

Risk Assessment: Exploring the success of DIAL and its capabilities in comparison to other methods (for example, DASH)

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Risk Assessment: Brief Outline

- To guide the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004) the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, 2005) produced 'Assessing and Managing Risk in Context of Policing Domestic Violence'. Section five outlines 'effective risk assessment and risk management processes, including risk identification system; risk categorisation system; and risk categorisation system accompanied by numerical scoring (ACPO, 2005; Edwards, 2012).
- Research into the ACPO report identified 10 key influencing risks regarding the suspect and 5 regarding the victim, in terms of future abuse (Hoyle, 2005; Richards, 2003; Richards, 2004). Furthermore the findings provided material surrounding SPECSS (Separation, Pregnancy, Escalation, Community Isolation, Stalking/harassment and Sexual abuse) and RAPA (Remove, Avoid, Reduce and Accept) (Richards, 2003b) all of which embody principles of current formal risk assessments (for example, DASH and DIAL).
- In essence, risk assessments aim to structurally identify victims most at risk of future harm (Weisz, Tolman & Saunders, 2000). The three primary functions of formal risk assessments:
 - Allow organised processes to acquire information from victims, starting an evidence documentation trail (Robinson, 2004).
 - Can reduce repeated incidents and provide early identification of those who are more vulnerable, saving future costs (Robinson, 2004).
 - Provide documentation and evidence, assisting agency frameworks (such as MARAC), through contributing to an overall perspective of each incident. Sharing information allows agencies to address those considered most at risk (Robinson, 2004).

Summary of Main Findings

- Examples of risk assessment tools which have been used within police forces:
 - DIAL (Domestic Investigation Arrest Log; or Domestic Intelligence Assessment Log)
 - DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment)
 - MeRIT (Merseyside Risk Indicator Toolkit)
 - SARA (Spousal Assault Risk Assessment)
 - DAS (Danger Assessment Scale)
 - National Intelligence Model (NIM)
- All models incorporate a checklist against proven risks which may result in further/future harm of the victim/s. Although differing in quantity and type of questions asked, they can all be considered to include similar essential details (for example drug abuse, alcohol abuse, violence level, former convictions) (Weisz, Tolman & Saunders, 2000).
- Formal risk assessments create an overall 'score' of a domestic incident, which is used to decide if cases should be reviewed within MARAC (NPJA, 2008). Categorisation of incidents (for example standard, medium, high and very high risk or MeRIT's bronze, silver and gold) identify the level of risk the victim is currently exposed to. If the level of risk reaches the predefined threshold, the case will proceed to a MARAC. However some cases may proceed to a MARAC even if a case does not reach the predefined threshold based on certain aspects (such as possibility of future violence or high levels of isolation).
- Comparison of risk assessment models against forces' performance provides difficulties in ascertaining reliable measurable data. Whilst the majority of forces apply the DASH model of formal risk assessment (HMIC, 2014), fluctuation of performance levels ensues (HMIC, 2015) ; with human error being commonly responsible for under-performance (HMIC, 2015). Additionally, some forces do not hold all relevant information on formal risk assessments (HMIC, 2015).
- However, research discussions generally surround different method types of risk assessment through evaluating 'best' approach; often arriving at the 'clinical versus actuarial'. Outlined by the Authorised Professional Practise (APP, 2016) the three categories from which risk assessment stem are:
 - **Unstructured Clinical Judgement:** An individual assessor of risk - which is prone to biases, thus lacking accountability.
 - **Actuarial:** The application of mathematical modelling, which determines risk factors. Whilst accurate in identifying repeat possibilities of domestic abuse, it can be considered inflexible and ignorant to specific contexts.
 - **Structure Professional Judgement:** An assessor is supported by a structural tool that identifies relevant risk factors. This process is currently used in UK forces.

Gaps in Knowledge

- Due to Staffordshire being the only documented police force currently using the DIAL risk assessment (HMIC, 2015), a lack of data exists for comparison of success regarding this risk assessment tool.
- The 2015 HMIC vulnerability report highlighted demand for improvement of risk assessments within police forces. Apart from certain forces being considered 'unreliable' in identifying child abuse, majority of other criticisms can be considered human 'error' i.e. 'incompletion' of assessments.
- Stanley and Humphreys (2014) state that risk assessments can only be considered to be as "good as the information that informs them" (80). The completion of formal risk assessments requires the human evaluation of incidents. Therefore, human judgement and error in compiling risk assessments is a target for further research.
- Significant examination exists surrounding formal risk assessment criteria and their known value in combating domestic violence. However limited research exists in direct comparison of formal risk assessment tools used in UK police forces (for example DIAL vs. DASH).
- Utilising data from the (2015) HMIC report, comparison of formal risk assessments and their successes cannot be easily determined. Whilst a force rated 'good' may use the DASH tool another may not. There are two stages of risk assessments those which occur in the control room (for example THRIVE) and those which occur through formal visitation (for example DASH or DIAL). There is a need to better understand the relationship between these two stages.
- A lack of research surrounding victim perspectives and outcomes of risk assessments is apparent. Although formal risk assessments are police policy, the victim may not require/want the process to proceed.

Research Methods

- Research suggests that a shift towards actuarial (statistical) methods are transforming the manner in which future domestic incidents will be assessed (Hoyle, 2008). These methods provide similar (if not improved) results compared with clinical risk assessment practice (Hoyle, 2008).
- The application of epidemiological surveys can be seen throughout risk assessment methodologies (Richards, 2003; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). This type of surveying method helps identify pattern, cause and result of a particular topic. Research methods further encompass three areas of epidemiological survey, including prospective research, retrospective research and cross-sectional research (Borum et al, 1999).
- The use of large-scale data samples has been demonstrated in driving understanding, development and construction of multiple risk assessments. Sheridan and Roberts (2011), analysed 1,565 stalking victims, worldwide, using a population data collection sample. However, the inflexibility within actuarial methods of risk assessments has demonstrated an inability to account for specific contexts (i.e. not addressing all necessary risk factors).
- Although disagreements in approaches (clinical vs. actuarial) are often addressed, the use of risk assessments as a tool is considered essential. A planned and structured approach towards identifying risk promises improvements within any given police forces' ability to reduce domestic violence (Hoyle, 2008; Clear & Cadora, 2001).

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