

TORONTO, ONTARIO  
AUGUST 6-9, 2015

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION  
2015 ANNUAL  
CONVENTION

# At-Risk Populations for Homicide-Suicide

Developed and Presented by: **Karen N. Guskowski, M.S., Vera A. Klinoff, M.S., Chelsey Mahler, M.S., Laura Lundel, M.S., Lenore Walker, Ed.D, ABPP**  
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Discussion Led by: **Robert Geffner, Ph.D, ABN, ABPP**  
*Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma*

# **At-Risk Populations for Homicide-Suicide**

Guszkowski, Klinoff, Mahler, Lundell, Walker  
*Nova Southeastern University*

## **Chelsey Mahler, M.S.**

*The Link Between Domestic Violence and Murder-Suicide*

## **Karen N. Guszkowski, M.S.**

*The Risk of Homicide-Suicide for Families Involved with  
Family Court*

## **Vera A. Klinoff, M.S.**

*Homicide-Suicide in Police Families*

## **Laura Lundell, M.S.**

*Homicide-Suicide in the Elderly Population*

# At-Risk Populations for Homicide-Suicide

Guszkowski, Klinoff, Mahler, Lundell, Walker  
*Nova Southeastern University*

- Presentation of the problem, research question, methods and results
- Review at-risk groups
- Discussion of results and future directions

# Introduction

- Research indicates that consortial homicide-suicides cluster in some states with four identified groups at risk:
  - couples with a history of domestic violence,
  - couples involved in family court,
  - law enforcement officer couples, and
  - elderly couples.

# The Problem

- Current attention focused on mass murders who then commit suicide
- A more commonly occurring form of homicide-suicide (murder-suicide) is where the perpetrator and victim are in a relationship
- These events seem to cluster in some states, Florida often being one of the highest in frequency

# Our Question

- What risk factors, or at-risk groups, can be identified from open source media that covered homicide-suicides?

# Methods

- Electronic open source media
  - Broward, West Palm Beach, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, Polk, Seminol, Citrus, Hernando, Collier, Dade, Miami-Dade, Munroe, Osceola, Orange, Bay, Volusia, Nassau, Duval, Clay, St. Johns, Flagler,
- Collected for the past 5 years (2011-2015)
  - Perpetrator characteristics
  - Victim characteristics
  - Relationship
  - Situational characteristics

# Results

- Four major groups were identified in the Florida sample
  1. Couples with a history of domestic violence
  2. Couples involved in child custody disputes
  3. Couples where one or both parties are police officers
  4. Elderly couples where one or both parties are in the caregiver role



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# The Link between Domestic Violence and Homicide-Suicide

Developed and Presented by: **Chelsey Mahler, M.S**  
*Nova Southeastern University*

# Perpetrator Characteristics

- “Dependent-protective” role
  - Power and control
  - Jealousy
  - Obsession
  - Struggles with rejection and/or being left alone
  - Lack of regard for partner’s life
  - Difficulty existing without their partner
- Depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation are exhibited

# Risk Factors within Domestic Violence

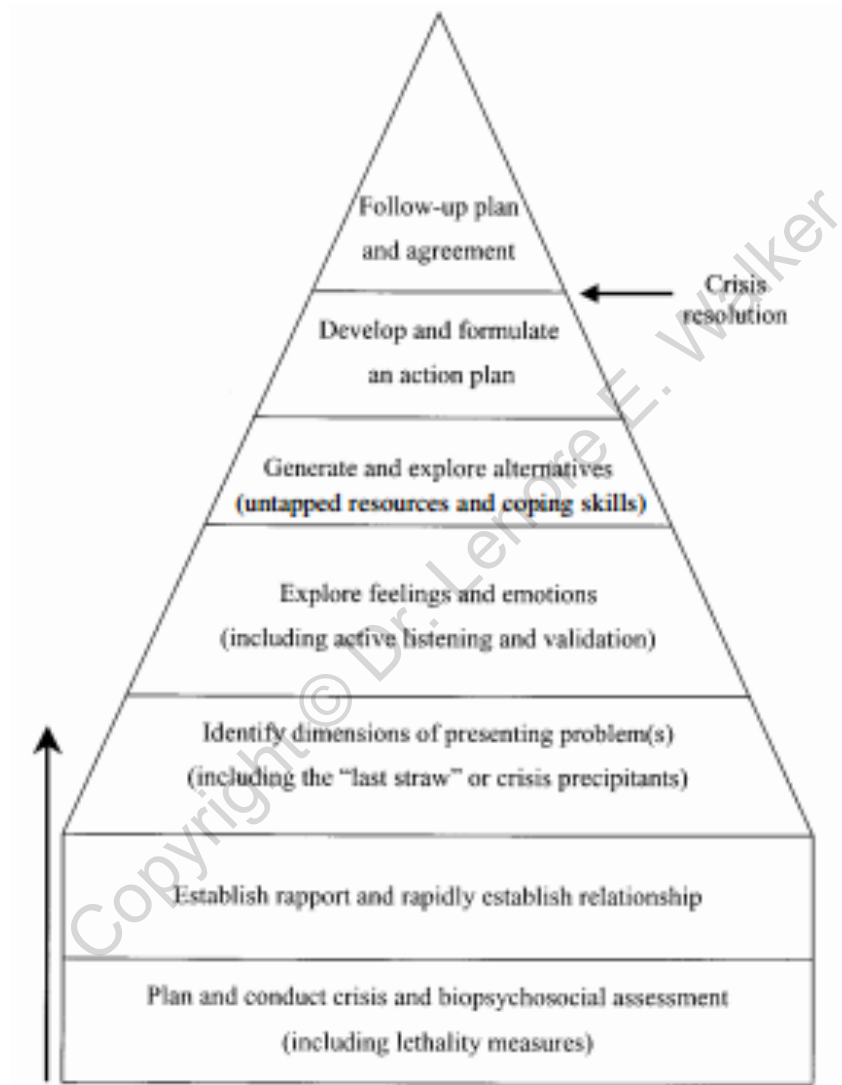
- Leaving the abuser or *threats of leaving* the abuser
- Stalking behavior
- Presence of a firearm in the home
- Having a child living in the home that is not the perpetrator's biological child

# Recommendations

- ✓ Crisis Intervention Plan  
Roberts & Roberts, 2005
- ✓ Risk assessment
- ✓ Develop a safety plan
- ✓ Interview children privately

# Recommendations

- ✓ Urge emergency protective orders and/or restraining orders
- ✓ Confiscate firearms
- ✓ Employ specific interventions for batterers who are at risk



**Robert's Seven-Stage Crisis Intervention Model**

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# The Risk of Homicide- Suicide for Families Involved with Family Court

Developed and Presented by: **Karen N. Guskowski, M.S**  
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# What is Family Court?

- Family unit issues
  - Divorce
  - Parenting Rights
  - Child Custody
  - Child Support
  - Child Abuse
  - Child Neglect



# How Family Court has Evolved

- Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century
  - Father = head of the home
- Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century
  - Mother = nurturing one
- Present Day
  - Joint Custody

Grossman & Friedman, 2011

# How Involvement is a Risk Factor

- Co-occurring recent estrangement or separation

*“ [The] prospect of losing his family through death apparently strikes the desperate familicidal father as no more disastrous than the prospect of losing them through desertion.” – Daly & Wilson (1988)*

# How Involvement is a Risk Factor

- Typologies
  - Fatalistic
  - Frustration
- Classification
  - Intimate/Domestic Lethal Violence-Suicide
  - Family Annihilation-Suicide

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# Homicide-Suicide in Law Enforcement Families

Developed and Presented by: **Vera Klinoff, M.S**  
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# Introduction

- Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) are at higher risk of committing H-S than civilians
  - Work related factors
  - Officer-involved domestic violence
  - Mental health factors

# Work-related factors

- Access to service-issued firearm
  - Most common method of H-S (Flynn et al., 2009)
- Work-related stress
- Command presence
  - Generalized aggressive responding (Griffin & Bernard, 2003)
  - Elevated risk of IPV

# Officer-Involved Domestic Violence (OIDV)

- Significantly higher intimate partner violence (IPV) than in civilian populations (Neidig et al., 1992; Ryan, 2000).
- IPV most salient precursor to H-S (Violanti, 2007; Violence Policy Center, 2008; Eliason, 2009).
- Lack of widespread statistics on OIDV

# Mental Health Factors

- Substance abuse (Violanti, 2003)
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (West et al., 2008)
- Depression (Chen et al., 2008)
- Suicide (O'Hara and Violanti, 2009)



## Our study

- 43 police-involved H-S cases
- June 2007-February 2014
- Identified through OVID-related website
  - Corroborated with other media sources
- Frequencies calculated for relevant characteristics

# Descriptive findings

- Mean age of victims: 35.77 (range = 83; SD = 18.44)
- Mean age of perpetrators: 46.60 (range = 56; SD = 13.26)
- State of highest incidences: New York
- Ethnicity: Non-Hispanic, white origin
- Perpetrators males, victims females
- **Relationship: married/recently divorced**
- Primary weapon: service firearm
- Location of act: inside the home
- Type of department: local
- **Motive: Divorce/estrangement**
- **History presence of domestic violence**
- **History of previous separations**
- No disciplinary history
- Rank level: patrol officer
- Employment status: employed
- Type of department: local
- Middle SES

# Discussion

- Risk factors consistent with civilians
- Domestic violence remains key predictor
- Preventive measures
  - Domestic violence policies in police departments
  - Behavioral health trainings
  - Peer trainings

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# Homicide-Suicide in the Elderly Population

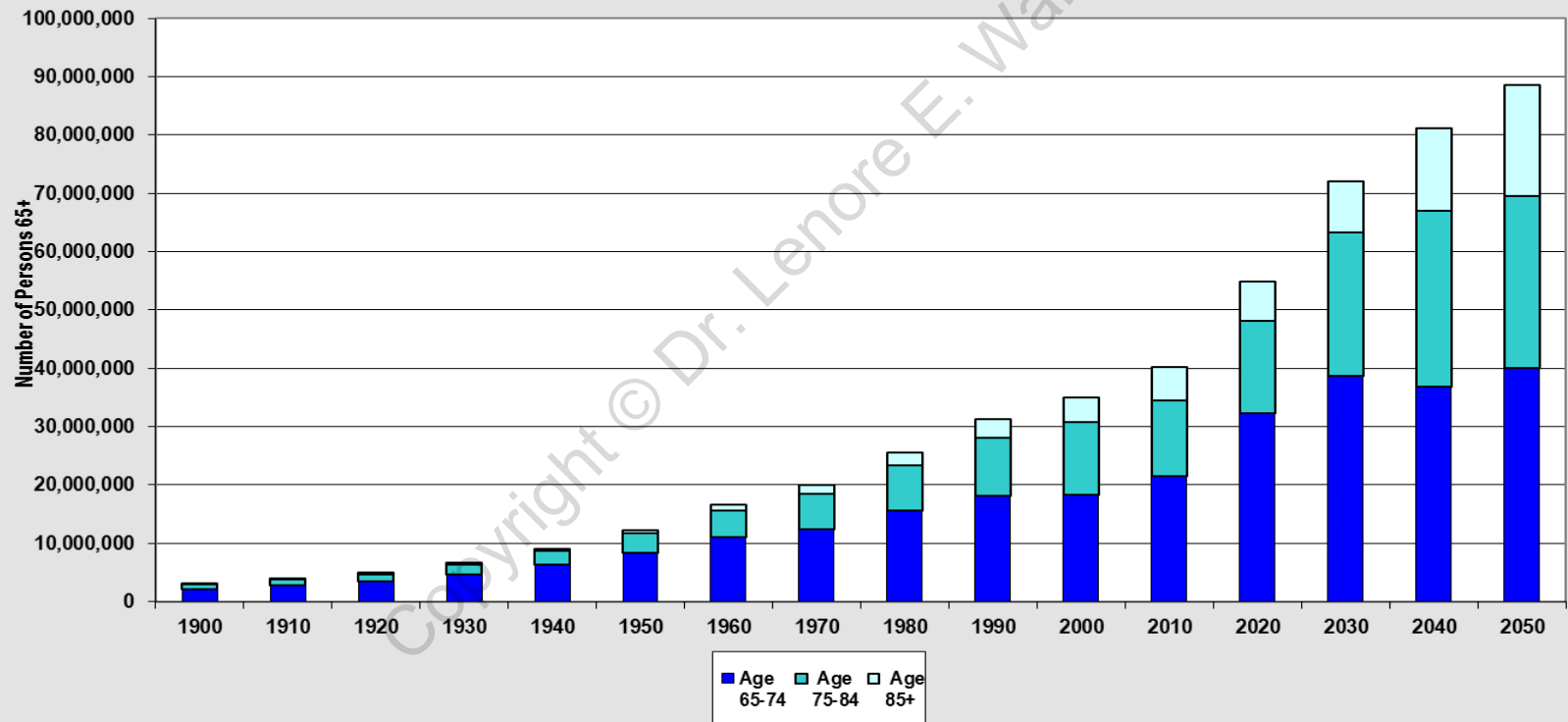
Developed by: **Laura Lundell, M.S**

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### Population 65+ by Age: 1900-2050

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census



# Outdated View

- Suicide pacts
- Altruistic killing
- Mutual consent
- Mercy killing



## **What we know: Relationship Variables**

- Long marriages where husband has dominant personality
- Husband as caregiver
- Wife with Alzheimer's or similar condition
- Health status of one or both is changing
- Pending separation (nursing home/assisted living facility)

# What we know: Relationship Variables

- Social isolation
- Marital conflict
- Husband with depressed mood\*

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# Future Directions



- Accurate classification
- Awareness
  - Family
  - Medical Professionals
  - Public
- Support

## DISCUSSANT

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