

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND HOMICIDE AND DOMESTIC HOMICIDE IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO 1995-2006)


AN OVERVIEW OF SPOUSAL HOMICIDE CASES FOR THE PERIOD 1995-2006

Dr Terence Bartholomew & Ms Zelena Marshall

Deakin University & The University of the West Indies

terryb@deakin.edu.au

Today...

- Provide some information about the social context of Trinidad and Tobago, and the resulting opportunities for research into violence and high risk groups
 - Provide a snapshot of one of our studies into these issues and the themes they clearly uncovered
- 

Context / Background I

- Dual island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
- Independence in 1962
- A post-colonial developing country
- Population of almost 1.5 million (i.e. 40% of Melbourne's population in an area twice the size of Melbourne)
- 10km off the coast of Venezuela
- The industrial capital of the Caribbean islands
- Violent coup in 1990
- In the last twenty years, there have been huge increases in urbanisation, industrialisation, crime and concomitant 'social disorganisation'.


Context / Background II

- Relevance of the 'Chicago theories' - population shifts, cultural clashes, gaps b/t means and goals, increasing divide b/t poor and rich
- Ecological studies of rising phenomena such as homicide, suicide, acquisitive crime, poverty, drug use
- T and T, not the population growth of Chicago, but many of the same fast moving social and economic forces
- Developing countries' expenditure on crime control – A comparison
- The T and T notion of the criminal as being from 'outside' (i.e. international / the 'other') or as being from particular areas of T and T (the 'hot spots')

These research efforts

- UWI has campuses in Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad
- Significant levels of funding available from Gov't and industry sources to explore issues relating to violence patterns, identification of high risk groups, data / record reduction / collation, and policy redirection
- This study was funded by a large grant from CariCom, and is part of a much larger research enterprise that explores violence patterns among particular sub-groups that are regarded as 'high risk' by media and government (and seeks to challenge some existing assumptions)
- Co-investigators and assistants

The research climate

- Acknowledged need for crime related data
 - Amenable agencies and professionals
 - Does no committees mean no ethics?
 - The different attitude to dual roles
 - Issues of race and being a critical outsider
- 

AIMS

- To investigate the relationship between domestic violence and spousal homicide in Trinidad and Tobago for the period 1995 - 2006
- To analyse and characterise the circumstances that lead to this type of DV escalation in this jurisdiction
- To collate and document judicial responses to these events

Spousal Abuse, Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence

- All mean the physical, psychological, financial, sexual or verbal abuse of a spouse by his/her partner (or ex partner).
- Given the limitations of the files we investigated, this study was more able to audit physical abuse, as other forms were often not documented in police records

The study

- Perusal of all cases documented in the Homicide Bureau of Investigation files for the period 1995-2006.
- There were **143 cases** where the homicide was documented as resulting from a domestic dispute among partners (married, common law or visiting relationships).
- Information about demographics, history, prior justice system involvement, and nature of the abuse was collected and collated.

The picture of domestic violence/ spousal homicide in T and T

Crime statistics from the Homicide Bureau show that, between 1995 and 2006:

- At least one person was killed per month as a result of domestic violence
- Most documented prior violence between intimates involved physical abuse that followed verbal, psychological and other forms of abuse.
- As expected, females much more likely to be victims than males (>80% of cases)

Gender effects

Men and women killed their partners for different reasons

- Consistent with other jurisdictions, when women killed their male partner, it was typically in response to an often prolonged period of physical abuse. Cases where the homicide was in response to imminent threat were almost equal with those where there was no imminent threat.
- In cases where police records commented on the longevity of the situation, issues such as: lack of money, offender apologizing, no other place to go (and inadequate police response) were listed as reasons for the victim not leaving the house
- Men killed their (ex)partners for reasons such as jealousy, or failed attempts at reconciliation

Predictive factors

History of abuse:

- A long history of escalating abuse was common in these cases.

Separation:

- Separation for period of a year or less intensified the risk of spousal homicide

New Partner:

- The (ex)partner discovering a new male partner often explained the timing of the homicide when separation had occurred

Profile of the abused

In general *the abused person*:

- Was female, and aged 27 – 45 (avge 34)
- Was culturally representative of the population, with the majority being of either East Indian or African descent
- Had received threats before
- Had changed or left her job, if employed
- Had marks about the body indicative of prior injury
- Social isolation from family and friends (ie exhausted living alternatives)

Judicial responses

Men in Prison

91 males serving life and 75 year sentences for murder

33 males serving lesser sentences for manslaughter –related crimes

Women in Prison

At the time of the study, there were 19 women in prison for the murder of their spouses. Four with long sentences, 13 with relatively short sentences for murder, while 2 were on remand, awaiting trial for the murder of their spouses.

So...

- This latter study identified culturally relevant risk factors for the escalation of DV into spousal homicide
- The findings challenged cultural ideas about DV and race, SES and geography
- Similar to our other studies into high risk groups and their trajectories, we see clear evidence of multiple personal and agency 'warning signs', and a system that failed to respond in an adequate way

The study

- provided systematically collected trend data
- shifted the analytical lens from widely accepted stereotypical ideas relating to ethnic and geographic patterns in the DV area
- highlighted gaps in service delivery / response
- lead to the establishment of a centralised data base for recording future cases and trends
- informed secondary investigations with less descriptive orientations

