

### What do we mean by 'Risk'?

Risk often refers to the risk of re-offense. In the IPV context, 'risk' refers to the risk of IPV re-occurring and the risk of the violence escalating to lethal violence. For instance, consider these two questions: 'Is this person causing harm at risk of committing another IPV related crime?' and 'Is this survivor at risk of being killed by their partner?'

### What are Risk Assessments?

Risk assessments are a type of evaluation tool that aim to predict the likelihood of an event occurring. They do this by examining risk factors and key characteristics. Risk assessments help identify risk levels and potential areas for intervention.

### What are Risk Factors?

Risk factors are the characteristics of a person, their situation, and past behaviors that correlate with an increased risk of an event occurring, falling into two broad categories:

- **Static risk factors:** characteristics of a person that are unchangeable (*i.e.* - *prior criminal history*).
- **Dynamic risk factors:** characteristics of a person that could potentially change or fluctuate over time (*i.e.* - *substance use*).

### What are Some Common Approaches to Risk Assessments?

**Actuarial:** This is the most common approach to risk assessments and they calculate a risk score by looking at specific information and risk factors that have been predicted by research to increase the likelihood of an event occurring.

**Structured:** looks at specific information and a structured list of risk factors. The risk level is based on the professional judgment of a practitioner and are usually a combination of actuarial and clinical approaches.

**Unstructured Clinical:** relies on practitioner experience and professional judgment to assess the level of risk, and unlike actuarial assessments, a risk score is not calculated.

***Frequently Asked Questions*****Are there Risk Assessments for IPV?**

There are risk assessments for IPV cases used in various settings and for different purposes. IPV risk assessments broadly fall into two categories, recidivism assessments and lethality assessments.

- **Recidivism assessments** focus on the person causing harm and their risk of re-assault.
- **Lethality assessments** focus on the survivor and the risk of violence escalating to potential homicide.

**When should a Risk Assessment be Used?**

Risk assessments can be used at various stages and each of them are designed for specific settings and purposes. For example, one can be used at pre-trial to inform decisions about release, or one could be used to inform treatment planning and supervision.

**What are the Risk Factors for IPV?**

There are recidivism risk factors and lethality risk factors for IPV. Some recidivism risk factors are criminal history, history of causing harm with IPV, and substance use and some lethality factors are strangulation, abuse during pregnancy, and recent separation.

**Is an IPV Risk Assessment the Same as a 'High-Risk Team'?**

Risk assessments and high-risk teams are not the same. High-risk teams are composed of multidisciplinary practitioners who come together to discuss and manage high risk IPV cases. They often use a risk assessment to inform decision making and determine whether a case is 'high risk.'

**Where are IPV Risk Assessments Commonly Used?**

Risk assessments can be used in many different settings. For example, they can be used on-scene by law enforcement when responding to an IPV related call.

They can be used in court by probation officers to inform supervision and treatment planning, and they can be used in the community by advocates to inform safety planning.

### Are IPV Risk Assessments Reliable?

Many have been validated, meaning they have been tested to see how well they perform at predicting IPV re-assault or lethality. Two types of validity for risk assessments are:

- **Inter-rater reliability** - the degree to which an assessment generates the same score, in the same case, when used by different assessors and,
- **Predictive validity**- how accurate the assessment is at predicting future violence.

### How Do we Know Which IPV Risk Assessment to Use?

Different risk assessments serve different purposes and can be used at various system entry points. It's important to understand the risk assessments and the setting or purpose they were validated for. For example, there are risk assessments validated for on-scene administration by law enforcement and others that are validated for safety planning and use by an advocate.

### What should be Considered when Using a Risk Assessment?

Some things to consider when implementing risk assessments are:

- who the assessment was created for and its' intended use,
- the population the assessment was validated on;
- partnerships and community buy-in;
- training and financial commitments; fidelity requirements,
- and potential unintended consequences, especially related to racial bias and disparity.