



*Promoting justice and safety for victims of intimate partner violence and their families.*

## **BATTERED WOMEN'S JUSTICE PROJECT**



# **Assessing the Readiness of Your Coordinated Community Response (CCR) for Formal Risk or Danger Assessment**

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## **The History of Risk Assessments**

Advocates and law enforcement officers have conducted informal danger and safety assessments of individual intimate partner violence (IPV) cases without the use of standardized tools for decades, and do so even today. Informal safety assessments have evolved over the years into the adoption of formal risk and danger assessments that measure the relative likelihood and severity of another physical assault committed by a perpetrator. These assessments were developed by accomplished researchers in the field, with some of the best known instruments including: Danger Assessment (DA); Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model (DASH); Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI); Lethality Assessment Program – Maryland Model (LAP); Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA); Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA); Stalking and Harassment Assessment and Risk Profile (SHARP), and the Victim Inventory of Goals, Options, & Risks (VIGOR). A description of these tools and links to more comprehensive information about them is found on BWJP's [website](#).

## Communities Should be Properly Organized Before Implementing Formal Assessments

Formal risk assessments rely on the evaluating professionals to have a full understanding of the nature of violence faced by the survivor: is the incident in which the responder is intervening a one-time incident unlikely to be repeated, or is it one act of violence in a pattern of coercive control? One major question which must be asked of all responders, including 911 call takers, dispatchers, patrol officers, investigators, police supervisors, prosecutors, and victim advocates—among others—is the following: do practitioners, as a matter of routine practice, ask detailed questions about the nature and context of the violence within a domestic or dating relationship?

A strategy to maximize safety should focus on sustained improvements to institutional and community response. The introduction of formal risk assessment protocols may serve as an impediment or distraction. The most direct way to find out the nature of professional response, institutional buy-in, and professional competence in a single jurisdiction is for its CCR to undertake an institutional analysis. This institutional analysis can take many forms, i.e., a text analysis of police or probation records, diagramming a theoretical case in detail from 911 through parole, or a focus group of survivors from a commonly-marginalized community. BWJP's [Accounting for Risk and Danger Checklists](#) may serve as a framework for this inquiry. National technical assistance providers, such as [Praxis International](#) and the Battered Women's Justice Project, are well-placed to assist CCRs with these analyses.

## Legislative Mandates: A Complicating Factor

Keeping these considerations in mind, another dynamic impacting the decision to introduce formal risk assessment tools is the enactment of state statutes mandating formal assessments. As always, CCRs are advised to contact their state domestic violence or sexual assault coalitions for the latest news from their respective state capitols, but it should be noted that states as diverse as Maine, Minnesota, and Tennessee have passed legislation mandating formal risk assessment. CCRs must lay a foundation for long-term change. This change requires continuous appraisal of whether a critical mass of individual professionals and agencies understand that intimate partner violence is synonymous with coercive control; and, further, that this abuse shares little in common with “domestic disturbances” or the broader category of family violence.