

Domestic Homicide in New Brunswick: An Overview of Some Contributing Factors

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Abstract

This study looks at domestic homicides of women in New Brunswick from 1984 to 2005. It examines factors associated with higher homicide risk for women and reviews the criminal justice system response. The study suggests that national studies of domestic homicide are urban-centric and that rurality itself may be a risk factor.

Résumé

Cette étude se penche sur les homicides conjugaux de femmes au Nouveau-Brunswick entre 1984 et 2005. Elle étudie les facteurs associés aux risques d'homicides plus élevés pour les femmes et réexamine la réponse du système judiciaire criminel. Cette étude suggère que les études sur l'homicide conjugal sont concentrées sur le milieu urbain et que le fait de vivre en milieu rural est en soi peut-être un facteur de risque.

...although the marital relationship was not the "textbook kind," and was in fact of the "stormy" variety of a "bickering" nature where the accused and his wife lived in an argumentative style of marriage, it nevertheless worked for them for 34 years.

R. v. Foster, 2004 NBQB 315 (CanLII)

These were the words of the defence counsel in a "voir dire" hearing to determine the admissibility of evidence relating to a history of domestic violence of a man accused of the second degree murder of his wife, Gail Foster, in rural New Brunswick in 2003. Defence counsel objected to having his client characterized as an "abuser," stating that, "the marriage was not one of 'violence' in its true meaning..." Although the judge noted that some of conduct of the accused over the years was revolting, he also remarked that despite the Crown's attempt to portray this conduct as abusive, when taken in isolation, most acts could be interpreted in another manner. Citing many cases of the inadmissibility of such evidence, the judge concluded: "The evidence of the accused's bad character and temperament has small probative value compared with its potential heavy prejudicial effect. Such evidence ought to be excluded and will accordingly not be admissible at trial" (R. v. Foster 2004).

Clearly the relationship did not "work" for the victim, who might have survived her injuries from the shotgun blast if she had received medical assistance after the shooting. However, the accused had by then passed out on the couch in a drunken stupor. In the months before her death, Gail Foster had told friends that she was fearful for her life, and had hidden her husband's bullets in an attempt to thwart disaster. It is no wonder then that her family and friends spoke to the press on the courthouse steps after her husband's conviction

for manslaughter to share their feelings of hostility, betrayal and resentment towards the justice system for not allowing the jury to hear about the history of domestic violence (Telegraph Journal 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is three-fold. First, it explores the re-occurring factors that emerge from the analysis of New Brunswick domestic homicide cases and murder-suicide cases over the past 22 years. Second, it compares the common social and economic factors that emerge to those identified in Canadian national domestic homicide studies and family violence surveys with a view to determining if these national studies reflect the realities of women in New Brunswick, a rural province with over half its inhabitants residing in rural areas and small towns (Statistics Canada 1996). Given that 88% of Canada's population live in urban areas and that national studies rarely correlate their findings with urban-rural residence, our understanding of domestic homicide risk tends to reflect an urban-centric bias. Third, the study examines the legal system's treatment of these domestic homicides and concludes with a discussion of how these deaths help us to better understand lethality risks confronting New Brunswick women, particularly rural women, and ultimately, to improve responses and prevent further deaths.

Methodology

This study is based on the examination of cases of New Brunswick women who died at the hands of legally married spouses, common-law partners, ex-spouses or ex-common-law partners, as well as current or ex-boyfriends. No attempt was made to use research categories and limit data sources to those that would be consistent with other studies such as the Family Violence Survey (Johnston and Aucoin 2003) which excludes ex-common-law partners and boyfriends from the definition of "spousal homicide." Although the term "intimate partner homicide" has been used in national studies to capture a greater range of relationships (Besserer and Trainor 2000; Fedorowycz 1997; Johnson 1996), this study uses the term "domestic homicide" to refer to homicides and murder-suicides committed by any current or

ex-partner.

This study examines 28 female deaths (19 homicides and 9 murder-suicides) of New Brunswick women over 15 years of age between 1984 and 2005. The time period reflects the rise of the women's movement, transition houses, violence against women campaigns and a reversal of homicide conviction trends (Dawson 2005). A broad range of documentation was sought out for this study - including information that was not heard by the courts. Although most published studies on domestic homicide are based solely on the analysis of reported cases, the intent of this study is to look at any information that helps us to better understand the reasons for the tragedies and how we might prevent future deaths. The documents reviewed include unreported cases, preliminary hearings, voir dire hearings, sentencing hearings, pre-sentencing reports, coroner reports, psychiatric assessments, and victim impact statements. Newspapers provided another source of information and observation on factors that may have contributed to the lethal outcomes. Internet searches yielded obituaries and articles about the homicides, and included interviews with the family or friends of the victim and the accused. Since little information on the murder-suicides is in the public domain it was not always possible to include complete data on them.

Much of the data collected initially came as a result of the author's involvement in the New Brunswick Silent Witness Project, which, following the lead of the American Silent Witness Program, was the first such initiative in Canada to identify women victims of domestic homicide and build life-size red wooden silhouettes to honour them and create public awareness of family violence issues. Media coverage of Silent Witness presentations often resulted in calls from relatives who wanted to share the names of loved ones they thought should have silhouettes. Transition house staff also provided names of women who had been killed by partners. In some instances, a victim's family provided relationship information when they participated in writing personal text for the silhouette shield of their loved one.

The information from these various sources was set out in 11 tables. Factors examined included relevant social relationship and background information for the victims and

the accused such as age, relationship status, past history of family violence, abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, mental disorders and prior criminal record. Additional variables associated with each death included type of weapon, where it happened (home, workplace, cottage), location of homicide (rural or urban), and other victims. Also included was information on whether the accused blamed the victim for the tragedy or attempted suicide after the killing. Tables were also created to analyze the criminal law outcomes of each case such as charges, convictions, sentences, and types of aggravating and mitigating factors cited at sentencing. Although the homicides and murder suicides were analyzed separately to determine if different patterns of variables emerged, the study also presents some aggregate profiles of the victims and the men who killed them.

Preliminary Analysis of Social and Economic Factors

Several studies have correlated the attributes of men and women in intimate partner relationships, such as age and marital status, with increased risk for abuse or homicide. National data show that although greater numbers of married women aged 31-40 are spousal homicide victims than any other age category, the rate of homicides is greatest for younger women, particularly at separation (Trainor 2002, 7). In the New Brunswick homicide cases in this study, very few of the victims or perpetrators were under 25 years of age - only one accused and one victim. The majority of homicides were committed by older men (over 40 years), rather than younger men. Of the men convicted in homicide cases, 63% were over 40 years old, while close to 50% of the female victims were between the ages 31-40. A quarter of the accused and the victims in the New Brunswick homicides were over 50 years. The ages of the men in the murder suicides were not always available. However, only one murder-suicide victim was under 25 years, while none were over 50 years of age.

Another correlation of note is cohabitation status. About two-thirds of all the New Brunswick women killed were living with the accused at the time, while one-third had been separated or were not living with the man. For both homicide and murder-suicide cases, more deaths occurred when couples

were living together, although separation appears to be a time of great risk (Aucoin 2005). Nationally, 39% of male ex-partners in spousal homicides committed suicide after killing the victim, while 6% attempted suicide.

Marital status is another variable that is associated with domestic homicides (Fitzgerald 1999). A heightened risk of homicide has been associated with women in common-law relationships (Brownridge 2004, 234). Of the New Brunswick domestic homicides reviewed, 61% occurred at the hands of a common-law or former common-law partner. When the homicides and murder-suicides are considered separately, we find that 52% of the women in homicide cases were or had been in a common-law type relationship, compared to 77% of the victims in murder-suicides. Of those couples who were living apart at the time of the killing, 80% (8 out of 10) were separated from a common-law partner or boyfriend. This supports research showing that the risk of homicide is greater after separation, particularly at the hands of an ex-common-law partner (Hotton 2001; Statistics Canada 1999).

The current study also examined the location of the homicides and the weapons used such as firearms, knives, and blunt objects. Clearly it is not intended, nor is it able, to establish the incidence of firearm deaths. However, there was a striking correlation of New Brunswick domestic homicides with the use of firearms. In 13 of the 28 deaths, or 46% of the cases, the victim was killed with a firearm. This is slightly higher than the figure cited in a national firearms homicide study, which found that 34% of Canadian women killed by their husbands were shot (Hung 2000). The study suggested that homes that have firearms are much more likely to turn deadly for women. Additionally, there was a significant correlation in New Brunswick between intimate partner deaths and location. Nearly 70% of the deaths occurred in small towns and rural locations (i.e., areas with populations of less than 10,000). This finding is consistent with a national firearms study that notes "almost one-half (49 percent) of the victims of domestic homicide involving firearms are killed in rural settings" (Canada Firearms Centre 1999a).

A striking correlation between domestic homicide and murder-suicide emerged in this study. Of the 28 domestic homicides in New Brunswick between 1984 and 2005, 32%

were murder-suicides. The correlation of domestic homicide to murder-suicide is well documented in national studies (Gillespie, Hearn, and Silverman 1998). Moreover, the association of domestic homicides and rurality in the current study was even stronger in the case of murder-suicides. All but one of the nine murder-suicides happened in rural areas. As well, the murder-suicides were strongly correlated in New Brunswick to the presence of firearms. All but one of the murder-suicides were committed with firearms. Although murder-suicides constituted only 32% of the 28 deaths, they accounted for 62% of the firearm deaths. This is fairly consistent with national studies that have found high rates of murder-suicide associated with firearms and domestic violence (Aucoin 2005; Gillespie, Hearn and Silverman 1998). One study found that 70% of spousal homicides involving firearms were murder-suicides and that men were 5 times more likely to use a firearm to kill an intimate partner than were women (Dansys 1992).

The association between rurality and firearms homicides in New Brunswick is not surprising. Gun ownership rates are particularly high in rural areas generally, and New Brunswick, which is largely a rural province, has the second highest rate of gun ownership in Canada, excluding the Territories (Canada Firearms Centre 1999b). New Brunswick also has the highest rate of firearms deaths of all the provinces, which includes accidental shootings, suicides and homicides (Hung 2000). Several studies have pointed to the increased risk for lethal violence associated with a history of family violence and the presence of firearms in the home. In urban areas, firearm homicides have long been associated with handguns and illegal weapons. In rural communities, there is a strong "rural gun culture" that tends to value and associate the use of long guns with peaceful and law-abiding behaviour such as hunting. While this is certainly true for the vast majority of homes with firearms, we cannot overlook the fact that 95% of the New Brunswick firearms spousal homicides (12 of the 13 cases) were committed with long guns. The rural nature of the province no doubt explains why this rate is higher than a national study that showed 63% of spousal homicide victims killed with firearms were killed by rifles and shotguns (Hung 2000). In the New Brunswick cases, the use of

firearms was associated with both legally married and common-law relationships: five shootings were by husbands and six shootings were by common-law partners. Most of the killings took place in the victim's home.

Another factor examined in this study was "previous history of abuse." After reviewing various sources, the author estimates that 89% of the New Brunswick homicides could be associated with a history of family violence. This determination was made from reviewing court cases, sentencing reports, voir dire hearings, victim impact statements and media reports. At the national level, the connection between homicide and prior domestic violence has been well documented with 56% of spousal homicides being linked to prior family violence (Dansys Consulting 1992; Wilson, Johnson, Daly 1995). As will be discussed later, despite this clear connection, both nationally and in the cases analyzed for this study, the courts in New Brunswick often appear hesitant to recognize or acknowledge a history of domestic violence. Instead, they tend to characterize abusive relationships using euphemisms such as "troubled," "turbulent" or "stormy."

Another variable of particular note is the prominence of alcohol or drug use on the part of the accused. Over three-quarters of the accused had been drinking or taking drugs at the time of the incident, and over 70% of these men were said in sentencing reports and other documents to be alcoholics or have a serious drinking problem. Alcohol appeared to be less strongly correlated with murder-suicides: only two of the nine cases involved alcohol. This association with alcohol abuse is consistent with national studies that have linked intimate partner homicides to alcohol abuse (Dansys Consulting 1992; Pottie Bunge and Locke 2000, 41).

The New Brunswick domestic homicides were also strongly correlated to a prior criminal record of the accused. Close to 60% of the accused had known criminal records which ranged from drunk driving, assaults, uttering threats, break and enter, arson, and probation breaches. This appears to support national data showing that a high proportion of the men who killed spouses had a prior criminal record (53%), were awaiting trial (18%) or were on probation (5%) at the time of the murder (Dansys Consulting 1992).

There is not sufficient evidence in many of the New Brunswick cases, particularly the murder-suicides, to comment specifically on the issue of prior mental illness. However, at least 6 cases noted mental health problems ranging from personality disorders and deep-seated emotional problems, to depression and suicide attempts. Nationally, studies have found links between mental health problems of partners and increased domestic homicide risk for abused women (Dutton 1999; Justice Canada 2003).

Domestic Homicide and the Criminal Law System

The economic, social and personal factors that have been associated with family violence and homicide risk are essentially the same factors considered by the court as mitigating or aggravating factors at the time of sentencing (Justice Canada 2003; Manson 2001). Aggravating factors relate to the accused person's use of drugs or alcohol, prior criminal record, use of a weapon, and the domestic nature of the crime, to name a few. Mitigating factors that the courts may consider include the accused person's demonstrations of remorse, self-rehabilitation efforts, provocation and mental illness. As well, at sentencing the court may consider the convicted person's personal characteristics such as education, literacy, employment situation, health, age and attachment to family.

One factor frequently noted at sentencing in this study was the use of alcohol and/or drugs by the perpetrator. Ironically, addiction was sometimes mentioned by the courts as a mitigating factor. For example, in a few cases the judges noted that the accused had entered into a treatment program, or had not touched alcohol since the incident (R. v. Duval 1994; R. v. Lanteigne 1999; R. v. Stewart 1999). In several cases, the accused claimed he was too drunk to even remember committing the crime. At least three accused claimed to have "blacked out" after the killing. Although self-induced intoxication was included as an aggravating factor in several cases, extreme inebriation was cited in some cases as evidence that the accused lacked the capacity to form intent to kill. In one case, R. v. Duval, the accused slit his common-law partner's throat but was too drunk to remember doing it the next morning. His entry into an alcohol treatment

program was cited as a mitigating factor at his sentencing after he pled guilty to manslaughter.

It is difficult to understand why treatment and sobriety after the murder should be considered in reducing the sentence given that in 1994 the Criminal Code was amended in response to a public outcry when the Supreme Court allowed intoxication as a defence to rape and other serious crimes in the case of R. v. Daviault. Section 33 was introduced to eliminate the defence of intoxication for crime, such as murder, that require the element of intent, so that offenders could no longer escape culpability by claiming they were too drunk to form the intention to commit these serious crimes. However, Section 33 is of no relevance in manslaughter sentencing, because only murder convictions deal with intent. More than half of the 19 cases reviewed in this study were cases where the accused either pled down or was convicted of the lesser offence of manslaughter. In the case of manslaughter, intent is not an issue, and therefore drunkenness is not necessarily an aggravating factor except where the accused was too drunk to get help for a victim who might have lived if she had received medical assistance right away.

The fact that alcohol figures prominently in the New Brunswick cases, and in the judges' reasoning at sentencing hearings, suggests a need to carefully consider how to weigh intoxication as a factor at sentencing, particularly in manslaughter cases. What judges say at sentencing is important and for the most part, judges have pointed to alcohol as the "reason" for the death. Alcohol certainly exacerbates the likelihood of a lethal outcome, but it does not explain the death. After all, these men did not get drunk and kill their neighbours, their friends, or their bosses: they killed their intimate partners. The lack of attention to a history of family violence was evident in many, though not all, of the New Brunswick cases. When family violence appears to be minimized or overlooked, it makes it that much easier for the crime to be treated in the press, and by society, as some kind of aberrant, isolated and rare event. To the contrary, when a man kills the woman to whom he has been married, dating or cohabiting, it should never be characterized as an isolated, out-of character, and senseless act.

Another concern is the difficulty of establishing a history of domestic violence. The relevance of past assaults of a domestic nature, or other information about obsessively jealous and controlling behaviour, was at times questioned and considered too "prejudicial" to be brought up during the trial. Although in some cases the Crown was able to establish that the victim had fled to a transition house, or had told family and friends about her fears of harm at the hands of the accused, the judges still failed to acknowledge the domestic nature of the killing. In part, the failure to recognize a history of family violence reflects society's inappropriate association of domestic violence with physical assaults or threats. If police reports are not available, which in many cases they are not, then claims of abuse tend to be minimized and discredited. Yet Pottie Bunge & Levett (1998) reported that a relatively high proportion of even severely assaulted women (45% who feared for their lives and 57% who were injured) chose not to involve the police. Nationally, it has been found that where police are aware of domestic violence, it precedes 74% of the homicides by ex-husbands, 57% of homicides by common-law partners, and 41% of current spouses (Statistics Canada 1999). Clearly, in the absence of police reports it is essential that the courts come to recognize that there are a variety of sources of information that might confirm that a couple was in an abusive relationship given that the abuse may have been well known to family, friends, physicians and perhaps transition house workers.

The failure to identify a history of abuse of a domestic nature is a serious oversight, and particularly problematic since 1996 when an amendment to the Criminal Code, Section 718.2, introduced spousal abuse as a deemed aggravating factor applicable to all sentences in cases in which an offender has killed his or her intimate partner. This section is supposed to reflect society's concern for the sanctity of life generally, and the outrage that people feel at the loss of life in a domestic situation in particular. At sentencing the judge may consider a history of family violence as an aggravating factor to increase the length of the accused's sentence - the minimum sentence required is four years and the maximum is life imprisonment.

A recent report examining sentences in manslaughter

cases in intimate partner relationships concluded that the 1996 sentencing reform has been successful and that judges have consistently taken into account the domestic nature of the offence (Justice Canada 2003). The report states that a history of family violence was specifically mentioned as an aggravating factor in all twenty-seven spousal homicide cases decided since 1996. This does not seem to be the case in New Brunswick, where only five of the ten domestic homicide cases since 1996 referred at sentencing to a history of family violence. Few cases specifically mentioned s718.2.

To illustrate this point, consider the following examples of cases where domestic violence was not recognized. On January 12, 1999 in response to the deaths of three women in thirteen months at the hands of their partners, an editorial appeared in a provincial paper "Women's Deaths Demand Public Scrutiny" (Telegraph Journal 1999). In one of these three cases, *R. v. Lanteigne* (1999), the accused plead guilty to manslaughter a few days into his trial. He had stabbed his estranged common-law partner in the back. At the sentencing hearing the judge reviewed the facts of the case. We learn that, "the accused had lived with the victim for a relatively long period of time, for several years. (They had a six year old daughter together.) The period of cohabitation had, I believe, been marked by turmoil, and on several occasions by violence, as evidenced by the accused's criminal record" (*R. v. Lanteigne*, 1999). Yet, in spite of this description of the couple's troubled relationship, which included a sexual assault charge dropped by the victim, when talking about his reasoning for the sentence, the judge said, "We must take into account that the couple had separated and that the accused had only been there for three or four days when the offence was committed. I do not know if this should be classified as 'a domestic homicide' as they say in English. I hesitate in slotting it into this category" (*R. v. Lanteigne*, 1999).

Rather, the judge goes on to say that this is a case of two people who were intoxicated and in the course of an argument the accused stabbed the victim, not intending to kill her, although her death followed. In this study the case was classified as having a prior history of abuse, although it was not a specific consideration at sentencing. As a result, it is not

surprising that in the above-mentioned report on sentencing for intimate partner manslaughter, *R v. Lanteigne* was not classified as a case with a history of family violence (Justice Canada 2003).

In another of these three deaths, *R. v. Savoie* (1998), the Crown noted that the victim had on numerous occasions sought shelter at the local transition house. At sentencing, the judge referred to it as "a senseless crime." For family and friends, it was only a senseless crime if one did not understand it in light of the serious history of violence. The accused had stabbed his wife and attempted to burn the body in front of their young daughter. He was convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to life without parole for fifteen years. Interviewed afterwards by press, family members were quoted: "With all the things that we know, it should have been first degree....She wanted to leave him, and was afraid of him" (Telegraph Journal, September 25, 1998).

In a more recent case, *R. v. Foster* (2004), which was the subject of the voir dire hearing cited at the start of this study, the judge ruled that evidence of a history of domestic violence was not admissible at trial. Justice McKinnon was quoted as writing:

A criminal trial is an examination of relevant facts surrounding a crime charged. There is no crime known to the criminal law of being an unsavoury person or being of a mean disposition. An accused need not answer for his or her entire life when charged with a crime.

In handing down a ten-year sentence for manslaughter, the judge did make strong statements about domestic violence as an aggravating factor. Still, one wonders whether, if juries were permitted to hear evidence about a history of domestic violence at trial, perhaps some of the manslaughter convictions might have ended up as second degree convictions. Is the introduction of a history of family violence at sentencing a case of too little, too late? Some would argue that more first and second degree sentences are not the answer - that longer sentences will not bring back the women who lost their lives. On the other hand, though we

can all agree that the best solution to family violence is effective prevention strategies, should the criminal law system be doing more to ensure general deterrence?

Clearly, the "bad temperament rule," as it is sometime called, poses a barrier for establishing a pattern of domestic abuse, since this may be relevant to the state of mind and intent of the accused. We can find cases where evidence about the accused's bad character or criminal disposition was admissible because it was deemed relevant to some other issue beyond disposition or character and where the probative value was found to outweigh the prejudicial effect. For example, in an Ontario case, the evidence of the accused's prior abuse of the complainant was permitted to ensure that "the pattern of dominance, control, possessiveness and fear promoted by the accused in his relationship" would enable the jury to assess the credibility of the complainant's account of the events (*R. v. Brown* (S), 1996). In *R. v. Bari*, a New Brunswick man convicted of the first degree murder of his wife is appealing his conviction citing the prejudicial testimony about prior domestic abuse which had been allowed to establish his estranged wife's fear of him (*R. v. Bari*, 2003).

It is impossible to present in this paper all of the data collected in the study. However, it is important to share some information on the charges and the sentences handed out in the New Brunswick cases. Sentences covered the full range including first and second degree murder, manslaughter and criminal negligence. Of the 19 court cases, only two men were tried and convicted of first degree murder, while seven were convicted of, or pled to, second degree murder. Significantly, there were ten sentences for manslaughter, despite the fact that only one accused was charged with manslaughter. Of the ten manslaughter convictions, five accused were originally charged with second degree murder, but they eventually pled guilty to the lesser, included charge of manslaughter. Four accused were charged with first or second degree murder, but were convicted of manslaughter. The accused charged with manslaughter was convicted of manslaughter. In only five of the ten cases since 1996 was previous history of family violence a consideration at sentencing.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to identify some of the risk factors associated with domestic homicides and murder-suicides in New Brunswick. An analysis of these deaths found that a history of family violence, coupled with rural residence and the presence of firearms, among other factors, were associated with a significant risk of lethality in New Brunswick. As the constellation of factors increases, so too does the risk of danger. Although these factors are not directly causative and they do not predetermine or predict lethality, the analysis points to some strong correlations or clustering of variables which appear to be associated with both the homicides and murder-suicides. This suggests that attention be given to further research, and possibly the development of policies and actions that would mitigate the association of these variables with lethal outcomes. Identifying key risk factors that contribute to an escalation of abuse to murder may help us to intervene earlier with abused women who are most at risk.

In relation to the criminal law system, the response of the courts in New Brunswick did not always reflect society's efforts to condemn family violence. When domestic violence is not properly acknowledged in homicide cases, the sentences handed down may not adequately demonstrate society's abhorrence of the on-going problem of violence against women in intimate relationships. This suggests a need to carefully consider, in domestic homicide cases, such issues as the tendency for the accused to plead down to manslaughter, the kinds of mitigating factors accepted by the courts, the reluctance of the courts to permit "bad temperament" testimony and the failure of the courts to acknowledge the domestic nature of the crime.

In light of the risks associated with family violence and the presence of firearms, enhanced measures to ensure the revocation of firearms in family violence cases is required. Since January 2001 Canadians have been required to have a license to possess and acquire a firearm. The Firearms Act permits Chief Firearms Officers to deny the application for a firearms license or revoke a license on specified grounds such as the applicant's criminal record, mental health problems or known involvement in domestic violence. These factors were

present in many of the firearms homicides or murder-suicides in New Brunswick. If we are to prevent further domestic homicides through the seizure of firearms from persons involved in violent domestic disputes, the police will have to be better informed about domestic violence occurrences. Research suggests that abused women are generally not aware of this legal remedy, though in some cases when they have turned to the police for help, the police have refused to seize firearms (Tutty 1999). This may suggest that the police are not adequately aware of their discretion applying for prohibition orders and seizing firearms. Given the strong correlation that emerged in the analysis between past history of domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and previous criminal record (including several offenders who had impaired driving convictions), one might suggest that non-violent offences such as impaired driving should be considered as a reason that could trigger the revocation of a firearms license where offenders have a history of domestic violence. Conviction for drunk driving is currently not one of those triggers - only violent offences are.

In conclusion, this study of domestic homicides in New Brunswick helps to give a collective voice to the victims. Each death is more than a single, tragic act. When families are experiencing multiple problems, such as those discussed in this study (addictions, mental health problems, and isolation), chances increase that the feelings of frustration and anger will result in abusive, if not lethal, acts. Although further research is required to determine the precise connections between the various risk factors examined and domestic homicide, it is clear that we must develop more appropriate legislation, policies, programs and risk assessment tools that enable us to intervene early and prevent the abuse, rather than waiting for serious problems to emerge.

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