

WHO IS KILLED, AND BY WHOM? WHO IS HARMED, AND BY WHOM?

BY FIROZA CHIC DABBY

Who is getting killed and who is doing the killing?

- **Women killed by their abusers** are the largest group of victims of intimate homicides. They include elderly women; lesbians; rural women; disabled women; pregnant women; sex-workers; women in the armed forces; married, divorced or separated women; professional women; immigrant, refugee or native-born women, etc. In addition to intimate partners, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law may participate in killings; or hire someone to do the killing. Some API women have expressed their fears of being killed here in the U.S. or being sent back to their home countries and killed there.
- **Women and men in same-sex relationships** are victims of domestic violence related homicides, although such cases may be overlooked as intimate homicides.
- **Suicide Pacts of Elderly Couples** — Violent deaths in elderly couples that appear to be suicide pacts or mercy killings should be carefully considered to see if they are domestic violence related homicides. In the majority of these deaths, it is the man who does the killing. If it is a botched suicide where the man does not die, then we should be particularly alert to the possibility of an intimate homicide. Elderly women in long-standing abusive marriages may be coerced into a suicide pact. The adult children of a couple dead in a suicide pact may also offer resistance to investigating the possibility of, or ruling out, homicide.
- **Homicide-Suicide** — These can involve single or multiple homicides -of an intimate partner and/or children- followed by the abuser's suicide. (Sometimes a "police assisted suicide" occurs where the killer forces a showdown with the police and is killed in the ensuing shootout.)
- **Abetted Suicides** — Abused women who are tortured, depressed and severely isolated by batterers and by the community are ending their own lives. Although this does not amount to homicide, they are being driven to suicidal desperation. E.g., Central Asian Tajik brides are being tormented into committing suicide early in the marriage by self-immolation. In India, because 'dowry deaths' are often disguised as suicides, husbands and in-laws can be arrested for the felony offense of abetting a suicide.
- **Mother-Child Suicides** — These cases involve mothers with long histories of severe domestic violence who attempt a joint suicide of themselves and their children. These cases differ from those where fathers kill their children and commit suicide: men typically use guns, kill their children whilst they were asleep, or in front of their mother, kill the partner they had been abusing, and

kill themselves. Mothers in most of the cases we know about, are holding their children close to them and then jumping, mostly into water, or off a building, or using poison. What has happened in many of the cases we know about is that none, or one, or more of the children die, and the mother may or may not die in the suicide attempt. The mother is then charged with first degree murder or attempted murder. These mothers talk about feeling safer in jail than they did in their homes; about horrible prolonged abuse; about their deep despair; and the fear that no one would have cared for their children. One husband commented to the effect that his wife “was sitting in air-conditioned comfort in the jail and I’m left with this terrible child.” Deep as a battered women’s desperation may be, we do not condone mother-child suicides and we must work to prevent them from happening.

- **Honor Killings** —In some cultures, women are considered to bring dishonor to their and/or their husband’s families by disobeying their wishes and asserting her own (e.g., trying to divorce or escape from her batterer). A family member kills her (or orders her killing) to restore honor to her and/or her husband’s family. Brothers, fathers and contract killers mostly carry out honor killings, often with the complicity of the mother.
- **Contract Killings** – A batterer or a family member hires someone to kill his partner or one of her family members.
- **Killing her family members** - API women describe threats against and/or murders of their family members in their home country; typically carried out or ordered by the batterer’s family.
- **Children and Teens** — Children and teens are killed in domestic violence related deaths.
- **New intimates** of a battered women get killed by her ex-partner.
- **Batterers** — Batterers are killed by their abused female partners and sometimes by their teenage children who are trying to stop them from abusing their mothers.

Harm done to surviving children

The children of a murdered battered woman can become invisible. Our advocacy and interventions need to focus on the issues that affect them, such as:

- Dealing with the grief and trauma of their mother’s death
- In a multiple homicide or a homicide-suicide, they will be dealing with grief and the traumatic loss of siblings, both parents or other family members
- Witnessing the homicide(s) and or suicide inflicts double trauma: that of witnessing the murder of a mother and the homicidal attack of a father
- Discovering their mother’s body and/or the bodies of other victims
- Dealing with their own physical injuries if they had been targeted
- Fears about being in further danger, especially if the killer has not been apprehended.

- Fears about their future, who they will live with; and if there are teen or young adult children, they worry about how they will provide for the family and keep it together. If it is a large family, the siblings can be split up and placed in different homes.
- If they have been living in a household of multiple batterers who had victimized their mother, their fear and lack of trust in caregivers is heightened.
- If there is a wide age range among siblings, they will have different reactions to loss, trauma and even victim-blaming. Older siblings may be expected to look after younger ones, and their own emotional needs may get overlooked.
- Children and teens may be overcome by feelings of helplessness or failure because they feel they could not stop the homicide.
- Testifying in court if they witnessed the killing can of course re-ignite the original trauma. To say nothing of the fears and anxieties of testifying against their own father or stepfather.
- Custody battles: Children can become the focus of custody battles between the two families. If the case was a homicide-suicide, then the battle can be fiercer. The battered woman's family can lose custody of their grandchildren because they might be residing in the home country, and/or because they are uninformed of the legal process in the U.S., or because they have less power and financial resources than the husband's family.

Our advocacy has therefore to focus on

- Collecting more data on what is happening in our communities.
- Preventing domestic violence related homicides, including mother-child suicides.
- Addressing the effects on surviving family members and children.

Chic Dabby is the Director of the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence.

HOMICIDE, GENDER AND CULTURE

BY SHAMITA DAS DASGUPTA

Decoupling Gendered Homicide and Culture

When violence occurs within the family in our API communities, it is immediately thought to have occurred because of the implicit or explicit dictates of our cultures. Lately, I have started to think about culture as learned behavior as opposed to biologically determined behaviors. So if culture represents behaviors that are learned and nature represents those that are biologically determined, then domestic violence becomes cultural. However, most people and institutions here do not view culture in terms of learned behavior when they talk about India, Japan, Guam, Bangladesh or any of our API cultures. When discussing “minority” cultures, they refer to the symbols, nuances, guidelines and teachings of our cultures that condone and even encourage men to abuse the women related to them. Having stated that, I will try to decouple these issues a little later.

We, ourselves, as activists and advocates, sometimes get confused about the origin of violence in our communities. I have heard many advocates fall into the trap of saying “your culture.” In my case, South Asian activists and advocates say, “our culture condones this” and “our culture teaches us woman-abuse.” In our effort to explain woman-abuse, we regularly evoke culture—especially when homicide occurs in our communities. Many non-activists and many of our own community members also speak about culture; however, they speak about it in a different way. They use culture to say woman-abuse has been imposed on us and we are in fact, these good and peaceful people. They say the behaviors of the Euro-American world, colonization and violent American culture is corrupting our peaceful one. Class and religion as cause and variables also are implicated in these arguments. We say it is “those people” or “that religion.” This finger pointing goes on in very interesting ways.

I will attempt to decouple the notions of domestic abuse and culture by talking about domestic violence related deaths, specifically focusing on the South Asian community. I have collected data and information haphazardly. I started literally by collecting newspaper articles and throwing them into a folder, which I did not review for about 10 years. Then I started putting the information in the computer because the folder had become very thick. Once I began doing that, I literally started crying because of all the reports of women being killed – until then I had not recognized that so many South Asian women were being killed. It was just horrendous. I have started gathering information more carefully now. However, there is no systematic data available about domestic violence related homicides in our communities. Newspapers report incidents carelessly, the

stories are often misleading, and only a story that some reporter thinks is interesting or knows something about gets reported. Much of the information reported is suspect and suicides that are obviously related to domestic violence never get reported as such. It is a pretty dismal situation.

Domestic homicides in the South Asian community: what the data reveals

In the South Asian communities of the United States and Canada, individuals have been killed, suicides have occurred, there have been attempted murders, suspicious disappearances, and individuals have been killed by the police. The following information was collected from ethnic (South Asian) and local newspapers.

**Summary of domestic violence related lethal and near-lethal incidents in North America
USA 1981- 2002**

	Murder	Suicide	Attempted Murder	Suspicious Disappearance	Killed by Police	Total
Women	38	2	8	3		51
Men	8	10			2	20
Children	13	1	4			18
Others	4					4
TOTAL	63	13	12	3	2	93

Canada 1986- 2001

	Murder	Suicide	Attempted Murder	Suspicious Disappearance	Killed by Police	Total
Women	15		3			18
Men		2	1		1	4
Children	1					1
Others	10					10
TOTAL	26	2	4		1	33

- *Men Killing Heterosexual Partners, or Intended Partners* — These killings target the wife, ex-wife, lover, ex-lover, or a woman this man may be pursuing. A number of killings have occurred where the woman does not know the man but he has been pursuing and sending her letters or telling his friends he was going to marry her. In some cases, the man was pressuring the young

woman's brother, saying he wants to marry the sister. He eventually ends up killing the woman.

- *Women Killing their Heterosexual Partners* — All of the instances that I collected indicated the woman was being battered.
- *Murder-Suicides* — Most of the instances involved a man killing his wife and then himself, or the man killing himself and the children. There was one rare instance I found of a woman killing her whole family, which included her husband and children. There also were two incidents of battered mothers trying to kill their children and themselves. There are pieces missing here because many of these killings of children as well as mothers and children were reported later as accidents.
- *Men Killing Adult Family Members, Mothers-in-law, Fathers-in-law, and Others Related to His Spouse* — Often men are not killing their partner but attacking the mother-in-law, father-in-law and related people who are probably providing support to the woman.
- *Men Hiring Killers to Murder their Wives* — In only one instance, I have a report of a woman trying to hire killers to murder her husband.
- *Fathers-in-law Killing Daughters-in-law* — The newspapers reported the reasons for these killings as being misogynistic. The incidents involved fathers not wanting their son to be married to their chosen partners because she was of another culture. (Most times the killings occur because the woman is of another culture, not another race.) In cases that involve property, there was fear that the woman was going to go away with a lot of property and the son would be left a pauper.
- *Teenage and Adult Children Killing Parents* — The reasons why teen and adult children kill their parents are unknown. None of the newspaper reports offered an explanation. Suspicions are that abuse in the home perhaps of their mother and/or of themselves may have been occurring; however, it is not clear.
- *Sibling Killing* — All of the newspaper reports showed brothers killing their sisters.
- *Domestic Worker Killings* — Female domestic workers were reported in the newspapers as being killed by their employers.

Some Observations

The methods of committing homicides varied—by setting women on fire, shooting, bludgeoning, poisoning, beating, stabbing, strangulation, etc. These deaths appear to be much more brutal when the man is doing the killing; for example, one woman was bludgeoned 60 times, one had 16 stab wounds on her body.

I have not found in our community newspaper, articles involving same sex domestic violence related deaths, which probably indicates that they are not

being labeled or reported as such. There is no record, for most of the South Asian women victims and perpetrators of domestic homicide, to show that they sought help from a domestic violence agency or other community-based organization (CBO). We must ask why that is, given that there are now 22 domestic violence organizations across the country serving South Asian battered women. We also must recognize the fact that many small API-specific CBOs do not have the capacity to deal with these kinds of complex cases.

We need to do is look at obituary columns and see what is happening there in terms of suicides. We also should go into neighborhoods, interview individuals and listen to community 'gossip'. The latter can be a useful, but not always reliable, way of gathering information about what might have been happening in particular families.

Internal and External Perceptions of Culture

I could not find instances in the newspaper where cultural issues played a part. The only questionable area I found involved mother-child murder -suicides where culturally held beliefs about motherhood may have some impact. However, we are missing the issue of the immigrant status these women have and the isolation they face. Immigrant status and isolation may play a crucial part in the woman's decision-making. For example, perhaps the woman is trying to kill herself to take herself out of her abusive situation and she could not find alternate caretakers who she confidently believes would care for her children. Would she have tried to kill her children if there were caretakers she could entrust her children to? That is a question that remains unanswered.

Unfortunately, culture is evoked at every level in these cases; and when they appear in the courtroom, by the media and larger community as well. Typically, culture is used to mitigate the actions of the male perpetrator and to vilify the female when she is the perpetrator. Interestingly, the ethnic newspapers pick up the theme of culture also. For example, in a couple of cases with which we have been closely involved, the local newspapers called us immediately after the death occurred and said, "Oh, we understand this was an arranged marriage." We were able to dissuade them from using "arranged marriage" as an explanation. However, the ethnic newspapers that are familiar with India and South Asian immigrant communities reported the cases using quotes such as, "Arranged Marriage", and "Dowry". Rather than focusing on the prevalence of abusive men or abused women in our communities, these deaths were portrayed as anomalies having cultural associations and origins.

Most community members do not discuss cultural arguments openly. When we go to community settings to talk to groups, they tend to absolve men's violence by placing the blame squarely on women. The implicit idea of culture, teaching,

and socialization of men also comes up when activists and researchers are called to provide expert witness testimony in court. Usually, it is defense attorneys—but sometimes prosecutors also—who are calling and asking for expert cultural testimony. They present individuals as cultural experts and not as domestic violence experts. When API experts are called, they are told, “You don’t have to talk about domestic violence. We have [white] people coming in and doing that. But you are going to explain culture.” That gets repeated over and over again, and it puts us in a double bind. If we accept the invitation to go and present, we are perpetrating this notion that there is something different about our culture and that it is problematic. Meanwhile, no cultural expert is called upon when cases involve white or African Americans in very similar situations.

When we find ourselves having to go to court; we have to face several thorny dilemmas, particularly since the court system itself is based on the ethos of the dominant culture. So should we, or should we not, provide expert testimony? Refusing may mean we are abandoning the woman to her fate. The first imperative we have as a group is to collect information because we do not know what has happened in these homicide cases. The work performed by homicide review boards is not sufficient because they review only official documents. Pertinent information goes missing in these reports. For example, in New Jersey there was a murder in a Latino community. Right after the woman’s murder, the Immigration and Naturalization Service made a number of sweeps into the community because they discovered the woman was undocumented. That type of information is never going to make any of the official documents; however, it is critical in reviewing subsequent cases in that neighborhood.

Concluding Questions

So, what should we do? Should we try to eliminate culture totally from our work? If so, then what would be our strategies and tactics? Should we retain some elements of this cultural based argument and use it to support victims and battered women who use violence? Which elements should we keep and how should we keep them? What are the unintended consequences we can anticipate in retaining parts of our culture and cultural argument? How are activists and experts contributing to perpetrating cultural stereotypes? How can we provide cultural testimony to support individual women while not jeopardize the safety of other women who will come through this system in the future? If we eliminate the cultural argument totally how can we justify the existence of CBOs? How can we use public education effectively to stop extreme and all other forms of violence in our communities? Do you as advocates and community workers think the larger society, community members, and women we work with view domestic violence issues and nuances as cultural phenomenon? How can we use this perspective to end violence? How can we use culture for our purposes or would taking it on mean going down a slippery slope?

Shamita Das Dasgupta is the co-founder of Manavi, the first South Asian service program established in the United States.

LESSONS FROM ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-RELATED HOMICIDES AND SUICIDES

BY JUDY CHEN

WASHINGTON STATE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The findings presented below are from the Washington State Coalition's Fatality Review Project, which is staffed by Kelly Starr, Fatality Review Project Coordinator, Joanne Gallagher, Fatality Review Project Specialist, and Margaret Hobart, Fatality Review Project Advisor.

The Domestic Violence Fatality Review Process

Domestic violence fatality reviews are a grand experiment in effective systems change. Domestic violence advocates and systems representatives examine a battered woman's homicide, but not from the viewpoint of "What was wrong with the abuser?", "Was she a drinker?", or other attempts to understand the violence by looking just at the victim or perpetrator. Instead, the fatality review process is designed to ask, "What are the circumstances that surrounded the woman's death?" and to view the homicide from a systemic, not just personal, framework.

In Washington, our statewide fatality review project is set up to examine the death through the victim's eyes, looking at how the system responded to her attempts to get help and to keep herself and her children safe. The fatality review process is also designed to identify how criminal justice and other systems attempted to hold the batterer accountable, by collecting and examining related data, such as protection orders and prior arrest history. When we review a fatality, project staff enter the information into a comprehensive database and then create a chronology of events, to trace the times the victim attempted to get help, and when either party interacted with the system. Protection orders, tapes and transcripts of 911 calls are some of the items in the public record that we may track down. Also, we may add information received from local domestic violence programs, clergy or other individuals who knew something about the people involved and the homicide. The information reported by individuals in local programs might differ from the official accounts.

The statutes related to domestic violence fatality review in Washington State require the review team to include law enforcement officials, medical examiners, the prosecutor's office, and other institutional representatives, as well as community advocates. We also attempt to involve other community members, such as the woman's clergy person. It is an interesting experience to hear review panelists talk about the case, because often the policies and procedures that institutional representatives describe are different from what we as advocates experience. Fatality reviews are an opportunity to engage in dialogue about policy versus actual practice.

We also try to contact the victim's family in a non-intrusive manner, by sending a letter to let them know that we are looking at the case. We offer an opportunity to share information with us, if they so choose. It is important for families to know that someone cares about what happened.

A Cascade of Multiple Systems Failure

In our state, we have examined several fatalities of limited English speaking women, primarily Asians and Latinas. Many of the victims made extraordinary attempts to get help from the criminal and civil justice systems, which failed them dramatically and repeatedly. My colleague Margaret Hobart, the original staff for our fatality review project, has called this "a cascade of multiple failures."

The cases we have looked at during the fatality reviews have not thus far indicated what some call a "cultural" problem of domestic violence. Most of the barriers identified indicate a lack of appropriate institutional response to the danger that these women faced. These are the typical system failures faced by battered women in general, and in particular, by those who are immigrant, refugee, limited English-speaking, or of color:

- A lack of access to helping systems;
- A lack of appropriate advocacy and intervention;
- A lack of a strong criminal justice intervention to hold the perpetrator accountable and prevent further victimization.

Consistent Themes Regarding Experiences of Women with Limited English Proficiency

This section is from a report by Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Margaret Hobart, Fatality Review Project Advisor.

- Law enforcement agencies failing to provide translation at the scene even when their official policy is to call the AT&T Language Line [for interpretation by telephone], resulting in a lack of prosecution.
- Lack of advocacy in the woman's first language within protection order offices and/or prosecutor's offices.
- In several cases, women had made multiple attempts to enlist the assistance of the criminal justice or civil justice systems.
- It appeared that immigrant women resorted to calling law enforcement only when they felt that their lives or the lives of their children were literally endangered.
- When limited English speaking abusers were convicted, they often were not required to attend batterer's treatment because none existed in their language

– but they did not face any alternative consequence (such as jail time), so from the victim’s point of view, “nothing happened.”

- Many of the cases we reviewed involved active homicide and suicide threats with loaded guns prior to the murder, but prosecutions and follow-up to these threats by the criminal justice system did not adequately respond to the seriousness of these threats.
- Contacts with the criminal justice system were critical points of intervention for the battered woman, but generally did not result in women getting support or realistic safety planning because of a lack of court-based advocates.

Several homicides were preceded by the abuser making homicide and suicide threats, threats with loaded guns, and threats at the victim’s place of employment. Many people witnessed these incidents and yet, nothing happened to stop the abuse. There were instances when law enforcement failed to seize weapons from the perpetrator, and when no charges were filed. The system could have made a difference, and perhaps we, as advocates, could have made a difference with safety planning - if we had been linked with these victims in the first place.

“Culture” - or Systems Failure?

A common statement made about battered women from our communities—particularly refugees and immigrants—is that, “They won’t get help, they won’t call the police.” However, the women in the cases we reviewed made repeated attempts to get protection orders, to call 911, and to do everything they could to get help and safety – but they did not encounter an adequate institutional response. While it is well established that oppressive cultural values and gender roles sustain domestic violence in any culture (including mainstream American culture), API cultural beliefs and practices did not seem to be the root problem in the homicides we examined.

A tendency exists in the majority culture in the U.S. to blame domestic violence fatalities in immigrant/ refugee communities on “culture.” Such characterizations distract from the significant problems identified: lack of access to services, lack of meaningful advocacy, and lack of strong criminal justice intervention to domestic violence generally. One of the common threads between cases involving immigrants/refugees and cases involving U.S.-born individuals was a general lack of effort by the criminal and civil justice systems to control the batterer and keep the victim safe. A focus on an immigrant/refugee’s culture also ignores the fact that the bulk of domestic violence murders in Washington are committed by white, U.S. born, English-speaking men. (Hobart, p. 45)

Our findings point to institutionalized racism, and a failure of the system in general to hold safe victims of any background.

Thirteen percent of the reviewed cases (n=4) involved victims and families who spoke English as a second language, and were immigrants or refugees to this country. While all the murdered women faced significant barriers in attempting to access help from law enforcement, courts, medical providers, social services, and domestic violence programs, review panels noted that this set of victims also faced additional and daunting barriers, including:

- The reasonable expectation of encountering bias and racism when seeking help
- Institutional and individual racism on the part of professionals involved in the community response to domestic violence
- A lack of translation
- A lack of language-accessible, culturally appropriate services. (Hobart, p. 45)

Our government - and we as a movement - have invested significant resources in creating a criminal justice response that does not work for many battered women. This is not to say that arrest, prosecution, and court ordered treatment or jail time never stops a batterer's abuse; thousands of women have found safety through the system and we should never forget that. However, so much more must be done to compliment the criminal justice approach to stopping abuse, and to make this system focus on victim safety.

Doing so will require more advocacy outreach, more systems advocacy, and more work within our own communities to hold batterers accountable. It also may require pushing the criminal justice system, publicly funded health care providers, and social services to offer basic translation and interpretation services, at least to the minimum levels provided for in their own policies. Our priorities for ensuring interpretation should be for law enforcement response at domestic violence scenes, 911 responses, and health care.

If we look at institutional response to battering through the eyes of those who experience it, we see that institutions are sometimes not enforcing even their own policies and procedures about domestic violence. We must find constructive ways to address this. For example, we should let the police chief know when a 911 operator does not follow guidelines in responding to a limited-English speaker's emergency, or when officers use children to interpret at the scene of a domestic violence incident.

As safety audits have shown, the helping systems that victims and perpetrators encounter are not truly set up to prioritize women's safety and to hold the perpetrator accountable. This is a "good people working in bad systems" issue, where our expertise and advocacy can make a change. For example, we as a movement have said that protective orders can help victims be safer. However, there may significant barriers for limited English speaking women to obtain court orders. Say an immigrant woman decides to request an order: she has to find someone who reads and writes English well to go with her, take a break from work, find the courthouse and the appropriate line, and after all that, may not have time to obtain or complete the paperwork before returning to work. Will she ever try again? Advocates should examine the process of actually asking for help, in order to see what changes would support API women's attempts to stop the abuse.

How Does the Community Organize to Protect Women?

Fatality reviews are just one of the tools available to the community to take action. Others include lawsuits, pickets and protests. Fatality reviews, along with safety audits and task forces, are experiments and only part of the total approach needed to ensure that:

- The ways that institutions respond to domestic violence are based on community needs
- Battered women's safety and access to justice are central to everyone's efforts
- Advocates have a place at the table when funding and policy decisions are made.

Let's look at some of the community-based responses, in addition to fatality review.

The most common community-based response is what women living with the violence do to protect themselves. Before a murder, women often have a clear understanding of the danger posed by their abuser. They are creating their own safety plans, however limited in scope, with their friends, families, and co-workers. We know that only a small percentage of all battered women are calling us, the community advocates who can help them navigate the system, as well as assess lethality, find shelter, find help for their children, get financial assistance, and provide support. In the cases of LEP victims that we examined, many of the murdered women had not contacted a battered women's program. Many of them did not seem to know about us. We need to connect better with women's homegrown responses, and with the people who are helping them. We will need more money to do this, given the high prevalence of domestic violence versus our small programs and budgets.

In my own experience at an API community-based program, after a domestic violence murder in the API community, there is so much that community members want to do to help. For example, holding vigils, forums, and dialogues among the leadership. Sometimes there is intensive media attention, usually focused on cultural reasons for the murder, rather than the ones described above. There may be a community spur for new kinds of responses, new kinds of services, and new kinds of commitment. This is an incredible opportunity for us as API advocates and organizers to seek change, to let them know that domestic violence happens all the time, not just in this one case, and to do some organizing and mobilization.

Here also are some tremendous challenges. Frequently, our ethnic community leaders are very interested in stopping violence and murders. Most of them can agree that these are bad things. But they are not necessarily interested in gender equality. They are not usually demanding women's liberation. Sometimes it seems that the only way for us to get communities interested in this issue is when a woman dies. And yet, is that the only way?

Battered women's deaths raise important questions for us as activists: How do we hold the formal leadership accountable, especially the elder male leaders? How do we ensure the community's response is based on a woman's safety and her own decision-making, and that we are not just transferring control over her from the batterer to community leaders? How do we hold ourselves accountable for working effectively in our own community, when it is so hard? What are we concretely doing to create leadership opportunities for survivors, and for young men who are interested in being part of the solution?

Implications for Advocacy

What can API domestic violence homicides teach us about advocacy? I suggest that there are implications for systems advocacy, suicide and lethality screening, and safety planning.

First, we need to be more complex in our thinking about limited English speaking women and getting help from law enforcement. It is important for us to challenge the idea that limited English speaking women will not call 911. I have been guilty of perpetuating this idea myself, in an attempt to advocate for a culturally appropriate response, i.e., "Our women don't call the police, so alternative methods are required for intervention." The data in our state suggests that LEP women are indeed calling the police – but perhaps only when LEP women believe their lives are in immediate danger. We should think about what it means if women in our community do make that kind of contact, and what systems changes are required so that their desperate calls for help are not in vain. For example, should we have a discussion with law enforcement that says, "If

you get this kind of call, it means that the situation is even worse than you are seeing with mainstream women, and this is what we want you to do...”?

Second, in regards to Chic Dabby’s presentation on API homicide and suicide, we should routinely screen for suicidal ideation, especially by the abuser, and perhaps by the victim, in the same way we ask women about sexual abuse from their partners. Are we warning women about the danger that a suicidal abuser poses to them? When we ask what her abuser says about committing suicide, are we also asking if she’s thought herself about suicide or killing her children in order to protect them from abuse?

Our fatality review research has found that suicidal abusers pose a high level of danger to their victims, and that there is a pattern of inadequate response from professionals and institutions to this risk. In regards to API suicidal abusers, what do we need to know and do? Among other actions, perhaps we should advocate for some kind of Tarasoff warning for mental health professionals who come in contact with suicidal abusers. This would require them to warn the woman of the lethal danger she may face. (The Tarasoff ruling mandates therapists to disclose, and not hold confidential, their patients’ stated threats or intentions to harm another individual. The intended victim must be notified of such threats.)

Third, we need to find out if there are lethality factors significant and specific to APIs. For example, what does it mean for a woman from a particular culture and home country experience to disclose partner sexual abuse to law enforcement – what is she telling us about the danger she is facing?

Lastly, with our safety planning, we should consider speaking more frankly with women about the possibility of their deaths. How do we do this in a way that does not make the women seeking our help turn away from us? What does it mean to do safety planning around this issue with those API women who are very unlikely to leave their abusers?

There is so much that we do not know, but must find out. We need to collect and analyze data about these cases. Even small programs can help. When I worked at an API domestic violence program in Seattle, we collected newspaper clippings of API domestic violence homicides, and discussed these with the domestic violence coalition (where I now work) every year. The coalition provided data for our community education work, which helped us show the API community that domestic violence does happen in our families, and is not just an “American” problem.

Lastly, I have a question for you as advocates. What do you all need to better address API domestic violence homicides in your community? What do you need from the Institute and from others? For example, do you want a packet on what to do after a death in your community, or training on working with the media, or support for working with API community organizations? What is it that we could be doing to assist you?

Judy Chen is a Program Coordinator at the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Previously, she was Director of the Asian & Pacific Islander Women & Family Safety Center, Seattle.

ONE WOMAN'S DEATH: ONE COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

BY LENI MARIN

Claire Joyce Tempongko was a Filipina immigrant woman who was stabbed by her ex-boyfriend in front of her two very young children, in October 2000. Claire had called the police repeatedly before the incident. In fact, even a year before the incident Tari Ramirez, her batterer, had served at least six or seven months in jail for domestic violence. He was released on probation, and he began to harass her. Claire obtained a temporary restraining order. She expressed her fear of her ex-boyfriend to her family and her family was helping her. He continued harassing her. At one point, when she called the police they had come and picked him up. He was only charged with disorderly drunken conduct. He came before a judge on the arrest charges. However, missing from the packet that was presented to the judge was the fact that he was on probation and had earlier been charged and convicted for domestic violence—a huge missing piece. The ex-boyfriend was released and ordered to perform community service. Two weeks later Claire Joyce was dead. He had come back and killed her. Her children were witness to their mother's murder. There was shock, outrage, and fear.

When the System Fails

In looking at the things this woman tried, it is obvious she was in great danger. She called the police and got a temporary restraining order. The ex-boyfriend had been arrested for domestic violence. Right now, Tari Ramirez is still at large. He has not been caught.

Similarly, ten years ago, we also were involved in the case of a Fijian immigrant woman who was killed in San Francisco. The same thing happened. She called the police and tried everything. She got a restraining order and the man came after her while he was on probation. She was dropping her son off at school. He killed her there. He committed suicide after killing her in front of their son.

The Asian Women's Shelter organized a vigil and rally in front of the Hall of Justice for Claire Joyce. The event mobilized anti-domestic violence activists, the local Filipino community, as well as the community at large. The demand for justice was very clear. People wanted the system to be accountable because clearly the system had failed.

Making Systems Accountable

How did we make the systems accountable? In Claire Joyce's case, we held the criminal justice system, the probation department and the police department accountable.

In meeting with the criminal justice system, we first organized what we called the Committee for Justice for Claire Joyce Tempongko. The Asian Women's Shelter, the Family Violence Prevention Fund and other community organizations were involved. The first order of business was to demand a meeting with the Chief of Police and the Mayor, which we were able to do. In the meeting with the Chief of Police, we asked: "What are you going to do about looking for the batterer? It is ridiculous that he is still at large." We pushed them to organize community posting of the batterer's picture. He was well known in his neighborhood. Also, people repeatedly called the woman's family, saying they had seen him. The police said it was not true and they believed he went to Mexico. We then stepped up our efforts and demanded that the reward be raised. The Mayor agreed and the reward was raised from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

We said from the very start that this tragedy could have been prevented. In addition, we recognized a flaw in the fatality review process. There appeared to be a sentiment among them that they were not going to point fingers. They were just reviewing the case for the sake of reviewing it and not saying what went wrong. They were not addressing questions concerning who is accountable and what corrections need to be made to prevent a repetition of certain system failures. Community organizing occurred around the points of taking further action because we recognized that fatality reviews are not the answer to preventing homicides.

Community Organizing As the Key

How did we support the family and how did we mobilize the community so they could have an opportunity to express their outrage and shock and be a part of the demand for justice?

We offered post-traumatic stress therapy for the children who witnessed the murders. The children were still attending the same school. We worked with the family to move the children to another school right away. We were concerned that the batterer might come for them there. We also were concerned about security, even after the children were moved to another school. We wanted to make sure the teachers and police knew the situation. The police were not thinking about those kinds of things for the family.

We worked with the media to broaden—beyond the Filipino and the advocacy community—the impact and the knowledge about the homicide. The Family Violence Prevention Fund organized a campaign called "Not in My Home, Not in My Town", which collected pledges from members of the San Francisco community. We organized luncheons that involved key women leaders and supporters of the Consortium on Domestic Violence, a leading organization in San Francisco. Organizers of the "Not in My Home, Not In My Town" campaign and the family worked together to collect names at organizational meetings and

at churches. Claire's mother –Clara Tempongko- has been very visible in the campaign.

Results

Concrete results came from our efforts. Together with the Mayor of San Francisco and the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women (which did a fatality review and conducted a hearing), we held a news conference and the city devoted \$12 million for a major overhaul of their system. For example, the probation department did not have computerized linkages with the San Francisco police department. With all the high tech that is supposed to be in Silicon Valley, they were in the dark. We collected more than 5,000 pledge cards and we demanded that open positions in the domestic violence investigation unit be filled. There were only ten people working in the unit at a time when they had funding for twenty positions, four of which were supposed to be for multi-lingual workers. Those are just some of the concrete results we experienced. We were proactive and realized that community organizing is the key to preventing domestic violence.

Leni Marin is the Managing Director at the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

HOLDING OUR COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTABLE

BY DEBBIE LEE

Adding our Asian Voices

Repeatedly, we see studies done in which Asians are left out. When homicide studies are conducted, data on Asians is excluded because of the view that “the numbers were not that big and so we just didn’t do any analysis in that category.” We cannot continue to accept this. We must collect the data within our urban centers and other places where there are Asian populations so that we can better understand the nature of these homicides. We must do this in addition to collecting newspapers articles and clippings, as was suggested earlier.

We are called to put a larger portion of our time into working with our community leaders, despite the frustrations we might face. We sometimes may not be able to talk about our feminism up front. However, we can still build an understanding of domestic violence in our communities. We can do that through bringing data and repeated stories that show domestic homicide is not an infrequent circumstance and that it was not the woman’s behavior that caused her death. We need to come up with plans for developing public education campaigns and for helping those already in leadership to become more outspoken about domestic violence.

With our ideas and the information we collect, we can assist our communities by showing them what they should do next to respond to domestic violence homicide and to prevent these kinds of deaths.

Debbie Lee is the Managing Director at the Family Violence Prevention Fund. She directs the National Health Initiative on Domestic Violence.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR ADVOCACY & INTERVENTION

- ❑ What kinds of domestic violence related homicides are occurring in different ethnic &/or geographic communities? What are the trends?
- ❑ What do we do in our interactions with the criminal legal system, especially about “cultural defense” claims?
 - When the perpetrator[s] are batterers/abusive family members?
 - When the perpetrator is a battered woman?
- ❑ How do agencies handle requests for “cultural defense” “expert” witnesses?
- ❑ From a research point of view, should domestic violence related homicides be “counted” as API even when the killer is API but the victim is not; or only when the victim is API (regardless of killer’s ethnicity)?
- ❑ What sort of community organizing follows a homicide?
- ❑ What is the impact of domestic violence related homicides on survivors, other women in the community?
- ❑ What is happening to women who kill their abusers?
- ❑ What is happening to women who attempt mother-child suicide?
- ❑ How are we getting information about domestic violence related homicides?
- ❑ How does the media coverage – in the mainstream and ethnic press – subscribe to stereotypes ethnic communities and of domestic violence?