



Photo of *In Control: Dangerous Relationships and how they end in murder* taken on a rainy day in Helsinki. Autumn is on its way.

Jane Monckton Smith, author of *In Control: Dangerous Relationships and How They End In Murder*, sheds light on intimate partner violence in coercive relationships, and the structure and patterns that lead to murder. Monckton Smith effectively outlines the 8 stages that are present in these types of homicides, making it painstakingly clear that these deaths are not 'isolated incidents', nor are they 'crimes of passion' where someone 'just lost it', but they are deliberate and well thought out acts.

"Femicide (the killing of women because they are women) is a serious public health and criminal justice issue. According to the UNODC men commit 90 per cent of all homicides, but they also make up some 80 per cent of its victims and this statistic is historically stable. In intimate partner homicides, however, women comprise 82 per cent of victims, with men the majority of killers"

— Monckton Smith, *In Control* (2021, page xiii)

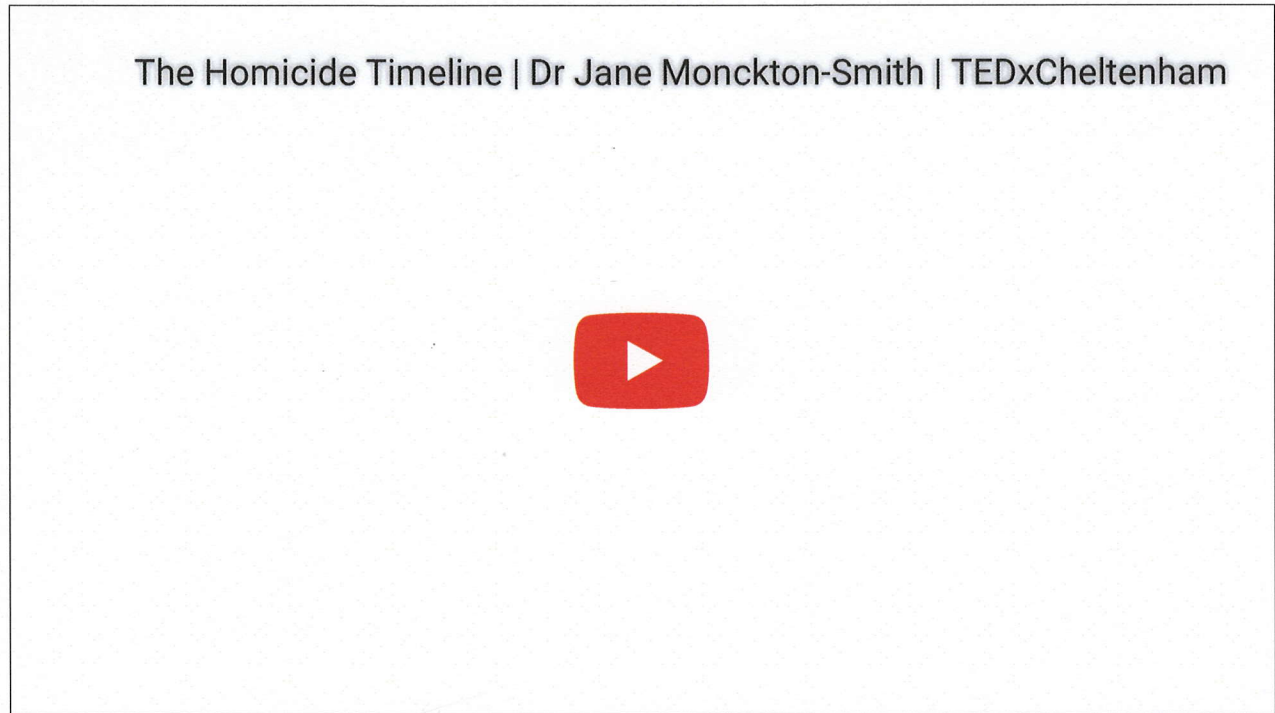
The recorded number of women killed by an intimate partner is high, yet the real number will be even higher as many are left unreported.

Monckton Smith invites readers to critically engage with the topic of homicide and intimate partner killings. Based on her experience as a police officer and years of academic research on this topic, she encourages people to flip common myths and narratives on its head. One of her first cases as a newly qualified police officer was a 999 call to a house where a woman had been hit in the head by her partner with a lump hammer. Monckton Smith was surprised to find that the woman was refusing to leave the house and go with the paramedics. Her initial thought was '*why will this woman not get in the ambulance?*', and this will perhaps be the thought of many reading this as well. Yet, years of investigating this topic has changed Monckton Smith's thinking into the question: *Why was it in her best interest not to leave?*

The answer to this is very complex. But ultimately, leaving a relationship based on coercive control can be as dangerous as staying in it.

Monckton Smith has identified an 8-stage homicide timeline which consists of: 1) a history of control and stalking, 2) the commitment whirlwind, 3) Living with control, 4) Trigger, 5) Escalation, 6) A change in thinking, 7) Planning, and finally 8) Homicide and/or suicide. Each chapter in *In Control* focuses on one of these stages, and

through the use of real life examples she convincingly shows how this time line plays out in femicide cases, time and again.



Importantly, Monckton Smith shows that killers can come from all backgrounds and walks of life, yet when you analyse what happened in coercive relationships that ended in murder, these 8 stages are omnipresent. Sadly, the majority of cases are retrospective accounts, and a large part of the book is a plea from Monckton Smith to take serious the dynamics that are at play in these relationships, and to have a greater recognition in society that these murders are in fact structural and not isolated incidents. If there is a greater understanding of these 8 stages, hopefully in the future coercion can be recognised before it reaches stage 8.

Like Monckton Smith, Sara Knox has an academic interest in murder and the cultural stories that are created around this topic. In a recent interview on *The Death Studies Podcast* she notes that some stories are dominant and omnipresent, whereas others are very much silenced or ignored. Murder, and particularly, serial killers, speak to the public imagination. As a consequence, there are very specific narratives that are constructed in popular culture and the media, that all reinforce these stories.