

Exercise

Risk Assessment

AVERT
FAMILY VIOLENCE



**Collaborative Responses in
the Family Law System**



An Australian Government Initiative

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Risk Assessment Exercise

Purpose:

- ☐ To provide an experience of family violence risk assessment and invite consideration of the impact of relationship dynamics on the level of risk.

Materials required:

- ☐ Risk Factor Cards
- ☐ Handout with reflective questions and risk assessment scales.

Process:

1. Each group will receive 5 cards that provide information about dynamics within a couple relationship:

- 2 cards that indicate family violence behaviour
- 1 card indicating family context
- 1 card naming a situational factor
- 1 card naming a protective factor

They also receive a risk assessment scales handout. (See below).

2. The group lays the cards face up on their table.
3. Using the questions listed below, they discuss the risk rating they would give to this relationship as measured along the following four scales:
 - Pattern of violence
 - Potency of violence
 - Situational factors
 - Parenting problems

The group records their response on each of the four assessment scales, from levels 1 to 5.



Questions:

- ☐ Do you see a pattern of family violence in the relationship? If yes, where along the Pattern Scale would you assess the pattern of violence to be?
- ☐ From what the cards reveal, how would you rate the conflict and violence in this relationship, on the Potency Scale?
- ☐ How would you describe this situation:
 - ☐ In its most extreme description (dangerous / negative)?
 - ☐ In its most benign description (optimistic / positive)?
- ☐ What situational factors may be impacting on this relationship? Where do you feel these factors place the victims' vulnerability on the Situational Factors Scale? Where do you feel these factors place the perpetrators' vulnerability on Situational Factors Scale?
- ☐ Which factor on your set of cards is potentially:
 - ☐ The most dangerous/risky?
 - ☐ The most protective/supportive?
- ☐ Given the brief information you know about the parenting arrangements from the cards, how would you assess the safety of the children on the Parenting Issues Scale?
- ☐ What else would you need to know about this scenario to make an informed risk assessment?

Key things to draw out of the discussion:

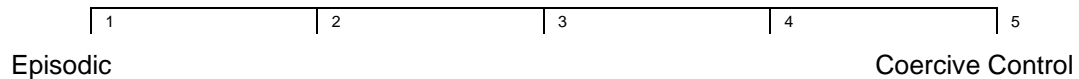
- ☐ Risk is dynamic and consequently escalates or decreases based on the varying *interplay* and *combination* of protective and risk factors
- ☐ The use of formal written tools has been found to increase accuracy in identifying FV and levels of risk

Risk assessment ultimately relies on interpretation and perceptions. Therefore research and risk assessment tools can contribute to our ability to interpret and assess but it will always require a process of professional judgement.

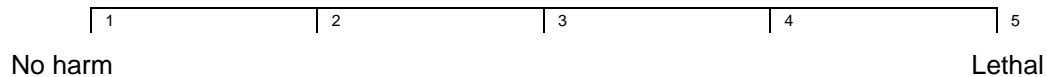


Risk Assessment Scales:

Pattern: The pattern of violence measures the history of using violent tactics and coercive control. An ongoing or escalating pattern indicates the degree of stress and trauma likely to be suffered by the victim and children, the potential for future violence, need for longer term restraints on abuser, contributing factors, need for corrective and rehabilitative measures, and prognosis with intervention.

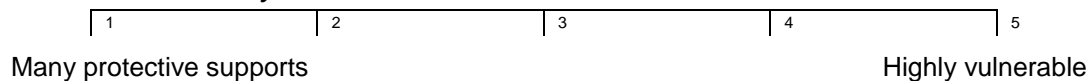


Potency: The potency of violence measure is assessing the degree of severity, dangerousness, risk of serious injury or lethality. Measuring potency indicates the level of threat, and thus need for immediate safety measures for the victim and children, including any protective orders.

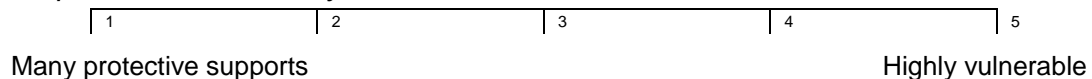


Situational factors: Situational factors indicate external factors that may influence an existing situation. Situational factors may increase distress or may provide protective supports.

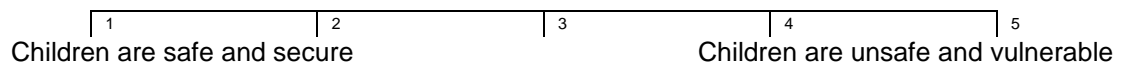
Victims' vulnerability:



Perpetrators' vulnerability:



Parenting issues: Assessing both parents' capacities to respond to their children aids in the assessment of the safety of children: is any parent focusing on the safety needs of the children?





Risk Assessment Cards

Family Violence Behaviour

FV Behaviour

Perpetrator undermines
partner's competence as
a parent post-separation

FV Behaviour

Perpetrator threatened
ex-partner's new
partner/mother/sister two
years ago

FV Behaviour

Perpetrator threatened
to kill self in past

FV Behaviour

Perpetrator regularly
criticises and denigrates
partner with put-downs
and belittling comments

FV Behaviour

Perpetrator constantly
obsessed with
repartnering

FV Behaviour

Perpetrator treats
partner like a servant
since living together



Risk Assessment Cards

Family Context

Family Context

Children encouraged
by one parent to take
sides

Family Context

Victim connected to
wider family support

Family Context

Children not attending
school

Family Context

Perpetrator rewards
child for rejecting or
punishing other parent

Family Context

Child with limited or
impaired cognitive
capacity

Family Context

Perpetrator uses
physical punishment on
children



Family Context

Perpetrator demands
respect and affection
from children

Family Context

Perpetrator is aware
of the impact violent
behaviour has on
partner/children

Family Context

Perpetrator concerned
about their potential for
violence

Family Context

Victim lives with own
children and step
children

Family Context

Victim unexpectedly
pregnant

Family Context

Victim has multiple
children with multiple
partners



Risk Assessment Cards

Situational Factors

Situational Factor

Victim subjected to
childhood sexual abuse

Situational Factor

Court case coming up

Situational Factor

Victim is fearful and
reluctant to speak up

Situational Factor

Victim has a gambling
problem

Situational Factor

Perpetrator recently
retrenched and family
in significant debt

Situational Factor

Perpetrator grew up in
foster care



Situational Factor

Victim drinking alcohol heavily

Situational Factor

Victim does not speak English

Situational Factor

Perpetrator is a highly esteemed local identity

Situational Factor

Perpetrator blames and is angry at the system

Situational Factor

Victim has a significant physical disability

Situational Factor

Victim is isolated and lives a long way from family of origin



Situational Factor

Perpetrator subjected
to racism at work on a
regular basis

Situational Factor

Victim responsible
for the care of an
elderly parent



Risk Assessment Cards

Protective Factors

Protective Factor

Perpetrator open to possibilities of change

Protective Factor

Perpetrator keeps agreements

Protective Factor

Perpetrator does not minimise, justify or deny behaviour

Protective Factor

Victim connected to community supports

Protective Factor

Perpetrator uses childrens contact service respectfully

Protective Factor

Perpetrator participating in behaviour change group



Protective Factor

Victim has a safety
plan

Protective Factor

Perpetrator previously
arrested for domestic
violence

Protective Factor

Victim is implementing
strategies to stop or
intervene in violent or
controlling behaviour

Protective Factor

Perpetrator
acknowledges and
accepts responsibility
for own behaviour