



*Transforming  
lives for stronger  
communities*

Child Aware Conference -  
Preventing Filicide -  
What can professionals and families do?

Jo Cavanagh OAM

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# Filicide - when parents kill their children

Darcy Freeman



Luke Batty



Farquharson boys



# What does the research tell us

Australia has a high rate of filicide deaths - one child under 18 is killed by a parent every fortnight; the deaths form 20-25% of all domestic homicides.

Deaths are associated with a **complex** constellation of intersecting factors including intimate partner violence, mental health, drug and alcohol problems, social isolation and parental separation.

Why Parents Kill Children: Understanding Filicide, Brown, Tyson and Fernandez Arias. (017) papers from Second "Addressing Filicide" International Conference June 2015 Monash Centre Prato Tuscany Italy, forthcoming for 2017

Brown T, Tyson D, Fernandez Arias P (2014) Filicide and Parental Separation and Divorce. Child Abuse Review 23: 79-88

Australian Institute of Criminology, forth coming publication of National Filicide Report.



# Practice based research findings

Change our understanding of the impact and risks of parental separation.....

.....parental separation is not a benign adult event: it is a non-linear process involving multiple decisions, emotions, actions and actors over time (Enander 2008). Complexity theory is the study of nonlinear dynamic systems (Levy 2000). Complexity is a useful metaphor to understand the dynamic context of parental separation. When there is contention and conflict around separation and responsibility for children efforts to solve one problem can lead to new problems, and the possibility of the problem re-emerging in a different form.

Cavanagh (2017) Chapter 12 Why Parents Kill Children: Understanding Filicide, Brown, Tyson and Fernandez Arias.



# Expert Reports & Inquiries

## Opportunities for policy and/or practice

***Responding to post-separation violence*** and specifically developing an alignment between concerns for the harm to children identified through child protection, family support services, the specialist family violence sector and decisions made in the Family Law arena. **This is currently the weakest point in family violence intervention.**

*Witness statement of Professor Cathy Humphreys  
Royal Commission into Family Violence  
July 2015*



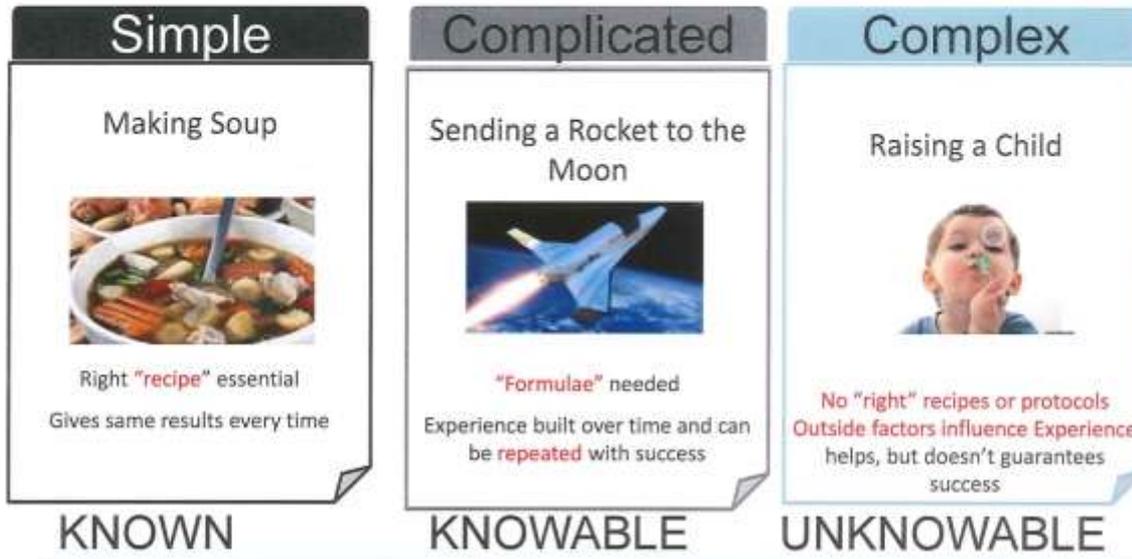
Parental Separation as a Child Protection & risk for family violence issue?



# Understanding Complexity

Brenda Zimmerman 2015

## *There Are Several Types of Problems*



# What can we do?

Research - health and mental health problems lead potential perpetrators to access GP's and health services

Who asks - what is happening in your relationships?

If separated - who is supporting you?

If a parent - how do you get on with the other parent? Do you see your children? How would the other parent describe you? How do you describe the other parent?

Can I introduce you to professional family services?



# What can we do?

Public and media perceptions - “he is a good bloke!”

Coroners reports - family and friends did not believe the parent would hurt their children.

For children to be safe, we need to help the public and health professionals reframe understanding of separation.



# What can we do?

Legislation and implementation nuances practice.

The best interests of the child

Join up the Child Protection and Family Law knowledge and expertise.

A systems focus beyond identifying the protective parent.

Both parents and step parents must be assessed and extended family enrolled in the safety net.



# 7 Step Action Plan

1. Raise awareness separation can be a time of high risks to safety and wellbeing.
2. Keep children visible when either parent is distressed
3. Encourage health professionals to ask questions about relationships
4. Encourage health professionals to refer to family and relationship services
5. Expand use of quality assured Children's Contact Services when violence has occurred
6. Earlier intervention & effective response to family violence - Victoria's landmark directions and post weekend safety triage
7. Know prevention is possible through family and community support.



# Let's not miss opportunities to protect Questions?

