

What we know about Child Homicide

Extracted from 'Lives Cut Short' (Connolly & Doolan, 2007)



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What can we learn from child homicide research?

- Is child homicide predictable?
- What does research tell us about incidence?
- Are there common victim characteristics?
- Are there common perpetrator characteristics?
- How can this knowledge aid service development?

Predictability

- Child death by homicide a rare event
- Rarity renders probability of accurate prediction extremely low
- Empirical evidence supporting intergenerational transmission of abuse is low – but Genetics adding knowledge Caspi et al (2002)
- Significant numbers of child homicides are single assault fatalities
- Disclosure of abuse may heighten risk

Child Homicide - Incidence

- History of under-identification
- Race and class bias in reporting
- 57,000 annually worldwide
- Rates 2-3 times higher in low-middle income countries
- 3,500 annually in OECD
- 11% of all homicides
- Over half countries improving
- Variations in sub-populations
- Associated with other domestic violence

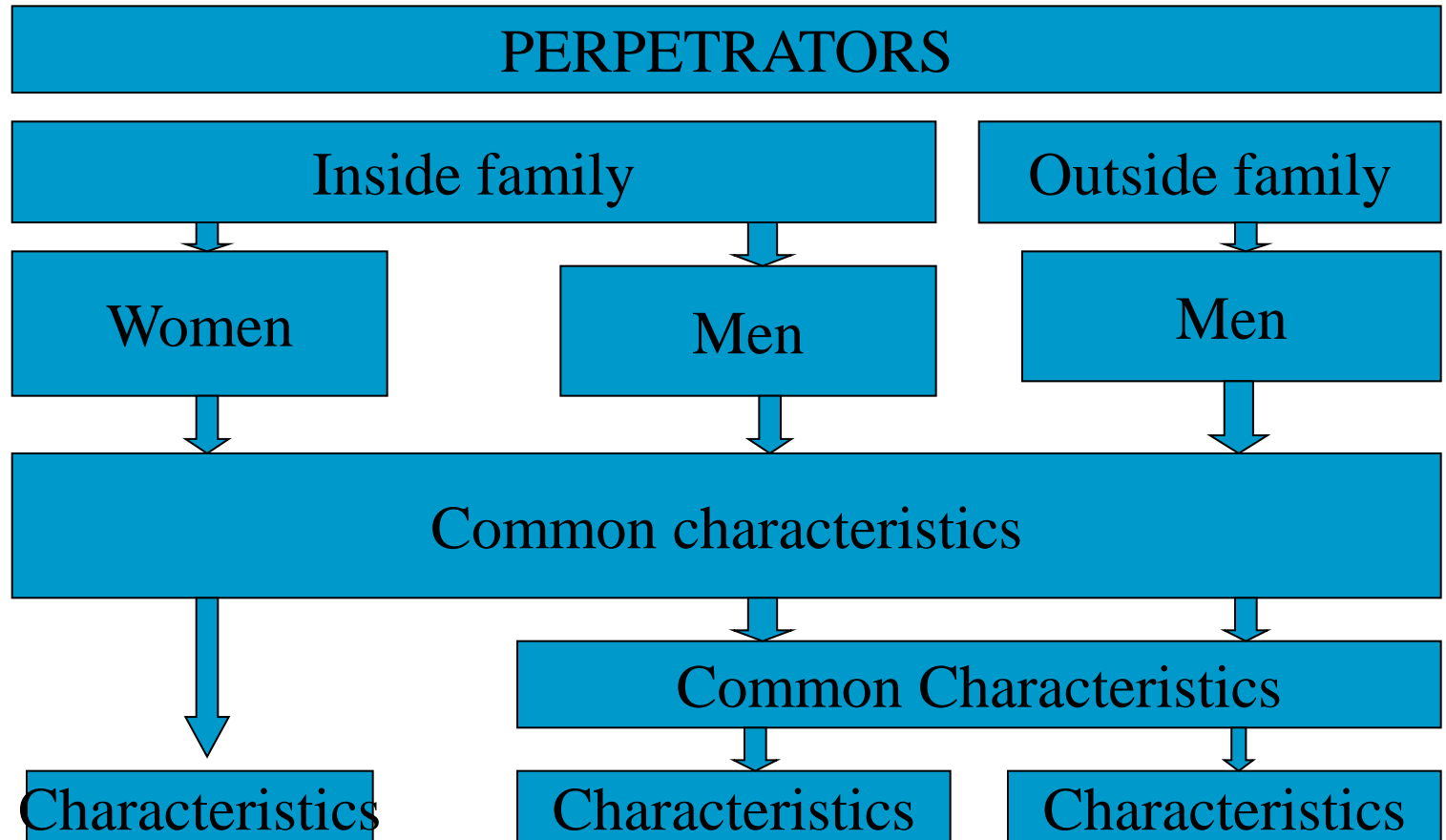
Child Characteristics

- Children < 1 year most highly victimized
- More victims 0-1 than any other age year
- Victims 0-4 double those 5-14
- Elevated risk for Black and ethnic minority children
- Slightly more boys than girls
- Place and status in family may be more important than gender

Child Characteristics (Cont'd)

- Youngest or only child more often
- Premature/low birth weight
- Sometimes a physical defect or 'different' or 'difficult'
- Battery greatest cause
- Risk declines with age
- 25% - 80% known to child protection authorities

Perpetrator Typology





Common Perpetrator Characteristics

- Poor
- Low education
- Young
- Poor mental health
- History of substance misuse
- Victim of family violence as a child
- Early offending or non-compliance



Common Characteristics – Men

- Regularly unemployed
- Unemployed at time of killing
- Had been in public care
- Had more than 3 caregivers
- Started alcohol/drugs as a child
- Started offending as a child
- History of offending as an adult

Perpetrator Characteristics - Women

- Had children young & in quick succession
- Late term or no ante-natal care
- Sole parent
- Socially isolated
- Victim of family violence as an adult
- Raised with harsh discipline and parental strife
- Suicide attempts or ideation

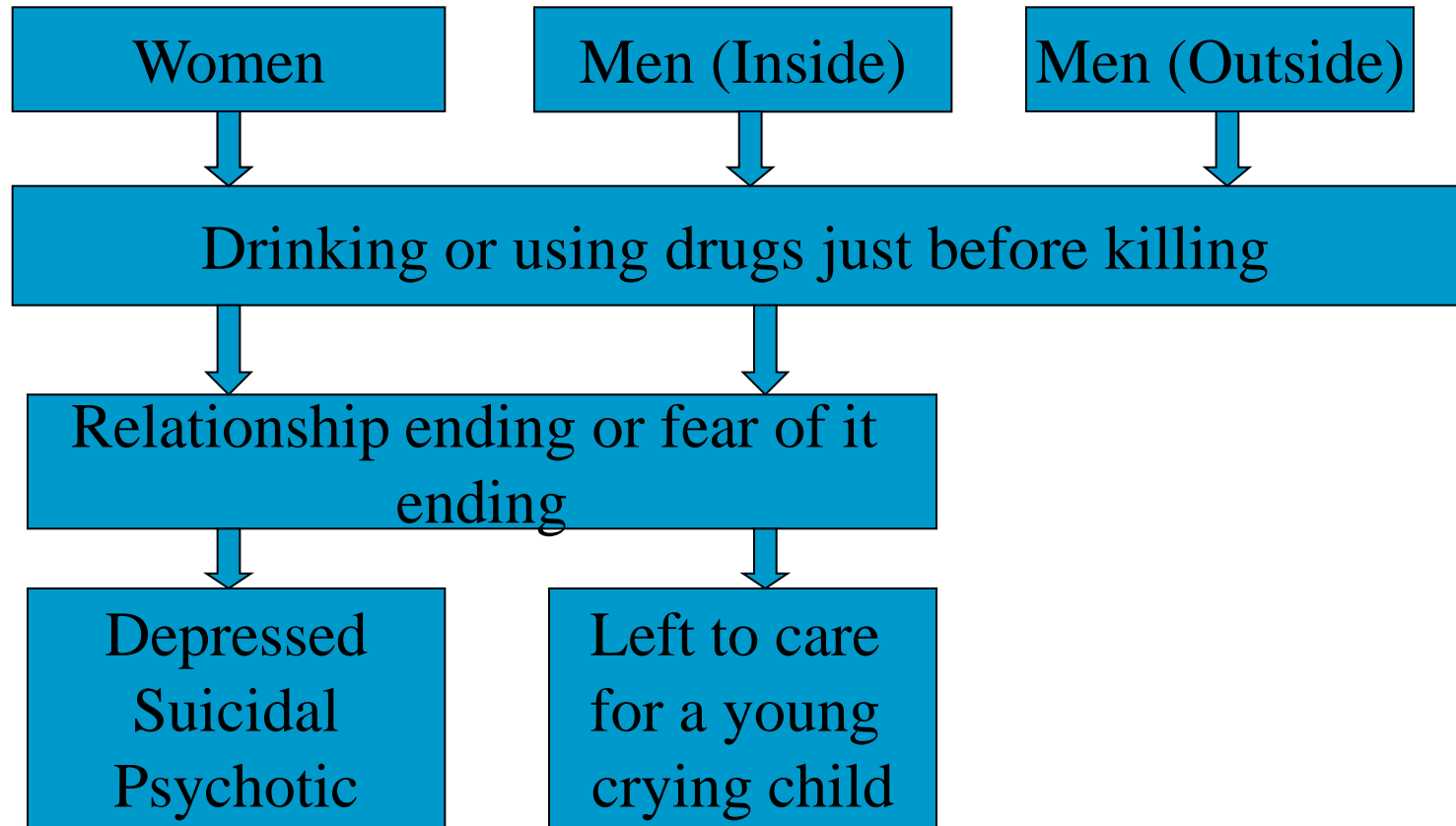
Perpetrator Characteristics – Men who kill inside the family

- Stepfather
- In a de facto relationship with primary caregiver
- History of abusing current or previous partners
- History of abusing children in their care
- History of abusing child they killed

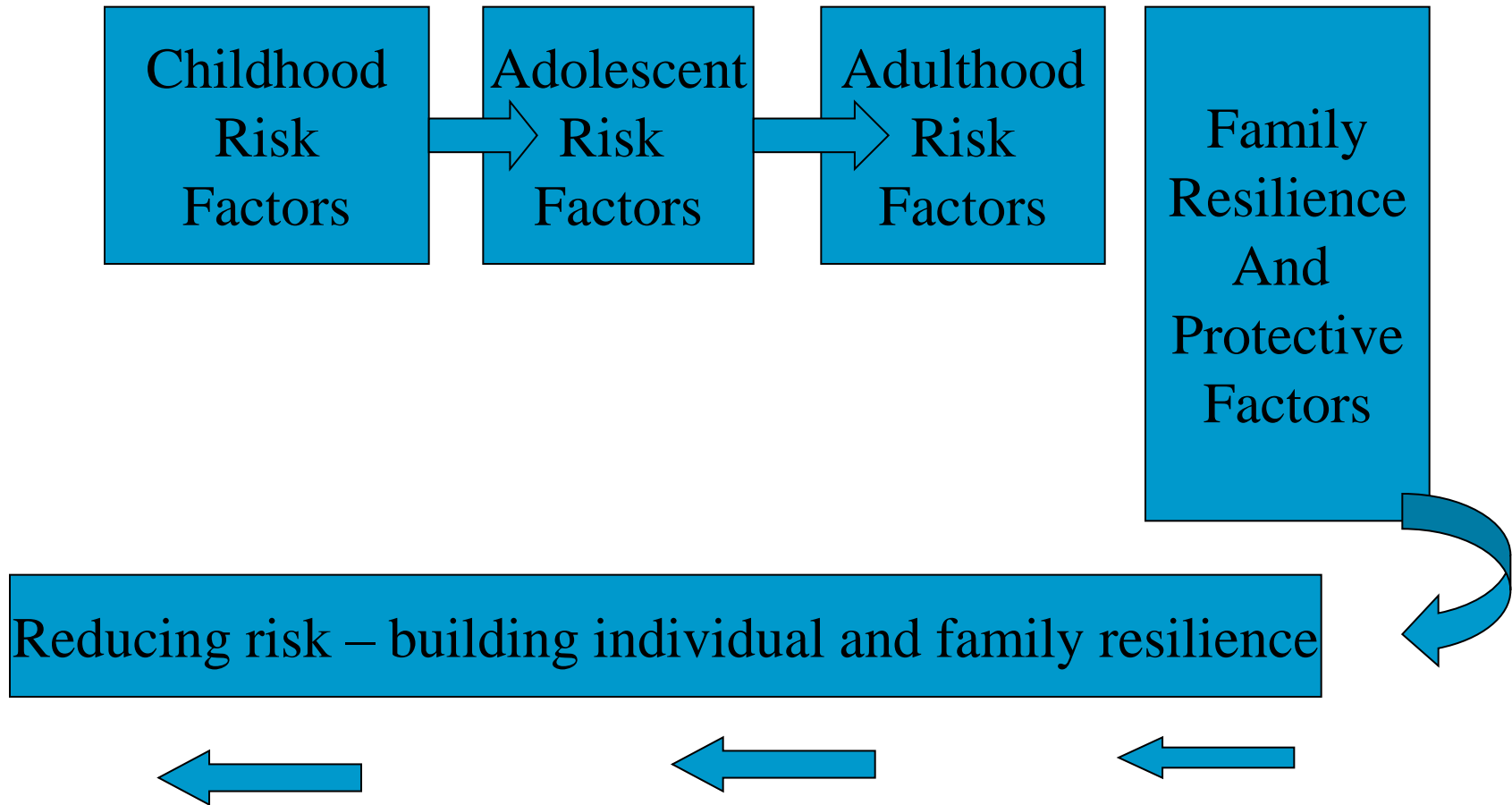
Perpetrator Characteristics – Men who kill outside the family

- Single at time of killing
- Violent to other children as a child
- Began offending before 12
- Sexually abused as child
- Convicted of serious and/or sexual assaults

Events prior to child's death



Vulnerability and Resilience across life-course



Adversity Accumulation

Childhood risk

Harsh discipline
Poverty
Family violence
Victimization
Public care
Multiple carers
Sexually abused
Submissive/aggres.
Disassociation
Violence normal
Anxious/hyper
Poor attachment
Boundary issues
Poor development
Poor role models

Adolescent risk

Poor peer r'ships
Low school attain.
Prem.
Independence
Early pregnancy
Truancy
Sexual victim
Offender before 15
Poor impulse c'trol
Substance misuse
Mental health issue
(anorexia, conduct)
Poor parenting
modeling

Adulthood risk

Abusive r'ship
Multiple r'ships
Poor conflict skills
Inconsistent
parenting
Mental health issues
Drug/alcohol abuse
Suicide ideation
Bonding issues
Reg. unemployed
Offending history
Violence perpetrator
Early parenthood
Social isolation
Poor access to
resources



Family Resilience & Protective factors

Adequate housing

Meaningful
employment

Independence & self-
reliance

Connectedness –
culture/community

Connectedness –
health/education
services

Changes to belief
systems, especially
about violence

Timely access to
quality services

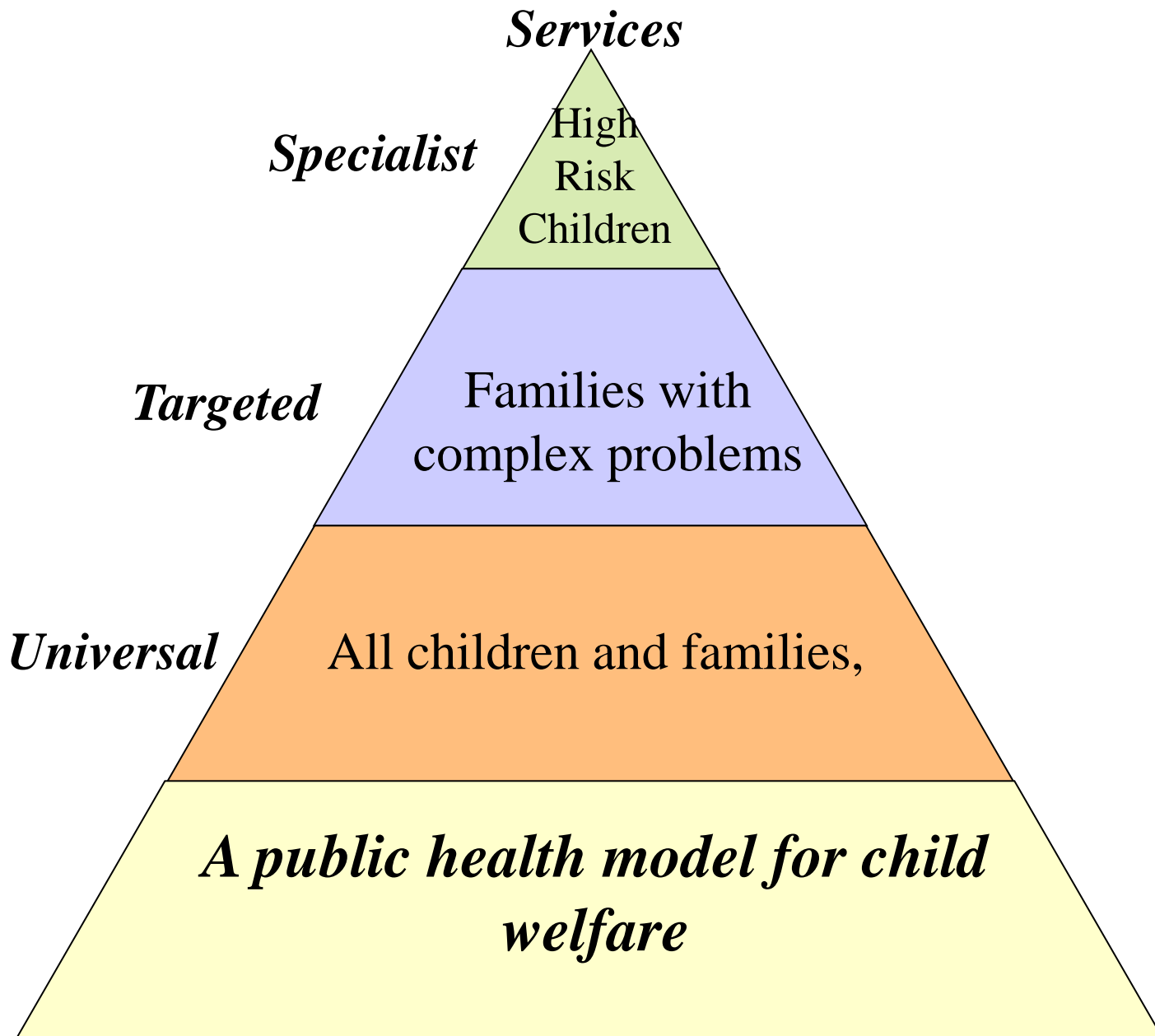
Good assessment and
treatment of parental
issues

Role models/mentors



Strategic Approach

- Uses what is known about risk and a family needs framework to guide sector development
- Builds services across the life-course
- Focuses on improving children's general quality of life over time
- Recognizes how services need to integrate – right service at right time



References

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