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'Cloak of secrecy' around domestic violence has B.C. cops keeping mum about murder-suicide perpetrator

By Katie DeRosa, Victoria Times Colonist April 30, 2015

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Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, B.C.'s representative for children and youth, criticizes “the cloak of secrecy” around domestic violence cases.

Photograph by: Lyle Stafford , Victoria Times Colonist files

VICTORIA — Saanich police are refusing to confirm who was responsible for a murder-suicide in a Cordova Bay house last week, a move family-safety advocates say further stigmatizes domestic violence and raises questions around who is accountable to victims.

The family of 56-year-old Julie Khurana, who is also known by her maiden name, Julie Cox, told the Times Colonist that a coroner’s report revealed she was killed by her husband, Peter Khurana, dying April 21 as a result of blunt force trauma to the head. They were also told that Peter Khurana, 58, then set fire to the home before hanging himself.

Saanich police and the Vancouver Island Integrated Major Crime Unit will not confirm that information. Saanich police spokesman Sgt. Steve Eassie said that because no criminal charges have been laid, both individuals have privacy rights.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, B.C.’s representative for children and youth, said the public deserves a higher level of accountability to prevent similar violence from happening again.

“I’m very concerned about the cloak of secrecy around these domestic-violence cases,” she said. “To say that it’s a private matter is exactly what’s

wrong in domestic violence. These are not private matters. This is an issue of public safety for vulnerable citizens, particularly women.”

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Tracy Porteous, executive director of Ending Violence B.C., said releasing information about the case could give the public information about possible warning signs of domestic violence, such as escalating abuse, drug or alcohol use on the part of the abuser, or the victim becoming increasingly isolated from family and friends.

“One very important public service the police could provide in the aftermath of these kinds of tragedies is to release the details [of] the months leading up to the death,” Porteous said. “Staying silent about domestic violence, which has historically thrived in that sort of silence, isn’t serving anyone. If we keep these things hidden, nothing changes.”

Julie Khurana’s brother-in-law, Kelly Tarpley, who lives in Palm City, Florida, said Julie called police to her home several times when her husband was violent. He would leave but was typically back by the next day.

Saanich police again cited privacy rights in refusing to confirm whether they had been called to the home for domestic-violence complaints.

The case was not referred to the regional domestic violence unit, which handles high-risk cases. Turpel-Lafond wants to know why.

“How did they miss this one? ... Who is responsible to look at this?” she asked. “Why was that case not before that [specialized] unit, and what can we learn from this case to make sure that the next woman will be safe?”

The regional domestic violence unit was created in 2010 after a review of a 2007 Oak Bay murder-suicide. Peter Lee killed his wife, Sunny Park, her parents and his six-year-old son, Christian, before taking his own life. In the weeks before the murders, Park had complained about domestic violence to three police departments, but nobody was able to protect her.

Tarpley said there were many signs pointing to Peter Khurana’s history of violence against women. He said Julie Khurana, who was from Louisville, Kentucky, had few friends in Victoria and was isolated in the house.

Peter Khurana’s first wife, Irene Khurana, told the Times Colonist last week that her ex-husband had a violent temper and she had tried to get a restraining order against him in 2004. The couple divorced in 2006.

Peter Khurana was charged with assault causing bodily harm against Julie Khurana in December 2013, when the couple was living in Mackenzie, B.C.

He pleaded guilty to the lesser offence of assault and was sentenced to one day in jail and one year of probation. He was released on conditions that included attending counselling and avoiding alcohol and drugs. He was not allowed to contact his wife.


He breached those conditions in January 2014, but the couple continued to live together in Greater Victoria.

In a murder-suicide at a Cadboro Bay house on Jan. 18, 2011, Saanich police also refused to confirm that 72-year-old Erich Mueller stabbed his wife, 66-year-old Kathy Mueller, to death and then killed himself. The information came out months later in a B.C. coroner’s report.

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