

REPORT FROM

ADDRESSING FILICIDE: SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CROSS NATIONAL DIALOGUE

MONASH CENTRE, PRATO, 3RD – 4TH JUNE, 2015

The second “Addressing Filicide” Conference, the only international conference series focusing on Addressing Filicide, was held just over a month ago and, as the conference organisers, we thought it was a great success. More themes emerged, in sharper definition and with international consensus. The conference proceedings suggested research knowledge had progressed in the two years since the first conference and an improved research base provided for advances in intervention and prevention. Although knowledge for prevention is still under-developed and insufficient, the conference took important steps towards prevention in the papers presented and in the subsequent discussion.

Attendance and Papers Presented

Once again the conference brought together academic and service professionals from many disciplines and countries. Twelve countries were represented (Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, and the USA). This was the first time a delegate from Israel and Japan had attended.

The four keynote papers presented a thoughtful stimulus to further enquiry and action. **Professors Rebecca and Russell Dobash (University of Manchester, England)** gave an intensely detailed account of homicide and its constituent factors, based primarily on their long term research from the Murder in Britain study on homicide perpetrated by men, just published as *“When Men Murder Women”* (Oxford University Press). **Dr Adam Tomison (Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology, Australia)** expanded the criminological understanding of homicide and concentrated on children killed by parents or equivalent guardians and provided strongly descriptive and comparative accounts of Australian children killed by their parents. **Professor Colin Pritchard (University of Bournemouth, England)** spoke of re-working of his data from a previous study that compared filicide across many countries. That study showed income inequality, rather than poverty, was correlated with filicide. He also shared new conclusions that the mental health of the perpetrator was a major factor in filicide deaths. **Associate Professor Dawson (University of Guelph, Canada)** gave her views on prevention based on her years of work on Death Review Committees in Canada, discussed in more detail on Page 2 of this report.

The Conference Program, with abstracts of all papers, is available on the conference website.

Consensus Knowledge

A consensus regarding research based knowledge, and about gaps in this knowledge, emerged at the conference. This is most important for intervention and prevention planning and for setting future research directions.

There was agreement that filicide was related to the over-all well-being of all children in any nation and it was therefore an indicator pointing to the well- being of all children generally in a country.

While the number of children killed by a parent or equivalent guardian is relatively small in all countries, and while the number is slowly decreasing, the rate of filicide does vary considerably from one country to another as Professor Pritchard's presentation showed. Little work has been undertaken on the constituents of that rate apart from the factors of the gender and age of victims. For example the rate is not usually divided up over time and by numbers killed by mothers and / or fathers, step-parent and other guardian, by the numbers killed while under child protection service care and not under child protection care, by numbers with a disability or illness or not.

The theme identified by Professor Koenraadt in 2013, that filicide is universal but not uniform from one country to another, emerged again with research data showing similar constellations (or cluster) of risk factors from country to country but with different priorities within those constellations. For example Dawson's paper showed many risk factors (36), with mental health (mostly depression) of the perpetrator, parental separation, domestic violence, substance abuse, and past abuse of children being the most common associated risk factors. These 5 high risk factors accord with Australian work, but in some other countries (England and Ireland) parental separation has not been identified as such a frequent factor. The prominence of step-fathers also varies across countries. In addition, as Dawson pointed out, we have not yet identified through research the linkages between these risk factors. It is likely we need further quantitative and qualitative research on these links.

We are not yet aware of changes in patterns of filicide over time. The Dobashes and Tomison spoke to this issue as did Dawson. We have insufficient data and poorly detailed data from various time periods; when we do have data over time it is mostly incidence alone. Dawson identified a number of changes in Canada over time, with increases of fathers and step-fathers as perpetrators, which she set against rises in male domestic violence. While we know that male domestic violence is associated with filicide we still know little of the nature of the link.

Some consensus emerged as to the identification of perpetrator groups and the impact this has on the event and by implication on the need to target prevention to each group. Four countries (Australia, England, Canada and Germany) had broken perpetrators into three groups which were very similar – mothers, fathers and step-fathers. Dr Theresa Hoyneck and Dr Ulrike Zahringer undertook an extensive identification and exploration of the offender groups they developed. By way of contrast Professor Shanaaz Matthews and colleagues work from South Africa showed similar and dissimilar perpetrator patterns.

New Themes

Some themes emerged for the first time. One was the role of the presence of illness or disability in the victimising of children. Another theme was the legislation affecting the criminal justice system's response to offenders, in this case its response to neo-naticide in a number of European countries. Another theme was that of vulnerability, the notion that particular groups in the population were more vulnerable to filicide events. It was pointed out in discussion that there was no focus on ethnicity, race or religion as potential qualities of vulnerability.

Prevention

A number of papers tackled prevention. The common view was that the entire community needed education on filicide, its existence, its risk factors, the difficulties for the other parent in gaining support and action from services. (Currently in Victoria we have had one inquest and are having another into a child's death that shows how services when approached do not respond satisfactorily to the other parent's well founded and well evidenced fears.) It was noted that friends and family are the first to be approached by a concerned parent and so information as to what to do needs to be widely dispersed.

The need for specially targeted services to be the ones to respond was proposed and that these services should receive special education for assessing risk, developing safety plans and taking action to implement them. The services targeted were the health services, police, child protection, the criminal justice system, parental separation services and domestic violence services.

Future Action

The conference looked forward to future action. Some delegates were already involved in this.

The conference intend the conference series to provide a platform for opportunities for dialogue between researchers and for sharing research, for collaboration in research, and for communicating news through the filicide google group. The conference organisers have committed to hold the third conference in the same venue (Prato) at the same time 14-15 June 2017. We hope that all delegates will join us for that conference in 2 years' time. There we again hope to share new findings, discuss new research, and develop new interventions to overcome these tragic deaths of children.

Our English, Scottish and Northern Ireland colleagues are planning a website.

Professor Sidebotham and Dr John Devaney issued a challenge at the end of the conference urging researchers to be ambitious in attempting a commonly agreed set of objectives and approaches to the study of filicide and to explore mechanisms for international collaboration.

We look forward to continuing to forge our research networks and to exploring these issues with you in the future.

Our Best Wishes,

(Professor) Thea Brown, Dr. Danielle Tyson, Paula Fernandez Arias,