

Your submission

Please provide a brief summary of your experience and any relevant issues. Your submission should respond to one or more of the terms of reference.

You may also wish to include any solutions, suggestions, or recommendations you have corresponding to the terms of reference.

Please note that content from this page onwards may be published.

Objective: To assess the effectiveness of conducting early threat and risk assessment of high-risk domestic violence offenders on recidivism and/or harm reduction.

Background

ITRAC is a multidisciplinary program developed in Canada over the past decade to identify high risk domestic violence offenders at the earliest times of their contact with the law. Their mandates states:

“The Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre (ITRAC) assesses threats and develops risk reduction plans for domestic violence and stalking cases in Alberta, as well as providing expert advice and training about threat assessment, domestic violence, and stalking to police, government and community agencies throughout the province. ITRAC is also equipped to respond to various threats and acts of targeted violence, including domestic and non-domestic related cases.

ITRAC currently completes approximately 250 threat assessments each year. Requests for assessments are only accepted from police departments in Alberta on current domestic violence or stalking charges before the courts.

Graduate students from various post-secondary institutions – including MacEwan University in Edmonton, the University of Alberta, and Carleton University in Ottawa – collaborate with ITRAC on research projects that help direct the centre’s work. Members of ITRAC have also presented at international conferences and published research papers that have earned provincial and national recognition.”

Anita McGregor has met with the ITRAC developers and directors to examine whether this system could be replicated in NSW. Anita is the director of the training clinic for the Master of Psychology (Forensic) program (UNSW Forensic Psychology Clinic) where the potential for developing this program in NSW could occur.

Between October 2018 and September 2019, 32 people were murdered in domestic violence related incidents in NSW, and 30,950 domestic violence related assaults were recorded overall¹. Despite a plethora of Government recommendations and initiatives to address domestic violence in NSW, there has been no significant reduction in incidents to date. Further, there appears to be a lack of effective measures to identify and assess those at risk of future serious violence. The NSW Police Force implemented the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) state-wide at all domestic violence incidents in July 2015. This tool was developed for police to identify the level of threat of future harm to a victim of domestic violence and automatically refer them to either a Safety Action Meeting if identified as ‘at serious threat’ or to the Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service. The DVSAT is a 25-item actual tool completed by attending police based on self-report responses by the victim. A victim is classified as either ‘at serious threat’ if 12 or more ‘yes’ responses are endorsed. Ringland (2018)² examined the predictive validity of the DVSAT and found it to be a poor predictor of repeat victimisation and suggested that the processes used to identify those at serious threat of domestic violence may not actually be effectively targeting those at greatest risk of harm. Coupled with statistics indicating that current government initiatives designed to reduce serious domestic violence incidents in NSW have been relatively ineffective, there is a need to re-evaluate the methods used to assess the threat and risk of serious domestic violence in NSW.

¹ NSW Bureau of Statistics and Research (Domesticviolencestatistics19Q3)

² Ringland, C. (2018). The domestic violence safety assessment tool (DVSAT) and intimate partner repeat victimization. *BOCSAR NSW Crime and Justice Bulletins*, 20.

Current procedures utilised by the NSWPF and other Government and non-Government service providers to identify and assess individuals at risk of future domestic violence in NSW are focused on directing victims of domestic violence to support services. There are no means for perpetrators of domestic violence to be assessed utilizing a validated tool that would aid in triaging cases for further assessment and referral for offence-related treatment opportunities in the community.

Methodology

We are examining how we could work in close consultation with the local magistrates and the NSW Police Force Domestic Violence Liaison Officers (DVLOs) to ensure that high-risk domestic violence offenders have been identified through a triaging system utilising validated actuarial measures and professional judgement. Individuals identified as high-risk of future domestic violence would be referred for a comprehensive threat and risk assessment conducted by experienced forensic psychologists and provisional psychologists in the UNSW Forensic Psychology Clinic. An assessment report identifying recommendations and risk-mitigation strategies would be made available to police, local magistrates and other relevant stakeholders involved in each case. A pilot study comparing two matched police commands is proposed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of these assessments and recommendations over a twelve month period.

Opportunities:

- Provide a comprehensive threat and risk assessment of high-risk domestic violence offenders to assist police and other stakeholders in managing risk for future violence.
- Offer treatment via AVL to high-risk domestic violence offenders in metro and regional NSW based on a theme of increases in offences in these areas that have limited service providers and programmes to address domestic related violence.

**If there is insufficient room above to summarise your experience and relevant issues,
please attach additional pages to this submission as required.**