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Connect the violence dots;

An Ontario report says too often people don't know what to do about domestic violence.

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Too often friends, family and co-workers see signs of domestic violence but don't know what to do about it.

A Ontario report that looked at domestic violence-related homicides, due out today, urges more public education on how to effectively step in before it's too late.

The domestic violence death review committee's annual report to the Ontario coroner's office highlights educating children, risk assessment and prevention programs to stop domestic violence.

They're not necessarily new themes in the committee's fourth report, conceived after two high-profile Ontario coroner's inquests.

But the messages, one member said, need repeating.

"At the end of the day, it's public awareness," Peter Jaffe, a renowned London psychologist, anti-violence expert and member of the provincial panel, said yesterday.

"Unfortunately, with every tragedy, there are friends who know a lot about what's going on and family members.

"But nobody is connecting the dots or thinking that it's come time to call the police or it's come time to take more drastic action."

The report reviewed 13 cases involving domestic violence, for which criminal proceedings, appeals or coroner's investigations are completed.

The report makes 33 recommendations -- many, focusing on what could have been done before the deaths.

The recommendations include:

- The importance of awareness and education about the dynamics of domestic violence, to help show people how to effectively intervene and provide support to both perpetrators and victims.
- The need to develop appropriate risk-assessment tools.

- The importance of high-risk management of perpetrators with violent pasts, involving the justice system, the police and other agencies, to ensure orders are followed for the protection of victims.
- The need to include children in education and safety plans.

In the cases reviewed in the report, four children were killed and five others were directly involved but not fatally hurt.

"Children are most likely to be aware and affected by abuse occurring in the home," the report says.

"It is important that community professionals, including family doctors and teachers who advocate for children, understand the lethality associated with domestic violence and know how to assess community services and support systems."

In six of the 13 cases there was evidence several people were aware of the abuse, either at the workplace or in the home.

"People are still concerned about getting too involved, or saying too much or doing too much when, in fact, the facts are staring them right in the face," Jaffe said.

Dr. Barbara Lent, a committee member and medical professor at the University of Western Ontario, said family doctors have an important role to play.

"We need family doctors to recognize how prevalent domestic violence is and to think about it when they are seeing any of their patients who are in distress," she said.

Doctors and others "can still do more to ask about whether there's violence going on and to direct people who are either experiencing the violence or doing the violence to connect with people who can help them," she said.

Jaffe said often domestic violence homicides are "predictable and preventable."

"From every tragedy there has to be lessons learned," he said.

Ontario is the only province to have a domestic violence death review committee, although there are similar efforts in the United States.

A Sept. 17 conference is planned in London to discuss the committee's findings and put its recommendations into action.