



# Domestic violence takes deadly toll in B.C.

By Dirk Meissner (http://www.nationalnewswatch.com/author/dirk-meissner-the-canadian-press/) — Sep 3 2014

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VICTORIA - The pending seven-year anniversary of the murder-suicide of a Victoria-area father who killed his six-year-old son, his wife and her parents before taking his own life will provide a reality check for anti-violence groups pushing to increase safety for women and children in British Columbia.

The Ending Violence Association of B.C. and Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, B.C.'s representative for children and youth, are expected to reveal on Wednesday an overview of changes they've been waiting for to protect families from domestic violence.

On Sept. 4, 2007, Christian Lee was stabbed to death by his father, Peter Lee, who also murdered his wife Sunny, and her parents in a homicidal rage over the family's breakup.

Lee, who weeks earlier tried to kill his wife in a staged car accident, was out on bail and under court order to stay away from the family home, when he climbed through a basement window in Oak Bay, B.C., and committed the murders before killing himself.

EVA executive director Tracy Porteous will speak during the event. Survivors of domestic violence, including a relative of Vernon, B.C.'s Gakhal family, victims of Canada's largest domestic violence related massacre in 1996, will attend the event.

The B.C. Liberal government has faced constant pressure to toughen its approach to domestic-violence issues as assaults and deaths of women and children continue. Some police departments facing cost pressures have cut domestic violence units to save money.

Turpel-Lafond has been calling on the government since 2009 to create domestic violence courts.

The recommendation was a major theme in two Turpel-Lafond reports that reviewed the homicides involving the Allan Schoenborn and Lee families.

Turpel-Lafond said earlier this year her files reveal 5,000 incidents in 18 months where domestic violence was a factor in a child welfare report.

Her report into the April 2008 murders of three Schoenborn children in Merritt, B.C., by their mentally ill father, concluded the children could have been saved if the province's social safety net was working properly.

A coroner's jury in the Lee family inquest made several recommendations in December 2009, including calling for the creation of a provincewide domestic violence unit, tighter bail restrictions for accused offenders and the development of a public domestic violence campaign that includes an elementary school program.

In 1996, nine members of Gakhal and Saran families were gunned down by the husband of Rajwar Gakhal in Vernon, B.C. The shooting occurred after the woman told police and those around her about the physical abuse she was experiencing at the hands of her husband.

Last spring, Attorney General Suzanne Anton said the government spends \$70 million annually on anti-violence measures, including initiating court reforms and police domestic-violence units, in its effort towards a violence-free B.C.

Anton said the government provides 160 victims-services programs across the province, including funding 100 transition houses and numerous counselling programs.

She said the province is examining the potential of offering dedicated court services for victims of domestic violence beyond the services already operating in Kamloops, Kelowna and Duncan.

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