

Major conference tackles domestic violence

By Communications Staff

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More than 500 people from across Canada and around the world will gather in London June 14-16 to share information about the prevention of domestic violence.

The goal is to save the lives of domestic violence victims who die at the hands of their partner or ex-partner. Research indicates that domestic homicide is considered the most predictable and preventable of all homicides.

The Canadian Conference on the Prevention of Domestic Homicides – the first is what is expected to be an annual event – is presented by the Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children (CREVAWC). The centre is part of the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario.

Most conference participants work in police services, victims' services, or at shelters for abused women, but the conference has also attracted workers in corrections, probation services, mental health programs and treatment programs for abusers.

"This conference is a great next step toward enhancing communication and collaboration between different groups of service providers and researchers," says CREVAWC Academic Director Peter Jaffe.

"Each group has specialized knowledge and strategies for preventing domestic homicides and domestic violence. Sharing of this information is critical."

Jaffe is a founding member of the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. Since 2002, this committee has worked through the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, reviewing domestic homicides. The 6th Annual Report, released today, provides recommendations aimed at preventing deaths in similar circumstances.

Ontario is the only province with a domestic homicide review committee of this kind, and Jaffe anticipates the collaboration that will be fostered at the national conference could lead to a national strategy with regional hubs of people working together in ways that may have real impact on preventing domestic homicides.

"Our centre is leading a national research agenda on domestic violence, and we look forward to working with sister centres and agencies across the country," says Jaffe.

One major area of discussion will be risk assessment, which is of major interest to the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. William Lucas is chair of the committee, a presenter at the Western conference.

"We now monitor or assess some 39 risk factors for their presence in each of the cases," says Lucas. "In 86 per cent of cases, we have found that seven or more risk factors exist, suggesting strongly that with appropriate training and experience, others may be able to recognize the truly high-risk cases

and potentially intervene to prevent subsequent deaths.”

The committee has found that the most commonly encountered risk factors include: pending or imminent separation; prior history of domestic violence; obsessive behaviour by the perpetrator; depression in the perpetrator; escalation of violence in a relationship; and prior history of threats to kill the victim.

Another major area of discussion at the conference will be the role friends, families, coworkers, neighbours and others can play in recognizing and helping to stop domestic violence.

Conference programs and information are available by visiting the Centre website at www.crvawc.ca