

Vulnerability

Identification and assessment of
vulnerability and risk in domestic
abuse across multiple agencies.

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Vulnerability: Brief Outline

When working with victims of domestic violence and abuse, the first key principle to follow is to **enquire safely** about violence or abuse. Safe enquiry means ensuring the potential perpetrator is not and will not easily become aware of the enquiry. It is a cornerstone of best practice in domestic abuse. Safe enquiry has been developed following circumstances in which women and their children have been placed at risk of serious harm (including homicide) due to perpetrators becoming aware that professionals knew about their behaviour (LGA and ADASS 2015; ACPO 2005).

Using risk assessment tools and exercising professional judgement

- Risk indicator tools such as the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification Checklist (DASH-RIC) and the Barnardos Multi Agency Domestic Violence Risk Identification Threshold Scale, are associated with many safeguarding adults procedures and can assess the level of risk in domestic abuse or violence situations. Tools can aid judgement and decision-making about the level of risk to individuals and families, how risk might be reduced or managed, how identified needs should be met, and who should be involved. When properly used, the tools should lead to robust risk management that protects and promotes the safety and well-being of the people affected by the abuse.
- Risk assessment should draw on multiple forms of information and evidence about the perpetrator's background, any prior incidents of domestic abuse, and take into account the evidence of the person experiencing the abuse, their level of fear, and any coercive control and psychological abuse (Barnardos, 2007, LGA and ADASS 2015).

Staffordshire Police Force adopted a set of principles known by the mnemonic 'THRIVE' (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and Engagement) to assess the likely threat or risk to an individual. The operator will ask questions of the caller using the THRIVE principles. They will also apply professional judgement to identify whether the caller presents as vulnerable and will identify if they are at immediate risk of harm. HMIC reviewed a small number of calls and found a consistent use of the THRIVE principles by call operators (HMIC, 2014; APP 2016)

Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) or a multi-agency safeguarding meeting?

- MARACs are regular meetings which take place in each local area, usually chaired by the police, where statutory and voluntary sector partners work together. MARAC considers cases identified as 'high risk' by use of tools such as the DASH-RIC, and develops a coordinated safety plan to protect each victim. This can include recording the actions agreed for any victims, perpetrators and all other concerned parties (LGA and ADASS 2015).

Findings from Literature

- Research indicated that Multi-agencies (the police, social services and the NHS), shared a consistent approach when dealing with vulnerability. For example, they all support the use of risk assessment tools such as DASH and the DAIL (HMIC 2014; Safe Lives: Ending Domestic Abuse 2016; Borum 1999).
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) provide forums for sharing information and taking action to reduce harm to victims of domestic violence who are at high-risk (Robinson 2006).
- However, in risk management, some agencies restrict how they intervene in high-risk cases, while other agencies maintain a focus on those cases that require lower levels of support. Hence, this approach may impede the day-to-day practice of risk assessment and management. This approach also lets down victims of Domestic Violence (DV). (Stanley et al 2014).
- The structured professional judgment allows the responsibility for grading risk sit ultimately with the assessor, but their judgement may be guided by a structured tool that includes relevant risk factors (The College of Policing 2016).
- Conducting a safe enquiry where domestic violence or domestic abuse are suspected, proved to be effective when aiming to acquire the best outcome, to support victims by the Legal Justice System (Richards, L. 2003b).
- The guidelines on how to assess risk are constantly reviewed and updated by the Home Office, utilising some information from the decommissioned documents.

Gaps in Knowledge

- There is a need for mass collaboration between multiple agencies to ensure that all 43 forces are consistent in the manner in which DV and DA cases are handled. For example, there would be value in a special domestic violence database that could be accessed by concerned agencies.
- There is a need to fully understand the different perspectives which organisations bring to the task of protecting victims (Stanley et al 2014).
- There is a need to ensure protocols and risk assessment tools are designed to be adaptable to all communities (Kirk 2004).
- There is a need to gather data in order to assess if the current approach to assessing risk and vulnerability is effective.

Research Methods

- Research methods used to Assessing Risk and Vulnerability include both qualitative and quantitative research, for example, conducting interviews with participants and victims, observations and use of police data (Williams et al 2004).
- Use of decommissioned documents to inform new policy and set guidelines in risk and vulnerability assessment (HMIC 2014).
- The use of other available sources, for example, information available online from other domestic violence support agencies.

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