremely urban-centric view of lethality risks.

It is important to understand the lived realities of rural/small town women in order to develop appropriate/relevant solutions.
A Promising Practice….

Development of a rural-sensitive and innovative safety planning tool to help women living in abusive relationships to strategically assess and mitigate their risks.
Funded by Justice Canada, the objective of the study was two-fold:

- To investigate the context in which abused women, particularly those living in small towns/rural communities, would make use of the safety planning tool.

- To identifying community-based dissemination strategies and uptake models for sharing the safety planning tool with abused women.
SCOPe OF STUDY

- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Two focus groups with crisis interveners, service providers and community agencies) in Miramichi and Woodstock (19 participants)
- Focus group with women had left an abusive relationship.
KEY FINDINGS

A. The “Rural Context” and Its Impact on Safety Planning
   - Experiences helping women to safety plan
   - Reasons why women stay
   - Women’s perception of risk

B. Review of the Safety Planning Tool
   - Usefulness of the tool
   - Relevance of the tool, cultural/rural sensitivity
   - Relationship to other tools

C. Dissemination Strategies
   - Who? Where? How
A. RURAL CONTEXT AND IMPACT ON SAFETY PLANNING

- little available for women who stay in abusive relationships

- risk assessments of offenders who are charged - but without a charge not much help for women who stay in the relationship

- almost everyone agreed that in their experience in rural communities, staying in the relationship was indeed the norm.
Some of the factors participants said kept women in abusive relationship:

- Poverty and low literacy
- Fear of the unknown and fear of loneliness
- Depression and hopelessness
- Lack of support from those around them - minimizing the risks
- Children’s needs
- Systemic barriers – lack of transportation, services, daycare, jobs, etc.
- Concerns about leaving behind their pets, family and rural lifestyle
- Presence of long guns in rural home
- Suicide threats and mental health issues
- Alcohol or drug use
- Normalizing of the abuse and victim blaming
- Lack of self-esteem (feeling “stupid” )
overwhelming agreement that women typically do not view their experience with intimate partner violence as “family violence”.

their clients use other terms to refer to the abuse such as going through a “rough patch”

friends, family, neighbours & even service providers may say the “abusive behaviour” caused by alcohol

Hard to name what one is experiencing when people make so many excuses (normalize) or blame the victim.
RURAL CONTEXT: CULTURAL NORMS

- Everyone expects women to show loyalty to their family. “Loyalty is ingrained, and leaving is failure and failure isn’t an option.”

- Pressures from family to stay are often strong
  - “Marriage is hard work, don’t give up.”
  - “I tested the waters with people, and tried to tell them what was going on. But they turned around and told him everything. You can imagine how that came down on me.”
All focus group participants brought up the presence of firearms. Even without overt threats, firearms are still a factor.

- “Almost every rural home has lots of firearms. He doesn’t have to actually say I’m going to shoot you. He can just say…‘if you ever leave…!’ ”
- “Shotguns and rifles are not the weapon of choice for domestic abuse in urban areas.”
- “I wasn’t afraid for myself, I thought he would shoot himself,”
Women often feel they have better control over the situation if they stay. They are more afraid of the unknown if they leave.

One participant noted that if a woman stays she can read his moods and knows how to diffuse an argument. But once she leaves "there is no telling what he might do".
Although women are the experts on their own situations, there are many reasons why they tend to minimize their risk of being harmed or killed by their partner.

Telling women to call 911 in an emergency does not resonate with many abused women:

- “Seeing your house on fire or your child bleeding to death – that’s an emergency. Being beaten up by your partner – that’s just another Saturday night.”

The new tool helps give women a reality check that the situations of control, dominance and abuse they experience are known to be risk factors for serious harm.
B. REVIEW OF TOOL

- Overall, participants/interviewees were extremely positive about the readability and usefulness of the tool.

- Fairly easy to read and accessible – however, there were many excellent suggestions on how to lower the language level to make it even more readable.

- The examples related to living in NB and the information on risk factors such as drinking, suicide and mental health gave a “wake up call”, but in a non-judgmental fashion.
All of the participants felt the information in the new safety planning tool would be valuable for them in helping women to make personal self-assessments of their risk.

- "I would definitely use this tool with my clients"
- "This tool is fantastic, much better than what I am using now."
The favourite or “best liked” part of the tool for most participants was “Deciding Who to Tell”.

It flags the most common things women say about why they don’t reach for help and counterbalances those reasons with “Points to Consider”. This is “exactly what women need to hear.”

As one participant noted: “this tool will promote ownership and internalization….”
Other comments…

- “This tool makes the plan unique to each woman. It is not general like so many of the others we have used.”
- “The tool is amazing. I like it much better than the safety plans we have now. It actually gets women thinking as they read it.”
- “the brilliance of this tool is that women can do it themselves.”
- “I love how it explains everything right at the start. She could do it by herself – or it’s something we could go through together. It’s great.”
All participants felt the new tool was compatible or complimentary to existing tools.

The new tool offers a personalized approach based on self assessment. Helping agencies can assist, offer to hold the plan for safe keeping, etc.

“We have a danger assessment tool, but I would see using this one much more broadly.”
C. DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES - WHO

- Guidance Counselors and social workers
- Public Health, Social Development, various government agencies
- Schools
- Hairdresser, beauty salons, gyms
- Doctors and dentist offices, mental health
- Public Libraries
- Grocery stores
- Wellness centres, workplace health and safety
- Transition houses
- Churches and faith communities
- Victim Services
- Police and RCMP
“It should be made available to all the dispatch staff. Just reading it, they would probably learn a lot that would relate to what they hear when they get a domestic call.”

“I personally don’t have any experience safety planning but I think that all police officers should be trained to use this new tool. Maybe we could train a team of 30 police officers or something. We usually refer women to Victim Services or other services such as child protection. But when there are no charges, we simply don’t do anything to help the woman.”
C. DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES – LAW ENFORCEMENT

- “Officers would definitely use this tool and would sit down with women to talk about safety planning. It becomes much harder for police to give women the tool, or tell them about it if the man knows she’s been talking to police.”

- “[Our officers] respond to a lot of domestic situations, and we always separate the parties to get both sides. Even if the woman doesn’t want to press charges or leave the house, having them in separate rooms would be a good opportunity for us to tell her about the tool and give her a copy if it would be safe.”
Participants debated - should the tool be a “secret” resource. Widespread agreement that it should be widely available in places where women are likely to find it – doctor’s office, hairdresser, church, etc. It defeats the purpose if only available from a professional.

Make the cover (pink) and the title unappealing to men so they won’t be likely to pick it up (How to Improve Your Relationships). One person noted, “It could look like a Cosmo quiz. After all, what woman doesn’t want to work on improving her relationship”
The new tool will serve as one more resource for helping agencies. Information sessions would be nice, but it was agreed that dissemination should not be delayed simply because there hasn’t been training. A covering letter or short fact sheet for the “dissemination venues” could explain ways of making it available for women.

Emphasis should be on the importance of each woman keeping her personal copy private/hidden. But the tool itself should “be out there”

A woman may pick up the tool in the waiting room and start to read it. Since it’s “a do-it-yourself tool, at some point she just might have an ‘aha moment’ and decide to do something about her personal risks.”
The suggestion that we create an App for the tool was met with enthusiasm.

“Younger people don’t want anything on paper anymore – and that’s where our services need to go too. The tool should be converted into an App for use on smart phones.”

That way, you could promote the tool by use of posters and magnets (which are much cheaper to produce and disseminate). These would have a “bar code” that a woman could scan to download the App which would be “hidden” on her phone. It would have a feminine icon (like the butterfly) that wouldn’t suggest that it was a safety planning tool.

There was general agreement that a mixed methods approach was necessary….promote access at a variety of local venues, target hard copies for areas with poor cell phone usage, make it available on the Internet on multiple sites, and ensure police, victim services, transition houses and service agencies have ready access.
NEXT STEPS

- Revise the tool to address the feedback
- Translate the tool and conduct focus groups in Francophone communities.
- Finalize the tool
- Search for funding
- Convert into an App
- Liaise with key stakeholders
- Develop promotional resources and disseminate tool