

Perth

Women's Council
Department for Child Protection
Keeping Kids Safe

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“The Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma and its Relationship to
Intimate Partner Homicide

© Dr Carolyn Harris Johnson 2009



In Depth Interviews & CTQ

- 10 Intimate partner homicide perpetrators
- 1 Familicide perpetrator
- 1 woman who killed x-partner's lover

Family context perpetrator and victim

- Intergenerational childhood trauma
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Violence

Childhood trauma

- 9 of the 12 perpetrators reported having experienced childhood trauma
- It is likely those 3 minimising also suffered childhood trauma
- Victims were also reported to have had experiences of childhood trauma

Childhood trauma was:

- Pervasive
- Cumulative
- Unmitigated

Attachment

- Attachment forms the template for future relationships
- Secure attachment requires primary carer to be physically and emotionally available
- Domestic violence, mental illness and substance abuse may compromise attachment

Effects over time

- If this is positive then the individual is able to replicate positive relationships with others
- If not relationships will be problematic and likely to mirror earlier traumatic ones

Effects on brain development

- Early trauma alters the development of the right brain
• (Schore 2001)
- Brain fails to develop through lack of appropriate stimulation e.g. touch, love. (Perry 1996)
- Release of opiates that can produce emotional numbing and amnesia. (Perry 2005)
- Traumatic environments compromise functions of empathy, attachment, affect regulation
- Adult brain may regress to an infantile state when confronted with severe stress. (Nijenhuis et al 1998)

Long term effects

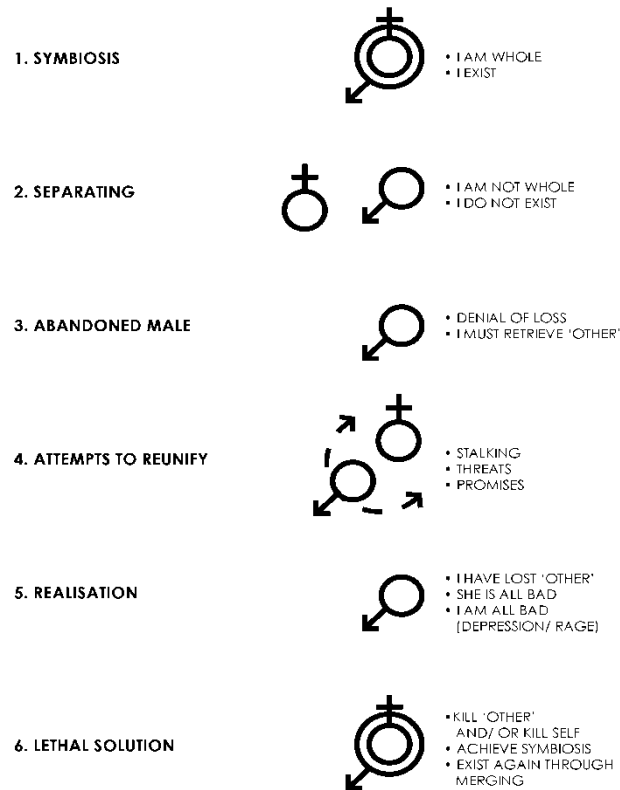
- Attachment disordered parents are unlikely to have securely attached children
- Children who witness D.V. are more likely to develop relationships mirroring this pattern
- Children who experience violence or abuse are more likely to develop violent and abusive behaviour as adults
- Unresolved trauma exacerbates propensity for violence

Intergenerational issues

- Attachment disordered parents are unlikely to have securely attached children
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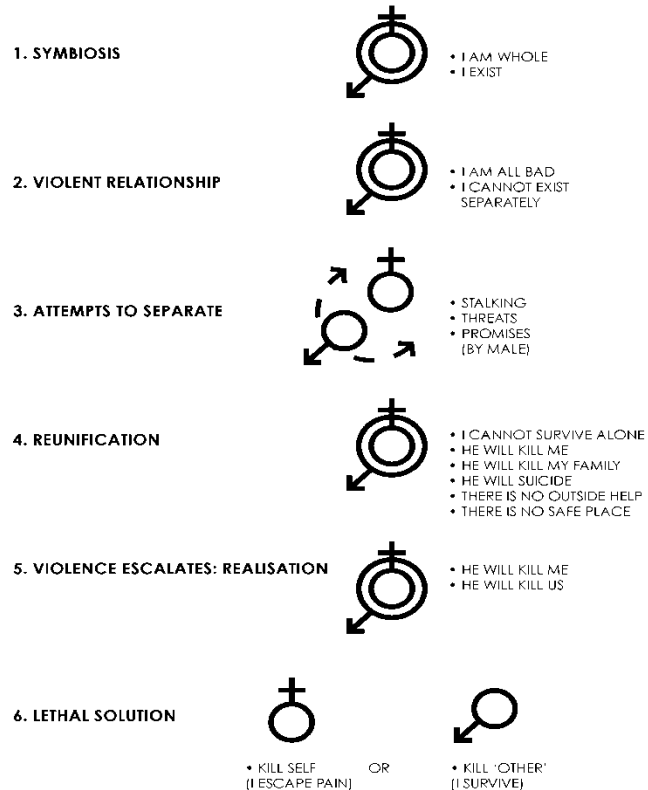
How childhood trauma can lead to male perpetrated IP homicide

NON-INDIGENOUS HOMICIDAL MALE



How childhood trauma can lead to female perpetrated IP homicide

NON-INDIGENOUS HOMICIDAL FEMALE



Challenges to practitioners

- Collaboration & case management across agencies
- Information sharing is critical
- Without minimising or ignoring, a preparedness to look past the violence
- A preparedness to see the traumatised child within the offender and the potential in the traumatised child to become the offender
- Preparedness to provide therapy as part of justice response