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Introduction

This chapter considers the implications of the findings for the many different groups of professionals repeatedly referred to in previous chapters. It suggests a way forward in terms of knowledge, awareness, attitude and approach. Given the number and diversity of cases identified and the numerous categories to which they belong, it would be delusional to think one has a solution for ending the carnage of all filicide and familicide killings. The principal objective nevertheless is to formulate a professional and competent attitude and approach which will at least alert and better prepare professionals in cases that have the potential for such killings.

The chapter is going to concentrate on three predominant and related categories among the overall number of cases. In the first category, children are killed by one parent (more likely to be the father) in response to the revelation, announcement or conviction of an affair or new relationship, by the other. The motivation and driving force are predominantly revenge-retaliation, and the killing is premeditated and swiftly executed. In the second related category (more likely the parent is to be a mother), the revelation, announcement or conviction of or about an affair or new relationship triggers off a crisis of such magnitude within the parental partnership, that the offended party has a deteriorating mental health crisis that leads to her killing her child. There may or may not be an element of revenge-retaliation in such killings, but they are less likely to be an instant response to the revelation of third party involvement. In the third much broader
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category, which may be related to and/or include the other two, the perpetrator experiences a gradual and unmistakable loss of power and control at the same time as the partner’s independence and influence within family and/or community are increasing.

At the end of this final chapter, the knowledge base for frontline practitioners will be considerably extended far beyond essential statistics, and their understanding of the relational and situational dynamics in many filicide cases will be enhanced. These two advances are key to the ultimate objective of ensuring the right attitude and approach.

Common themes

Jackie’s tragedy and the death of her children very much belongs to that category in Table 5.1 (pp. 74–83) of fathers who kill their children and then commit suicide. Although there was some ongoing involvement by specialists in the disability of the older child, there were no childcare workers involved in this case, no history of child abuse or neglect, poverty and deprivation, and no calls for help because a marriage was failing. That might lead one to think that the case has little to offer in terms of learning. But it is actually a highly relevant case, as its most prominent features are identical to those in so many of the other male perpetrator filicide cases included in this study. Those features include: a once stable marriage lasting well over five years; a family well integrated into the local community; good maternal and/or paternal grandparent support; mother more involved and influential in the care of the children; father traditionally exerting excessive control and power in the relationship and in the running of the home; mother steadily acquiring more status and influence within community; the involvement of a third party (disclosure of an affair, or pronouncement of a new relationship); one parent seeking separation and divorce; domestic violence; inadequate police response.

Given this level of similarity, many of the lessons learnt in Jackie’s story should be transferable to a substantial number of other cases. Here is one, the main difference being that the perpetrator of the killing was the mother. The information which follows is based upon the overview of the SCR report, inquest proceedings and reported witness statements in both inquest and trial. As with Jackie’s case,