

Practitioners' Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases

This is an abbreviated list of factors related to risk and danger in domestic violence. Most of the research is based on violence toward women, which reflects the majority of cases coming into the criminal justice system and the majority of research. These indicators suggest one of three likely outcomes without effective intervention: the violence will 1) probably continue, 2) escalate and or 3) become lethal.

Using this risk guide

- ❑ Each *Blueprint* protocol includes specific instructions for documenting and responding to risk. Practitioners should also read the related training memo and participate in the Blueprint training on risk and danger.
- ❑ Elicit and document the risk factors contained in this guide. Whenever possible, talk with the victim; engage in a discussion about danger rather than just asking if these things have happened. Victim perceptions and interpretations are important.
- ❑ Communicate risk factors to other intervening practitioners in a timely manner.
- ❑ Be attentive to the factors in a given case; use experience, common sense, and training to make judgments about the level of danger both the offender and set of circumstances pose.
- ❑ Adjust the response to each case based on the level of risk and dangerousness.
- ❑ Protect the victim from retaliation when soliciting or using safety and risk information.
- ❑ Link victims with risk factors to an advocate.
- ❑ Stay alert; the level and type of risk will likely change over time and as circumstances change. Determining and managing risk is an ongoing process.
- ❑ A victim's attempt to terminate the relationship is a major change that poses increased risk.
- ❑ Victims' perceptions of high danger are typically accurate, their perceptions of low danger are often not.

Acts or threats of violence associated with risk & lethality

Factors listed in italics are particularly associated with lethal violence.

- *Stalking*
- *Strangulation; attempts to "choke"*
- *Threats to kill the victim*
- *Threats to kill that the victim believes or fears*
- *Threats to kill that are conveyed to others*
- *Threats of suicide*
- *Forced sex or pressuring for sex even when separated*
- *Serious injury to the victim*
- *Carries, has access to, uses, or threatens with a weapon*
- *Violence outside of the home*
- Aggression toward interveners
- Threats to family, coworkers, victim's new partner
- Animal abuse or killing pets
- Damages victim's property
- Violent during pregnancy or shortly after birth
- Hostage-taking; restraint
- Acts exhibiting extreme hostility toward the victim

Coercion

Violence with a pattern of coercion is a serious marker of high risk. Coercion may be displayed as control of children, finances, or activities; sexual aggression; intimidation; hurting pets; or isolating the victim from support systems.

Risk is higher when the violence is accompanied by:

- *An increase in frequency, severity, or type of violence over recent months*
- *Almost daily impairment by alcohol or drugs*
- *The victim attempting a permanent break*
- *Estrangements, separations, and reunions*
- *Failure of prior interventions to impact the offender*
- *A victim who expresses fear of threats to kill*
- *A victim making no attempt to leave despite severe abuse*
- *Prior arrests, police calls, and/ or protection order(s)*
- Isolation of the victim (physical or social)
- A victim seeking outside help in the past year
- A victim has a child who is not the offender's
- An abuser who leaves before police arrive; eludes warrants
- An abuser's:
 - Lack of remorse
 - Mental health issues
 - Financial difficulty; unstable housing
 - Generalized aggression or violent acts
 - Ongoing efforts to take children from their mother
 - History of violence in multiple relationships
 - First act of violence is life-threatening or brutal
 - *Obsessive control of victim's daily activities*
 - *Obsessive jealousy*
 - Significant and harmful use of a child
- Drawing others into the abuse (e.g., children, family, friends)
- Non compliance with probation or pretrial release conditions

Homicide-Suicide

Homicide-suicide accounts for 27-32% of the lethal domestic violence incidents.

Predominant risk markers: guns, patterns of estrangement and reunion, and offender's poor mental health.. Additional markers:

- Obsession or jealousy
- Alcohol impairment (23 to 38% of perpetrators)
- History of domestic violence
- Suicide attempts or threats
- Personality disorder
- Depression of offender (46%)

Women who kill male partners

Predominant risk markers: severe, increasingly frequent, and recent violence by the person killed against the defendant; a defendant who is isolated and, has few social resources. Additional markers:

- Access or prior use of weapons
- More than 10 violent incidents in the last year at the hands of the person killed.
- Prior police intervention in one or more domestic violence calls in past year
- Prior strangulation by person killed
- Traditional relationship (married, children, lengthy relationship)
- Trapped and isolated in violent relationship
- Defendant sought help

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P.R. Kropp, Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment and Management, *Violence and Victims* 23(2), (2008): 202-220.

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