

# THE HIGH RISK CASE COORDINATION PROGRAM

National Victim's Awareness Week Symposium

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# High risk case coordination program



- What is it?
- Who is involved?
- How does it work?
- Why coordinate?

# My research



- Background
- Original research question – has the high risk program been helpful or harmful to abused women?
- Interviews – 29 women
- Focus groups – 2 with service providers
- Locations – Halifax and Sydney

# Findings



- Dominant domestic violence discourse
- The tensions
- What is working well
- The challenges
- Responding to the challenges

# Dominant domestic violence discourse

- Woman abuse is a manifestation of patriarchy and reflects the desire of men to control and maintain power over women (Martin, 1976).
- The abuser is always male and violent while the victim is always female and helpless (Martin, 1976).
- The only reasonable response to abuse is for the woman to leave the relationship (Schechter, 1982).
- Abuse happens across all spectrums of society and is unrelated to poverty, addictions or mental illness (Dobash & Doabsh, 1979).
- Systemic solutions are favoured over individual ones (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).
- Responses from the justice system or child welfare system may not be as effective or valid as those with grass roots origins such as shelters or support groups (Schechter, 1982).
- The criminal justice system is often viewed as the most appropriate site for addressing the abuser's violence (Ursel, Tutty & leMaistre, 2008).
- Treatment or therapy for the abuser would use up resources better directed at women and inappropriately individualizes the problem (Adams, 1988).

# Tensions



- ❑ The abuser is bad and evil
- ❑ Intervene with abuser or woman
- ❑ Abused women are victims
- ❑ Abused women should be cooperative
- ❑ All domestic violence is high risk
- ❑ The criminal justice system most appropriate
- ❑ Best interests of the mother or child

# Working well



- “So, finally what everyone’s been telling me and what I’ve finally learned myself, gets wrapped up in a nice neat little package called, High Risk for Lethality.”

# Working well



- Case information sharing, coordination and communication
- Inclusion of women's shelters and men's programs
- Case conference model
- Victim present
- Provincial program
- Risk assessments
- DV educator training

# The challenges



- Over emphasis on safety planning

“It freaks me out a lot (being called high risk). I hate hearing it so much and, the first couple of times I was talking to her (the DVCC), she would say, always have your cell phone on you, always have it charged, never go anywhere alone, never do this, never do that. And it was just like, it blew my mind. I can’t believe that now for the rest of my life, or for a good part of it, I’m going to have to be so much more cautious all the time.”

# Risk management of the abuser is weak

- “The only thing that I would change is that I think maybe they should meet with the abuser and let him know what’s going on, because he was furious that my mum would say to him, I couldn’t talk to him according to the restraining order. The abuser tried to contact victim services a number of times to talk to them and I wish they had answered and said, this is what’s going on. This is what category we’ve put her in based on what we know; so he would know just how bad it was. Cause he doesn’t believe me and I just wish that someone else had told him.”

# Lack of knowledge of resources



- “The reason I didn’t leave years ago is because I was afraid that I didn’t have the outside help. I didn’t know where to turn to. That hasn’t changed..... They (service providers) just keep passing it off. They want the next person to do something about it and in the end, nobody does anything. I still have to rely on myself.”

# Victim stereotypes

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- “You have to be very careful, right, because you have to be kind of a good victim, you can’t be ungrateful. I mean, that’s naturally how I am anyway, like I really believe you need to be polite and grateful, especially when so many people are working so hard. But, it’s very easy to not be a good victim and if you have people in a position of power where they can either take your case seriously or not, label you as a bitch, which has a direct correlation to the level of service, and therefore your safety. “

# Issues with police

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- “ I tell the cops I have a peace bond and they ask me what do you want us to do about it? ..... what is the point of having conditions if you can violate them and not have anything happen, right? I mean he breached every single No Contact Order that he ever had. It didn't stop him from coming to my house, didn't stop him from harassing me, didn't stop him from threatening me or stalking me. So the No Contact Orders didn't work.”

# Issues with child welfare



- “The child welfare worker I have is very young. She doesn’t have kids of her own so she doesn’t understand. She just sees one picture, she doesn’t see the big picture. And she’s deciding my life. “

# Responding to the challenges



- Re-thinking the approach to abused women
- Re-thinking the approach to the abuser
- Avoiding a one-size fits all approach
- Other recommendations

# Re-think approach to abuser



- Engage men and boys
- More feminist research on what is working
- For high risk program:
  - Notify abuser case is high risk
  - Ongoing risk management to foster accountability
  - Incentives for guilty pleas
  - Improve child welfare's practice for accountability

# Re-think approach to abused women



- DV policies should include women's choices and decisions
- For high risk program:
  - Complaint process
  - Policy on when file is no longer high risk
  - Ongoing education on abused women's resistance

# Avoiding one size fits all



- Continuum responses for range of risk
- Alternatives to justice system responses
- For high risk program:
  - ODARA score reviewed
  - Expand role of DV case coordinator
  - Coalition building and education on child welfare issues and women abuse issues

# Other recommendations



- ❑ Mandatory annual DV training for all police across province
- ❑ Specialized DV officers or units in all police departments in province
- ❑ Initial and ongoing DV training for child welfare workers
- ❑ Yearly annual evaluation report
- ❑ Mandatory attendance at high risk meetings



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