

## **Beyond the Numbers: Ending Intimate Partner Violence in Ontario**

### **Must Begin with Accountability**

**OpEd / #ThursdayThoughts – Posted November 13<sup>th</sup> 2025**

As a member of Ontario's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC) and a frontline worker who has witnessed the devastating human cost of intimate partner violence (IPV), I cannot read the 2022–2023 DVDRC Annual Report without deep grief and renewed urgency.

The report is not just a compilation of data. It is a catalogue of lost lives: parents, children, and community members whose deaths remind us that behind every statistic is a story of systemic failure.

Between 2003 and 2023, Ontario's DVDRC reviewed 420 cases involving 606 deaths. Of these, 85% of the victims were women, and the majority were killed in their own homes. The findings are grimly consistent: a history of intimate partner violence (77%), an actual or pending separation (64%), and threats to kill (34%) were among the most common risk factors.

These patterns have persisted for two decades, despite hundreds of recommendations urging governments, service systems, and communities to act.

#### **The Persistent Cost of Inaction**

Each time the committee releases its findings, the hope is that systemic change will follow; that the lessons carved from tragedy will shape prevention, policy, and accountability. Yet too often, our recommendations fall into silence.

As the 2022–2023 report reminds us, the 43 deaths reviewed during this period were not isolated incidents but preventable tragedies that reveal persistent gaps: failures in firearm control, lack of judicial understanding in family law, inadequate cultural and linguistic supports for immigrant women, and limited coordination between mental-health and justice systems.

We know what the risk factors are. We know when survivors are most at risk; particularly during separation, custody disputes, and after reporting abuse. What we continue to lack is the collective will to transform knowledge into prevention.

#### **The Children Left Behind**

Perhaps the most haunting findings in this year's report come from Chapter Two: Children in the Aftermath of Intimate Partner Homicide.

Children are too often the silent witnesses and forgotten victims. Some have watched one parent murder another. Others have found the bodies themselves. Many are left to navigate trauma with limited or delayed access to counseling and community supports.

Research cited by the committee notes that children exposed to IPV are at increased risk of developing anxiety, depression, and later perpetrating or experiencing violence themselves. Without intervention, the cycle repeats.

In one case, the committee learned that children waited two years before receiving therapeutic support after witnessing their mother's homicide. Two years... in a province with some of the most robust social systems in Canada.

This is not a gap. It is a wound in our collective humanity.

### **Intersections We Can No Longer Ignore**

The DVDRC's work this year shines a necessary light on aging populations, immigrant and refugee women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities, and those facing mental health or substance use challenges.

Older women, often invisible to policy and public awareness, are dying in what some media narratives still call “mercy killings”; when in fact, as the committee clarifies, these are acts of control and despair, not compassion.

For newcomers and precarious-status women, fear of deportation or loss of status can silence pleas for help. The report calls for culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and linguistically accessible services to meet these realities head-on.

The intersection of mental health, substance use, and IPV also demands deeper coordination. Sixteen of the 28 deaths reviewed involved one or both partners facing significant mental-health or substance use issues. Yet our systems remain siloed, leaving prevention work fragmented and reactive rather than proactive.

### **The Role of Accountability and Prevention**

In my daily work supporting victims and survivors, I see how front-line agencies fight to patch holes in systems that were never built for prevention. We are asked to do more with less: to navigate underfunded services, long wait-lists, and inconsistent risk-assessment protocols.

But systemic change requires more than frontline endurance. It requires provincial accountability; transparent tracking of which DVDRC recommendations have been implemented, which remain outstanding, and why.

Every recommendation delayed is a life at risk.

Every unimplemented policy is another vigil waiting to happen.

### **A Call to Collective Action**

The committee's work is rooted in remembrance. We honour each victim by learning from their story, not by letting it fade into bureaucracy. The findings of this report call on all of us: government, justice, healthcare, education, and communities — to act as if prevention is possible, because it is.

We need:

- Mandatory and ongoing trauma- and violence-informed training across all sectors, including family law and healthcare.
- Full implementation and public tracking of DVDRC recommendations.
- Sustainable funding for child-centred post-homicide supports and early intervention programs.
- Recognition of femicide as a distinct criminal category, as urged by advocacy groups and the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability.

Ontario's domestic violence landscape is not improving fast enough. The lessons are written in blood and grief.

As both a committee member and a frontline advocate, I know that behind every death reviewed is a voice that once called for help.

Our moral responsibility, and our collective opportunity, is to ensure those voices are not lost to silence again.