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## Fatality and Death Reviews

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This special issue of *Homicide Studies* is devoted to sharing knowledge and research about the growing role of fatality and death review initiatives as a violence prevention and intervention mechanism. These initiatives began to emerge in the 1970s and early 1980s, primarily in the United States in the area of child and infant deaths, and later in the 1990s, in response to domestic-violence-related deaths against women. While reasons for the emergence of different teams are varied, many grew out of the recognition that there were limited existing data or the capacity to collect such data that could help capture relevant and timely information needed to improve society's understanding of the individual, community, and societal factors associated with these violent lethal outcomes. Furthermore, it was recognized that without such information, it was difficult to subsequently improve society's response to violence.

In the call for articles for this special issue, we purposely defined our scope broadly, listing a range of possible topics including, but not limited to, issues surrounding data collection; challenges in the identification, selection, and composition of cases reviewed; measurement, identification, and tracking of risk factors; the development and uptake of recommendations; identified opportunities and strategies for system change and legislation reform for the prevention of deaths; and outcomes and measures of review impact including program evaluations. The call for articles was international in scope and advertised widely across multiple disciplines, professions, and sectors.

As the guest editor for this special issue, my goal was to attract submissions from all countries in which fatality or death review initiatives are common. While comprehensive international coverage was not possible, I am particularly pleased with the breadth of topics that are focused upon by the six articles in this issue and the quality of scholarship. Together, they capture the emphasis on domestic violence and child deaths as key foci of many recent review initiatives, although they are not the exclusive focus as we see from one article that focuses on deaths while in immigration custody. The order in which the articles are presented is strategic in nature. The first two articles provide some background to the fatality and death review movements in two countries. The next two articles focus on reviews related to specific populations. The final two articles deal with the challenging issue of understanding and assessing the impact of fatality and death review initiatives on violence and injury intervention and prevention.

In the first article, Neuilly provides a detailed description of the history of death investigations in the United States, contrasting the often distinct roles of the medical examiner and the coroner in these processes. Comparing also the emphasis of medico-legal practitioners on the individual case to the focus of public health epidemiologists

on aggregate trends and patterns, Neuilly contends that fatality/death reviews are an attempt to bridge the gap between these micro- and macro-level prevention efforts by highlighting the importance of valid and reliable death classifications. In doing so, fatality/death review teams bring in other actors to help contextualize the deaths from a variety of perspectives and disciplines and to emphasize multiple prevention goals. Focusing on the international and the local, this article links best practices in public health with the continued public concern of accountability over death. In doing so, she offers possible avenues to pursue in using inquests and related recommendations to address the problem of domestic violence and child deaths that can complement the fatality review process.

In the second article, which focuses on Australia where domestic violence death review teams have grown significantly in the past decade, Bugeja, Butler, Buxton, Ehrat, Hayes, McIntyre, and Walsh describe the origin and evolution of these initiatives in their country as well as the common objectives of the committees in the states in which they have been established. Similar to teams in other countries, their teams vary across jurisdictions and this article provides important detail on differences and similarities in how review teams operate, focusing on their legislative basis, structure, governance, key functions, reporting mechanisms, and outcomes. Their article draws attention to the important considerations that such teams must address when establishing their initiatives and implementing their review processes. In particular, emphasizing recommendations for systemic change as one of the more concrete outcomes of review teams, the article provides two case studies to demonstrate how the review process has led to the development and implementation of recommendations. The authors conclude by describing the establishment of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Network, which is an important development that will facilitate knowledge sharing among review teams in their country.

The third and fourth articles in this special issue focus on the role of fatality and death reviews and their impact on two important populations—the African American community and individuals in immigration custody. In the first article by Bent-Goodley, the crucial issue of cultural competence is discussed, focusing on Black women abused by men in the United States. Highlighting the importance of addressing cultural context adequately within the fatality/death review process, Bent-Goodley describes the various ways that the culture of the African American community, and specifically Black women, is shaped through their help-seeking behaviors, coping strategies, historical context, cultural values, and the socioeconomic barriers they face daily. Focusing on various components of domestic violence fatality review teams, the paper skillfully incorporates a case vignette to examine the application of the fatality review process in these areas through a cultural lens. Bent-Goodley concludes that through the adoption of a persistent, consistent, and authentic focus on domestic violence within the Black community, coupled with ongoing training in the area of cultural competence, fatality review teams can help to facilitate shared understandings of how to respond to domestic violence in particular communities and contexts before lethal violence occurs.

Highlighting the range of areas in which fatality/death reviews can serve as useful mechanisms for prevention and intervention, Powell, Weber, and Pickering take on the issue of deaths that occur in immigration custodial settings in Australia. Focusing on a subset of such cases that failed to be included in national data collection on “deaths in custody,” the authors argue that this omission means that opportunities to investigate these deaths as homicides or as the result of a lack of duty of care may be missed. Identifying what does prompt such deaths to be investigated, the authors examine their subset of cases in detail to establish how and why they should be considered and treated as deaths in custody in line with state coroners’ legislative responsibilities and, subsequently, in national monitoring of deaths in custody. They conclude by arguing that applying a “death in custody” label to immigration custody deaths does not necessarily mean that responsibility for the death is attributable to anyone in particular, although that may occur in some cases. Beyond identifying accountability where possible, such labels or classifications may help facilitate a systematic examination of factors that lead to such deaths which, in turn, can improve immigration policies and practices as well as the treatment of all human lives as equal.

Despite the fact that fatality and death reviews have existed for many decades, admittedly longer for some types of injury and violence than others, there is limited systematic research examining their impact on intervention and prevention. The final two articles grapple with this issue and the obstacles that may be faced when trying to understand the outcomes of these initiatives and the role they play in reducing various types of violence. In the fifth article by Storer, Lindhorst, and Starr, the ability of domestic violence fatality reviews to produce community-level changes is examined. Drawing from policy implementation scholars and focusing on one state-level review committee, the authors determine whether recommendations had an effect on priorities and practices that were operating in the community or related organizations. Drawing from survey responses from professionals who had participated in a domestic violence fatality review in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they found that countywide priorities were influenced by recommendations that arose from fatality reviews. However, there was less evidence that recommendations had been implemented at the organizational level. Recognizing their study occurred earlier in the domestic violence death review movement, the authors conclude by highlighting the continued importance of empirical research on the process and outcomes of fatality and death review initiatives.

The final article in the special issue also takes on the issue of evaluating the work of fatality and death review initiatives with a crucial focus on ethical issues. Banks, Albright, Broidy, Crandall, and Campos contend that no concrete ethical framework exists governing the work of domestic violence fatality review initiatives and so they begin to explore some of the ethical dilemmas faced by members of these teams at every stage of the review process. Using the American Evaluation Association’s guiding principles for program evaluation to frame their discussion, the authors identify various ethical conundrums associated with planning data collection, case review, and the reporting of findings by these committees. Focusing on team organization and case review methodology, they conclude by providing recommendations as to how teams

can address various ethical issues and to avoid misrepresentation of team findings and recommendations. Of the many challenges discussed are ensuring that teams are representative of the professions and agencies responding to domestic violence as well as establishing processes for selecting and identifying cases for review as well as data access and sharing.

As someone who has conducted research on social and legal responses to violence and homicide, I am keenly aware of the importance of systematic and rigorous research that examines the process and outcomes of initiatives that are meant to reduce or prevent violence. This experience, coupled with knowledge gained through my own participation as a member of a domestic violence death review committee, highlights for me the importance of the topics covered in this special issue and the crucial considerations that the authors bring to light when thinking about the progress that has been made by fatality and death review committees and where we are to go from here. The greater emphasis on domestic-violence-related deaths in this issue likely reflects the more recent growth of these initiatives in the past few decades whereas child death and infant mortality review committees have been around longer and have been subject to some, although not all, of the discussions contained in this issue. As we move forward, though, we must encourage ourselves and others to continue to carry out research on all types of fatality and death reviews, ensuring that our work is theoretically and methodologically grounded. In doing so, we can build on these six articles that have provided key foundational information and highlighted many of the future directions that this research must take.

In closing, I want to thank the editor of *Homicide Studies*, Wendy Regoeczi, for providing me with the opportunity to serve as guest editor for this special issue. By recognizing the importance of devoting a complete issue to this topic, attention has been drawn to necessary considerations surrounding the continued work of these initiatives and the need for more research in this area that would not have been possible otherwise. This effectively underscores the mandate of *Homicide Studies* as a journal that bridges the gap between academics and practitioners in the same way that many fatality and death review teams bridge the gap between individuals from a variety of sectors and professions responding to injury and death. I would also like to thank the very dedicated group of reviewers who provided timely, comprehensive, and expert reviews of all manuscripts received. The process of guest editing a special issue felt seamless because of their professionalism, and for that, I am truly grateful. Finally, I thank the authors of the six articles contained in this issue for providing our readership with an improved understanding of the role of fatality and death review teams in violence intervention and prevention, including achievements to date as well as the challenges that remain. We hope that this special issue encourages further discussion, exploration, and examination of this topic by more academics and practitioners from more countries in the future.

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