Saving Lives: Working across Agencies and Individuals to Reduce Intimate Homicide among those at Greatest Risk

Amy Bonomi¹ · April M. Zeoli² · Sandra Shanahan³ · David Martin³

Published online: 14 April 2021

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2021

Abstract

This special issue of the *Journal of Family Violence* offers insights on intimate homicide prevention from leading researchers and practitioners. The insights offered are timely, given the pervasiveness of domestic violence (DV), including some data since the emergence of COVID-19 noting an increase in DV-related cases with severe injury and police calls. Contributors in this special issue argue for interagency advocacy, protection orders, and firearm removal, along with reimagining data capture, risk assessment, firearm protocols, and fatality reviews to improve equitable services and care for DV survivors at the highest risk of homicide.

This special issue of the *Journal of Family Violence* convenes leading researchers and practitioners to describe new insights in interagency coordination and advocacy, protection orders, and firearm policy to reduce domestic violence- and intimate partner violence-related homicide. The insights offered are timely, given the pervasiveness of domestic violence (DV) (Breiding et al. 2014), including some data since the emergence of COVID-19 noting an increase in DV-related cases with severe injury (Gosangi et al. 2020) and an increase in police calls for DV emergencies (Bullinger et al. 2020).

The contributors in this JOFV issue argue that a coordinated response—involving interagency advocacy, protection orders, and firearm removal—are vital protections against DV- and intimate partner violence-related homicide. Contributors also challenge us to probe and reimagine data capture, risk assessment, firearm removal protocols, and fatality reviews to improve equitable services and care especially for DV survivors at the highest risk of homicide.

Inter-Agency Coordination Advocacy, Risk Assessment, and Protection Orders

Inter-agency advocacy, risk assessment, and protection orders with firearm prohibitions are critical keys to reduce DV (Sullivan and Bybee 1999; Holt et al. 2003) and potentially, intimate partner homicide. The challenge is identifying and implementing effective support to those at greatest risk, by improving data and risk assessment and reducing the barriers for collaboration and service delivery. The collective reflections of Messing et al. (2021), Youngson et al. (2021), Rubenstein et al. (2021), and David and Jaffe (2021), represent *advocacy models for necessary changes* in the field, ranging from *improved data and identification of risks to problem-solving barriers*.

Rubenstein et al. (2021) present Cincinnati's DVERT second-responder model. Their model is an exceptional risk-based collaboration between law enforcement and community-based service providers for DV incident response when weapons are present to support and connect survivors to services, divorcing them from the administrative burdens of traditional service-referral models. Their work highlights the need for *targeted, survivor-centered interventions to address safety*, especially for high-risk survivors. Key findings were that perpetrators who use weapons had higher rates of prior abuse and greater substance abuse and mental health needs. Importantly, their study also found that Black women survivors disproportionately experienced domestic violence involving weapons. These findings highlight the need for *upstream, second responder interventions for survivors most at*

✉ Amy Bonomi
bonoae1@gmail.com

¹ Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

² Department of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

³ King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, WA Seattle, USA

risk and the importance of a “continuity of care” at the time of crisis instead of relying on downstream models. And, during a period of robust discussion and action on criminal justice reform in the United States, Rubenstein et al. (2021) make key findings that *police who had good experiences working with advocates are inclined to connect victims with advocacy services*. This underscores the importance of collaborative relationships in linking survivors to services to shield against abuse.

Youngson et al.’s (2021) article outlines unique barriers faced by DV survivors in rural settings (i.e., isolation, disconnection from services, and access to firearms), and call upon us to consider *more individualized and targeted interventions* from divergent service providers. The article especially highlights a “circle of care” that encapsulates the need for *proactive service provider collaboration in adapting services to “go to the survivor”* (versus having the survivor come to the agency), and the critical need to address the *removal of firearms* from perpetrators. Survivors’ risk of violence served to guide more collaborative and effective support across service providers.

David and Jaffe (2021) retrospectively examined risk factors for intimate homicide among immigrant perpetrators—including pre-migration trauma, a factor typically excluded in risk tools and risk management strategies. Immigrant perpetrators with a history of pre-migration trauma had significantly increased risk factors for domestic homicide compared to those without pre-migration trauma, such as sexual jealousy, obsessive behavior, and weapon and suicide threats. David and Jaffe (2021) highlight the need for *expanded research and specialized risk assessment tools* for different populations to aid in domestic homicide prevention.

Messing et al. (2021) assess the literature on risk assessment and intimate partner homicide with a call for broad improvements. Their work advocates for *expanded and robust risk factor identification with greater sensitivity to marginalized and under-researched groups*. To illustrate this call, they describe their ongoing study that focuses on community-based data collection strategies in one U.S. state. The goal of such work is to develop *more comprehensive data examining risk for intimate partner homicide* that can serve as a model for other state level responses.

Minoritized Populations: Need for Equitable Data Capture and Coverage

Domestic violence is known to disproportionately impact minoritized populations (Breiding et al. 2014). Contributors in this special issue deepen our understanding of how minoritized populations are impacted by domestic homicide. Rubenstein et al. (2021) showed that *Black DV survivors (in Cincinnati) were disproportionately represented among the*

weapon involved group of survivors (74.1% versus 68.5%). David and Jaffe (2021) showed that *immigrant perpetrators with pre-migration trauma* were more likely than those without pre-migration trauma to engage highly manipulative behaviors (e.g., sexual jealousy).

Youngson et al. (2021) and Messing et al. (2021) shine a spotlight on other under-researched populations. Youngson et al. (2021) outline the unique risks and barriers that *rural domestic violence survivors face* (e.g., isolation). Messing et al. (2021) advocate for expansive *equitable risk data to expand understanding and sensitivity to marginalized and under-researched groups*.

Continuing on the theme of needing revamped risk assessment, data capture and protocols, nearly all contributors point to the need for improvements especially to further explicate our understanding of risk among minoritized populations. Cullen et al. (2021) suggest *improving data capture in fatality review processes to better explicate who is at risk* and to improve services for survivors who have *historically been invisible*—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (LGBTQ+) persons, older victims, victims with disabilities, as well as missing persons. Cullen et al. (2021) also call upon us to use an *intersectional lens to reimagine and redesign fatality review data capture* to collect key social identity characteristics that would more clearly explicate *how intersectional social identities (e.g., gender and race) compound risk for intimate homicide*.

Finally, Perras et al. (2020) use the lens of media coverage for intimate partner homicide in Los Angeles County to examine disparities in coverage. Their multivariate analysis showed significantly more media articles for victims ages 30 to 39, living in high SES zip codes with no reported argument prior to death. This underscores the reality that intimate homicide murders are more likely to garner media coverage when victims are younger and from more affluent communities, pointing to the need for more equitable media coverage that captures the full scope of DV.

Firearm Removal, Intersections with Protection Orders

Firearm access by perpetrators of intimate partner violence is a known risk factor for intimate partner homicide (Campbell et al. 2003). Because of the risk firearms pose in violent intimate relationships, federal law, and the laws of many states, prohibit individuals under certain domestic violence protection orders from having a gun. Lyons et al. (2020) use data from the National Violence Death Reporting System to investigate the extent to which intimate partner homicide offenders were under domestic violence protection orders and the extent to which they used firearms to kill. This is the first study, to date, to systematically examine the intersection of

protection orders and firearms within intimate partner homicides. While most intimate partner homicides were committed with a firearm, *only a small proportion of homicides occurred in the context of a restraining order*—underscoring the *potential value of protection orders*. While lack of a comparison group disallows any conclusions about the protective nature of protection orders (including whether they reduce the risk of intimate partner homicide), the authors note that none of the examined homicide records included mention of whether firearm restrictions ordered under the restraining order involved actual firearm removal.

Firearm removal by the justice system from those legally restricted from access may be an important protective step in safeguarding victims and families. However, many jurisdictions *do not yet have formalized protocols and procedures in place* to ensure firearm relinquishment by individuals under these protection orders. The innovation that both Frattaroli et al. (2021) and Carcirieri (2020) seek to promote in their work is the *development of these protocols*. Carcirieri uses her experiences and knowledge as an administrator in the Delaware Family Court system to illustrate *actionable steps that Delaware took to improve their tracking of firearm relinquishment* pursuant to domestic violence protection orders. Frattaroli et al. (2021) studied four jurisdictions in different parts of the United States to determine both their *protocols and the process* by which they developed their protocols for firearm removal. Taken together, these articles provide lessons from five localities that other jurisdictions can tailor to their communities to successfully develop and implemented firearm relinquishment protocols.

The improvement that Bender et al. (2020) call for is in research on the risk factors for and protective factors against the use of firearms in teen dating violence—at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Their scoping review revealed few studies of this phenomenon, despite its importance. It is common to think of teens as having the same risk factors for negative outcomes that adults do, however this may not be the case. Interventions designed for adults may not work in the same way when applied to teens. Firearm use in the context of teen dating violence is an area where our knowledge base must be greatly enhanced to *better tailor prevention and intervention efforts to safeguard teens*.

Concluding Thoughts

We are grateful to the thought leaders in this special issue of the *Journal of Family Violence* for bringing forward new insights in inter-agency advocacy, protection orders, and firearm policy to reduce intimate homicide and to Dr.

Rebecca Macy for supporting our editorial team. We invite you to explore the writings.

References

- Bender, A. K., Koegler, E., Johnson, S. D., et al. (2020). Guns and intimate partner violence among adolescents: A scoping review. *J Fam Viol* (2020). *Advance Online Publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00193-x>.
- Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Basile, K.C. et al. (2014) Prevalence and characteristics of sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence victimization—national intimate partner and sexual violence survey, United States, 2011. *MMWR Surveill Summ*. Sep 5;63(8):1–18. URL: [Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization — National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011 \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/sy6308a1.htm).
- Bullinger, L. R., Carr, J. B., & Packham, A. (2020) COVID-19 and Crime: Effects of stay-at home orders on domestic violence. Working Paper, 27667, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w27667>. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w27667>
- Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S. A., Manganello, J., Xu, X., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Laughon, K. (2003). Risk factors for Femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multi-site case control study, *93 Am. Journal of Public Health*, 93(7), 1089–1097. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.93.7.1089>.
- Carcirieri, A. T. (2020). Firearm relinquishment within civil protection orders: Processes and observations from *Delaware Family Court*. *J Fam Viol* (2020). *Advance Online Publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00173-1>.
- Cullen, P., Dawson, M., Price, J., et al. (2021). Intersectionality and invisible victims: Reflections on data challenges and vicarious trauma in Femicide, family and intimate partner homicide research. *J Fam Viol* (2021). *Advance Online Publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00243-4>.
- David, R., & Jaffe P. (2021) Pre-migration trauma and post-migration stress associated with immigrant perpetrators of domestic homicide. *J Fam Viol*. *Advance Online Publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-021-00259-4>.
- Frattaroli, S., Zeoli, A. M., & Webster, D. W. (2021). Armed, prohibited and violent at home: Implementation and enforcement of restrictions on gun possession by domestic violence offenders in four U.S. localities. *J Fam Viol* (2021). *Advance Online Publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00241-6>.
- Gosangi, B., Park, H., Thomas, R., Gujrathi, R., Bay, C. P., Raja, A. S., Seltzer, S. E., Balcom, M. C., McDonald, M. L., Orgill, D. P., Harris, M. B., Boland, G. W., Rexrode, K., & Khurana, B. (2020). Exacerbation of physical intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Radiology*, 298, 1–E45. <https://doi.org/10.1148/radiol.2020202866>.
- Holt, V. L., Kermic, M. A., Wolf, M. E., & Rivara, F. P. (2003). Do protection orders affect the likelihood of future partner violence and injury? *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 24, 16–21. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(02\)00576-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(02)00576-7).
- Lyons, V.H., Adhia, A., Moe, C. et al. (2020) Firearms and protective orders in intimate partner homicides. *J Fam Viol*. *Advance Online Publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00165-1>.

- Messing, J. T., AbiNader, M. A., Pizarro, J. M., et al. (2021). The Arizona intimate partner homicide (AzIPH) study: A step toward updating and expanding risk factors for intimate partner homicide. *J Fam Viol.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-021-00254-9>.
- Perras, N., Sternfeld, I., Fei, S., et al. (2020). Analysis of domestic violence related homicides in Los Angeles County: Media portrayals, demographics, and precipitating circumstances. *J Fam Viol.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00202-z>.
- Rubenstein, B. Y., Wojcik, M. L. T., Anderson, V. R., & Fisher, B. S. (2021). Shifting the service referral paradigm using community-based second responders: Examining weapon use in intimate partner violence. *J Fam Viol.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00246-1>.
- Sullivan, C. M., & Bybee, D. I. (1999). Reducing violence using community-based advocacy for women with abusive partners. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 67(1), 43–53. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-006x.67.1.43>.
- Youngson, N., Saxton, M., Jaffe, P. G., et al. (2021). Challenges in risk assessment with rural domestic violence victims: Implications for practice. *J Fam Viol.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-021-00248-7>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.