DOCCCR Validation of Two Domestic Violence Risk Instruments: 
*Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI)*
& *Spousal Abuse Risk Assessment (SARA)*

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**Introduction**

In 2001, the Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation began using two specialized domestic abuse risk assessment tools in its Domestic Violence Unit:

- the Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI), a twelve-item scale with a high score range of 30 that was developed for use as a domestic violence risk screening tool; and

- the Spousal Abuse Risk Assessment (SARA), a case management tool used for those offenders who have been previously screened as high risk for domestic related reoffense through administration of the DVSI.

The DOCCCR is committed to Evidence-Based Practices and the use of thorough research to determine the effectiveness of its practices and programs. In support of that commitment, the DOCCCR conducted a validation study to determine whether the DVSI and the SARA are valid predictors of future domestic violence related convictions.

**Evaluation Study: Results and Recommendations**

Misdemeanor offenders referred to the DOCCCR Domestic Violence Unit during 2001 were given the DVSI, and a portion of those same offenders were given the SARA. These groups of offenders were followed for eight years and, over this time period, information was collected and analyzed regarding their demographics, previous offense histories, and any subsequent statewide convictions. Any subsequent convictions recorded during this time were sorted into two categories:

- General offenses, which were defined as any non-traffic misdemeanor or above convictions; and

- Domestic Violence Related offenses, which were defined as offense convictions for which offenders were referred to the DOCCCR Domestic Violence Unit or that had a close association to domestic violence.

Figure 1 compares the General recidivism rate over the eight-year period to the recidivism rate for Domestic Violence Related offenses following completion of the DVSI. The General recidivism rate was 56%, and the Domestic Violence Related recidivism rate for those given the DVSI was 41%.
Each Domestic Violence Related offense that occurred within the study’s eight-year period was given a Conviction Score based upon the offender’s total number of offense convictions and the weighted severity level of those convictions. The recidivistic behavior of reoffenders was then classified as Low, Moderate, or High based upon this Conviction Score. Figure 2 shows the performance of the DVSI in accurately classifying risk for those who did not reoffend as well as for the Low, Moderate, and High levels of reoffense. The DVSI was most accurate in risk prediction for offenders with the most serious and frequent subsequent domestic related convictions (74%).

Overall, analysis showed that with higher risk scores on the DVSI or the SARA, offenders had higher rates of recidivism. This is strong evidence that the DVSI and SARA scores are valid tools for predicting risk to reoffend—both in general and for Domestic Violence Related offenses specifically. Further analysis also indicated that the most useful and accurate scoring criterion for a DVSI high risk classification is a score of 7 or above. According to study results, the use of this scoring criterion would correctly classify almost two-thirds of offenders.

Currently, the DOCCR is using the DVSI as a risk screening instrument for domestic violence offenders with a cutoff score of 9 for misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor offenders and a cutoff score of 8 for felony level offenders. It is recommended that the DVSI criterion for high risk classification be changed to a score of 7 or above. Based upon the eight-year recidivism data with misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor level offenders, this would lead to the correct identification of 64% of high risk offenders for further service referral and the elimination of 62% of low risk offenders from unnecessary intervention strategies. Use of the DVSI screening instrument with this modified risk cutoff would further the DOCCR’s goal of targeting resources for those at highest risk to reoffend and would eliminate the bulk of offenders at low risk from more intense service delivery models.

The DVSI has been revised since the start of this validation study. It is recommended that the availability and advantages of the Revised Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI-R) be explored.

Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections & Rehabilitation
Organizational Change Management

Julie Rud, Manager, Policy, Planning and Evaluation Manager
Nancy Skilling, Principle Planning Analyst, Policy, Planning and Evaluation
Deb Nonemaker, Senior Planning Analyst, Policy, Planning, and Evaluation

Original report written by Debra Nonemaker, Office of Policy, Planning and Evaluation, (612) 348-8254