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Recognising and responding to vulnerability-related risks guidelines

Evidence review part two

Frontline policing vulnerability risk assessment tools
Summary of research findings

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Executive summary

- Identifying and managing risk is a ‘perennial challenge’ for policing.
- There is a paucity of evaluation evidence relating to risk tools for identifying and assessing vulnerability.
- Eleven risk tools were identified as being used in policing in England and Wales to identify and assess vulnerability.
- Four of these tools – DASH, DARA, S-DASH and SASH – had some supporting evidence. No or limited evaluation evidence was identified for the remaining seven tools.
- A further three tools – ODARA, B-SAFER and LAP – had some supporting evidence, but are not currently used in England and Wales.
- Three broader risk assessment models were also identified: the National Decision Model (NDM), THRIVE/+ and THOR. No information was identified regarding the development of the models, or whether they have been evaluated.
- Several common factors appeared in the risk tools that might enable the identification of common signs of vulnerability. These included fear, control, violence and intimidation, substance abuse and perpetrator mental health.

A summary table with additional information can also be found in Appendix D. This is an overall summary of the information provided in the following sections. The table also lists the factors measured through each of the tools.

Background

This report presents the findings of research into vulnerability risk assessment tools used to support frontline policing in England and Wales. This research was conducted to inform the development of the College of Policing’s [national guidelines](#) to support police to recognise and respond to individuals at risk of harm.

The College of Policing has previously undertaken research to obtain a view of priorities for improvements in, or providing support to, policing over the short and medium term. The research sought to identify the recurring ‘perennial challenges’ in

policing where action is needed to drive improvement for the public across a range of contexts, rather than for a particular crime type or operational areas of policing. Identifying and managing risk was identified as one of the top 10 recurring areas where improvement is required, which led to the development of the guidelines.

Frontline police officers and staff often come into contact with vulnerable people in crisis who have already suffered or are at risk of harm. These initial police interactions present crucial opportunities for risk identification and protection, however it was not known whether many of the risk assessment tools available to, and currently being used by, policing first responders in these interactions have been subject to rigorous evaluation. Consultation with the National Police Chiefs' Council's Violence and Public Protection Board (VPPB) at the scoping stage of the guideline identified an interest in consistency in risk assessment at the frontline and exploring the potential for a 'generic approach', and an appetite for examining the evidence underpinning the existing risk assessment tools.

First responders can sometimes face difficulties identifying vulnerability during an encounter due to the wide range of risk factors and the complex relationship between risk factors (Robinson and others, 2016). There are a number of different risk assessment tools that are tailored to different, specific areas of public protection, situations and/or on individual crimes (such as DASH¹, THOR² and ViST³).

Further, response officers' work is often pressurised and is undertaken in busy environments. Research relating to domestic abuse has shown that practitioners often rely on a subset of factors when making decisions about risk (Robinson and others, 2016). Observations of frontline officers found that some risk factors were sometimes overlooked, or not explored fully (Robinson and others, 2016). Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found some evidence of risk management tools being used primarily to manage demand, rather than to tailor approaches to the needs of victims.⁴ There was also

¹ Domestic abuse, stalking and honour-based violence

² Threat, harm, opportunity, risk

³ Vulnerability Screening Tool

⁴ [HMIC Police Effectiveness Vulnerability report 2015](#)

evidence from frontline observations of inconsistent application and completion of risk assessments (Robinson and others, 2016).

This work focuses on those tools used to identify and assess vulnerability to support frontline officers and staff to deliver effective policing in an efficient way.

Methods

The aims of this research were to:

- collect and review the vulnerability-focused risk assessment tools currently being used in frontline policing in England and Wales
- search for evaluation evidence for the identified risk assessment tools
- identify any commonalities across the tools for which evaluation evidence exists

A total of 81 tools were identified, of which 67 were excluded for the following reasons: duplication; secondary assessment tools for specialist use only; tools for areas other than vulnerability; policies or locally adopted versions of more established tools; for use by other agencies, not the police.

Drawing on the experiences and prior work of the Risk Management Authority (RMA), the organisation responsible for setting risk practice standards in Scotland, the search for and collation of evaluation evidence centred on empirical grounding, inter-rater reliability (IRR) (the extent to which different people come to the same decision using a tool) and whether there is a clear record of how the tool was developed and tested.⁵

Findings

A total of 11 independent tools that met the criteria for this work were identified and some evaluation evidence was identified for four of these tools – DASH, DARA, S-DASH and SASH. No or limited evaluation evidence was identified for the remaining seven tools. A further three tools were identified, which met most of the criteria for this work, although they were not being used in England or Wales at the time of writing. Two of these – B-SAFER and ODARA – are awaiting further validation by the

⁵ [Risk Management Authority – Risk Assessment Tools Evaluation Directory \(RATED\)](#)

RMA. The third, LAP, is widely adopted in the United States. All three had some supporting evidence.

Three broader risk assessment models widely used in policing in England and Wales were also identified: the NDM, THRIVE/+ and THOR. No information was identified regarding the development of the models or whether they have been evaluated.

Drawing on the seven risk assessment tools supported by some evaluation evidence, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify commonalities that may enable the identification of common signals, indicators or signs of vulnerability.

Several common factors appeared in five or more of the tools:

- victim fear and concern
- control
- previous violence (or other related offending behaviour)
- current violence, threats, intimidation and aggression
- frequency and escalation
- perpetrator pursuing proximity (trying to get close to the victim)
- substance abuse
- mental health problems (perpetrator)

This work has identified a paucity of evidence to support the few risk tools available to frontline officers to assess and address vulnerability. Where evidence exists, it is concentrated in the fields of domestic abuse and stalking and harassment and so may not be relevant or generalisable to other vulnerability areas. Further testing and evaluation of these tools is needed to ensure that risk assessment in policing is appropriately supported by evidence.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of research into frontline policing vulnerability risk assessment tools conducted to inform the development of the College of Policing's national guidelines on vulnerability and risk.

Risk assessment tools can be used in a variety of settings by different professionals, to gather data on and predict outcomes for a variety of purposes and populations. In policing, risk assessment guidelines and instruments can act as decision-making aids by helping practitioners to recognise particular behaviours or patterns of risk, and improve responses to these risks (Hehemann and others, 2017).

There is an ongoing debate in the field of risk assessment about whether the primary focus of a risk assessment is prediction of reoffending or prevention of further abuse through risk management and safety planning (see Bennett-Cattaneo and Goodman, 2007). Much existing research relating to risk assessment focuses on the internal validity (the extent to which a tool measures what it was designed to measure) and reliability (the extent to which a tool measures what it is supposed to measure consistently and accurately) of structured risk assessments, and the ability of those tools to predict further contact with the police, or more specifically physical assaults or other criminal offences. Proponents of risk management models based on structured professional judgement (see below) argue that short-term prediction of re-abuse is not the primary aim of risk assessment; the primary aim is in fact prevention and longer-term management of victims' safety. Being (some way towards) accurate in predicting revictimisation is not necessarily the same as helping to improve the safety of victims in the longer term (Bennett-Cattaneo and Goodman, 2007). It has also been suggested that risk assessment may act as an intervention in and of itself and empower victims and develop strategies to manage the risk of harm in intimate relationships (Robinson, 2010).

Background

Vulnerability and risk guidelines

This report presents the findings of research into frontline policing vulnerability risk assessment tools conducted to inform the development of the College of Policing's national guidelines on vulnerability and risk.

Frontline police officers and staff often come into contact with vulnerable people in crisis who have already suffered or are at risk of harm. These initial police interactions present crucial opportunities for risk identification and protection.

However, it was not known whether the risk assessment tools available to, and currently being used by, policing first responders in these interactions have been subject to rigorous evaluation.

Consultation with the VPPB at the scoping stage of the guidelines identified an interest in consistency in risk assessment on the front line and exploring the potential for a 'generic approach' as an alternative to the discrete, and often narrow and specialised, risk assessment tools currently available. The board was also keen to understand the evidence underpinning existing risk assessment tools.

In conducting further scoping for the guidelines, several issues were identified in relation to the use of risk assessment tools in policing.

- First responders can sometimes face difficulties identifying vulnerability during an encounter due to the wide range of risk factors and the complex relationship between them (Robinson and others, 2016).
- Response officers' work is often pressurised and undertaken in busy environments. Research relating to domestic abuse has shown that practitioners often rely on a subset of factors when making decisions about risk (Robinson and others, 2016).
- Observations of frontline officers found that some risk factors were sometimes overlooked, or not explored fully (Robinson and others, 2016).
- HMICFRS found some evidence of risk assessment tools being used for different purposes, primarily to manage demand, rather than to tailor services to the needs of victims (HMIC, 2015).

- There was also evidence of inconsistent application and completion of risk assessments (Robinson and others, 2016).

Risk assessment

Approaches to risk assessment tools fall into four main categories.

- Unstructured professional judgement (assessment based solely on professional experience and discretion).
- Actuarial assessment (assessment based on explicit counting and scoring of recognised risk factors).
- Structured professional judgement (known risk factors used to guide professional judgement).
- Victim appraisal (victim's perception of their own risk), which can be included as part of the other three approaches, or as a standalone approach in itself (Wheller and Wire, 2014).

Some research indicates that structured risk assessment can be an effective way of improving police responses to crimes (Hehemann and others, 2017). Structured risk assessment involves counting and scoring recognised risk factors (actuarial assessment) or using guidance which combines the identification of known risk factors with professional discretion (structured professional judgement).

Risk Management Authority

The Risk Management Authority (RMA) is an executive non-departmental public body of the Scottish Government, established in 2005. The purpose of the organisation is to make Scotland safer by setting standards for risk practice to reduce reoffending and the harm that it causes.

As part of this work, the organisation created the Risk Assessment Tools Evaluation Directory (RATED). The RATED provides a summary of the empirical evidence on each assessment tool included in the directory with a particular focus on:

- Empirical grounding: 'the scientific and theoretical underpinnings of the risk assessment tools'.

- IRR: ‘the degree to which two or more assessors are consistent in their ratings of the risk presented by the individual being assessed using the same risk assessment tool’.
- Validation history: ‘the existence and quality of validation evaluation studies, assessed on the basis of the availability of two or more papers written by different authors, in peer reviewed journals. The papers are required to have examined the predictive validity of the tool and/or its practical usefulness for the assessment and management of risk of harm to others’.

The summaries are an impartial and factual account of the strengths and limitations of each instrument for assessors to consider when applying a tool as part of a holistic risk assessment process.⁶

This research builds on the achievements of the RMA and the information provided in the RATED by reviewing tools explicitly focused on assessing risk to vulnerable people, carried out by officers and staff on the frontline.⁷ It is intended to assist senior police leaders to make informed decisions about the tools they advocate in their forces. It is also intended to encourage officers’ and staff professional curiosity and enable them to have a good understanding of the common indications of vulnerability, which will support informed decision making at first response (McLean and Ryan, 2018).

⁶ For more information about RMA and the RATED see: rated.rmascotland.gov.uk/risk-tools/

⁷ At the time the research was conducted, the RATED included 61 tools grouped under eight sections. In 2019, the RATED was updated with new evidence and now includes 74 tools grouped under eight similar sections. Relevant findings in this report have been updated to reflect the latest inclusions.

Methods

Aims

The aims of this research were to:

- collect and review the vulnerability-focused risk assessment tools currently being used in frontline policing in England and Wales
- search for evaluation evidence for the identified risk assessment tools
- identify any commonalities across the tools for which evaluation evidence exists

Scope

This research focused on frontline risk assessment tools currently used in policing in England and Wales to identify and assess vulnerability and used the College adopted definition of vulnerability: 'A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation.'

Secondary risk assessment tools used by specialists in the police, which are more appropriate for less time-bound situations (such as after a frontline officer has attended an incident) were out of scope.

Call for practice

To gather information about the breadth of vulnerability-focused risk assessment tools currently being used in frontline policing, a call for information was sent to practitioners who had expressed interest in being involved in the development of guidelines. Calls for information were also sent through the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA) and other internal College communication platforms. The calls for information requested details of risk assessment tools currently being used by forces. Responses were collated to develop a database of risk assessment tools.

A review of the tools included in the RATED was also conducted to complement the call for practice, and identify any tools in the RATED that met the criteria for this research. Members of the guideline development team consulted with the RMA to understand the scope of their work and the framework used to interpret and present

evaluation evidence, and to ensure any work completed by the College would be complementary.

Database searches

To gather information related to the development, evaluation and validation of the risk assessment tools identified through the call for information, keyword searches were conducted in several databases: EBSCO, ProQuest, Emerald Insight and Web of Science. Additional, broader searches were conducted in Google and Google Scholar.

Keyword searches were conducted by combining the names of the risk assessment tools with focusing words such as 'reliability', 'validity', 'evaluation' and 'police'.

Detailed information about the keyword searches is provided in Appendix A.

Due to time constraints the searches were not exhaustive, however the research was reviewed by members of the Guideline Committee and any additional evidence identified was included. Where no or limited information was readily available, a member of the research team made contact with the individual who identified the tool directly to try to obtain more information. In some cases it was also possible to contact the authors of risk assessment tools to discuss the development of the tools and enquire about any existing evaluation evidence.

Findings

Overview

Through the call for information, and other research and communications, responses identifying a total of 81 tools were received.⁸

The list of 81 tools was reviewed in detail and revised to exclude the following:

- duplicates
- secondary tools for use by specialists (rather than first responding officers/staff)
- tools that were not focused on vulnerability
- policies, or localised adapted versions of a more established tool
- tools not used by the police

A total of 11 independent tools that met the criteria for this work remained and are described in the following section. Four of these tools identified are for use with adults at risk, two for victims of domestic abuse, two for victims of stalking and harassment, two for victims of honour-based abuse (HBA) and one for missing persons.

Risk assessment tools

1. Vulnerability screening tool (ViST)

Use: When a vulnerable person⁹ (adult or child) comes into contact with the police, to determine the most appropriate agency to provide support or intervention based on the needs identified. It can be used with victims of any crime where it is proportionate to record personal information.

Description: A set of open-ended questions, characteristics, circumstances, external influences and type of incident is provided to aid decision making. The risk is graded using red, amber or green based on professional assessment of

⁸ This list was also shared with the Guideline Committee for any further additions.

⁹ The definition of a vulnerable person is 'anyone who has been or is believed to be at risk of harm, abuse or exploitation following consideration of their individual circumstances and who is or may be in need of support or intervention'.

individuals at the time of the incident and submitted to a central safeguarding team. The rationale for deciding whether someone is vulnerable and any specific concerns for the individual are recorded in line with the NDM. If domestic abuse is identified, the ViST refers the user to the DASH.¹⁰

Development: This is a locally developed tool used by Devon and Cornwall Police. The ViST was developed in response to results of an HMICFRS inspection, which highlighted an inconsistent understanding of vulnerability. The tool was developed and refined over a six-month pilot in Torbay by a team of individuals in Devon and Cornwall with backgrounds in public protection, domestic abuse and safeguarding, drawing on existing safeguarding risk assessments. Teams working in children and adult social care and health were consulted to ensure the tool was fit for purpose.

Evaluation: No evaluation evidence has been identified.

2. ASB risk assessment matrix

Use: At the scene of an incident to identify repeat, vulnerable adult victims of antisocial behaviour (ASB).

Description: The tool consists of eight questions, which gather information on the nature, frequency and impact of the ASB and vulnerability of the victim. Each question has a set of preconceived response options with numerically assigned weightings which, when summed, generate a risk score assigning an individual to one of three risk categories: standard, medium or high.

Development: This is a locally developed tool used by Thames Valley Police. No further information has been identified regarding the development of the tool.

Evaluation: No evaluation evidence has been identified.

3. Anti-social behaviour risk assessment (ASBRA)

Use: A screening tool to grade ASB¹¹ and identify adult vulnerable victims.

¹⁰ Domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence risk, identification, assessment and management model (DASH).

¹¹ The tool defines victims of ASB as vulnerable 'if the conduct in question causes an adverse impact on their quality of life; or they believe they are vulnerable; or they have suffered antisocial behaviour or something similar before'.

Description: The tool consists of 15 questions, which gather information on the nature, frequency and impact of the ASB, the vulnerability of the victim, whether the offender is known to the victim and what support is available to the victim. Each question has a set of preconceived response options with numerically assigned weightings. Officers are encouraged to choose a response category of bronze, silver or gold based on the sum total and professional judgement.

Development: This is a locally developed tool used by Cumbria Police. No further information has been identified regarding the development of the tool.

Evaluation: No evaluation evidence has been identified.

4. Vulnerable adult risk assessment (VARA)

Use: At the scene of an incident to direct further support for vulnerable adult victims.

Description: The tool consists of 19 yes/no questions, which explore the nature and extent of the individual's vulnerability.

Development: This is a locally developed tool used by Cumbria Police. The tool was developed jointly by the Safeguarding Hub and Adult Social Care in Cumbria. No further information has been identified regarding the development of the tool.

Evaluation: No evaluation evidence has been identified.

5. Domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence risk, identification, assessment and management model (DASH)

Use: With adult victims at all incidents of domestic abuse. The DASH is used by the majority of police forces in England and Wales and a large number of partner agencies working in the field of public protection.

Description: The DASH is a primary structured professional judgement risk assessment consisting of 27 risk identification questions. The questions explore the victim's current situation, domestic violence history and information about the abuser. After the initial encounter, police officers submit a DASH primary risk assessment categorised as standard, medium or high risk (based on the Offender Assessment System (OASys) definitions, developed by the Prison and Probation Services (UK)).

Development: The DASH was created by a National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) working group comprising police practitioners, voluntary/charity sector representatives and academic experts.

Evaluation: Robinson and others (2016) conducted a review of the DASH model and found that, although the majority of forces use the DASH in domestic abuse cases across England and Wales (either in its original or an altered form), there were inconsistencies in three case-study forces in how the model operated. In addition, the research identified inconsistency in the way the DASH was completed by first response officers, and the way in which information was recorded. These inconsistencies were compounded by a lack of understanding of coercive control. Both Thornton (2017) and Chalkley and Strang (2017) looked retrospectively at cases of domestic homicide or serious assault assessed using DASH and found a high proportion of 'false positives' and 'false negatives'. It is not clear, however, whether these studies considered the dynamic nature of risk assessment (in other words, a risk grading of 'standard' or 'medium' may have been appropriate at the time of the assessment, even for cases that escalated subsequently to serious harm). In addition, a high false positive rate might be explained in part by effective intervention rather than poor prediction or incorrect risk grading (Chalkley and Strang, 2017). More recent studies (Turner, Medina and Brown, 2019; Grogger, Ivandic and Kirchmaier, 2020) have used machine learning methods to test how accurate data from the DASH is in predicting (further) reports of physical assaults. While both studies concluded that DASH does not predict violent recidivism accurately, they are limited again somewhat by the dynamic nature of risk assessment, and the association of 'high risk' solely with physical assault with injury. In addition, and in contrast, to some risk tools, the DASH was not designed specifically to predict discrete future acts of violence. (For further information, see Appendix B).

6. Domestic abuse risk assessment (DARA)

Use: By first responders with adult victims of domestic abuse.

Description: A primary structured professional judgement risk assessment tool consisting of 17 fixed response questions to victims and a free text box for the officer to provide context to responses and a rationale for their assessment of risk. Risk of

harm is rated as 'standard', 'medium' or 'high', with these categories being adapted from the OASys assessment for general offending used by the probation and prison services in England and Wales.

Development: The development of the questions was based on a core set of risk factors for domestic abuse identified through previous research (Robinson, 2010), with emphasis on coercive controlling behaviours (Stark, 2007). In-depth interviews were undertaken with police officers and survivors of domestic abuse. Service providers and academics were consulted (for further information see Appendix B).

Evaluation: Wire and Myhill (2018) evaluated a pilot of the DARA in three UK police forces and found first response officers' initial assessments of risk were less likely to be regraded, during a post-incident review, than assessments made using the DASH. They also found that victims in one force disclosed perpetrators' coercive and controlling, and stalking and harassment behaviours, at greater rates using the piloted risk assessment tool, and first response officers recorded proportionately more crimes of coercive control during the pilot (though overall numbers were small). For further information, see Appendix B.

7. Screening assessment for stalking and harassment (SASH) Frontline version of the stalking risk profile (SRP)^{12 13}

Use: At the time a stalking case is first reported to the police or another frontline responder. The tool is being used by the Metropolitan Police and Sussex Police by secondary risk assessors (not by frontline officers attending an incident) followed by the SRP, and a similar approach may be being used in some other forces.

¹² The SRP is currently awaiting further validation. For more information see the RATED: rated.rmascotland.gov.uk/risk-tools/internet-stalking/

¹³ The SRP and the stalking assessment and management (SAM) are effective for assessing stalking risks and guiding risk management. However, both are comprehensive structured risk assessments, requiring a level of specialist knowledge and usually taking some time to complete based on a substantial level of information about a case. This makes them suitable for police with additional training in understanding and assessing stalking who are likely to have ongoing involvement in case management, but unsuitable for first responders to initial reports of stalking who may have limited specialist knowledge and limited time to make decisions about their immediate responses (Hehemann and others, 2017).

Description: The SASH is a brief, triage assessment. The SASH requires the user to judge the presence of up to 16 items about the stalking behaviour, characteristics of the perpetrator's history and the victim's situation. The answers are used to identify how concerned the user should be about the stalking case, allowing them to prioritise resources towards cases that should cause the greatest concern. The level of concern is calculated using a three-point scale: low, moderate or high. Two items lead to an automatic high level of concern if present (victim fear of fatal violence and the presence of 'last resort thinking' in the perpetrator).

Development: No information has been identified regarding the development of the tool.

Evaluation: Hehemann and others (2017) measured the IRR and predictive validity of the SASH with the Netherlands National Police. Analyses suggested that SASH can be used consistently (the SASH was scored in the same way 80% of the time) and the level of concern outcome effectively differentiated between subsequent stalking of different severities (particularly subsequent low severity stalking, which allows resources to be targeted more effectively). For further information, see Appendix B.

8. S-DASH risk identification checklist for use in stalking and harassment case

Use: To aid the identification of stalking and harassment patterns and behaviours, and provide an indication of a victim(s) risk of harm.

Description: The S-DASH is a set of 11 risk identification questions that forms part of the DASH risk identification, assessment and management model. The questions are followed by a free text section which should be used to record any additional observations or relevant information. The checklist should be used when there are two or more incidents of stalking and harassment (reported or unreported) and/or if the victim is extremely frightened. A higher number of 'yes' responses indicates a higher risk that the perpetrator may harm the victim. Risk categories of standard, medium and high are included as part of the full DASH assessment if the case falls under the definition of domestic abuse.

Development: The development of the questions was based on correlates of serious stalker violence, as well as correlates produced by earlier studies, such as explicit threats made by the stalker, previous intimate relationship between victim and stalker and evidence of substance abuse by the stalker. The development was informed by data collected through an anonymous questionnaire of 1,565 stalking victims, with two binary regressions being run to assess the variables that best predicted physical assault by the stalker (Sheridan and Roberts, 2011).

Evaluation: An evaluation of the reliability of the tool was conducted by the tool authors and tested the development of the questions using retrospective case-file analysis (Sheridan and Roberts, 2011). The authors concluded that the S-DASH has good reliability and validity. For further information, see Appendix B.

9. HBA screening questions (H-DASH)

Use: The H-DASH questions are supposed to be initiated if a victim responds positively to a question on multiple perpetrators in the main DASH risk assessment. The DASH is used by the majority of police forces across England and Wales, although the H-DASH is not used by all forces that use the DASH.

Description: The H-DASH is a set of 10 additional questions for the DASH tool and focuses on identifying HBA. As with the DASH, the person conducting the risk identification interview is encouraged to document the victim's answers in detail to inform a risk management plan.

Development: The DASH was created by an NPCC working group comprising police practitioners, voluntary/charity sector representatives and academic experts.

Evaluation: No evaluation evidence specific to the H-DASH questions has been identified.

10. Forced marriage and honour-based abuse risk assessment (Karma Nirvana)

Use: The tool was developed as a secondary risk assessment tool, although it is being used in some forces by frontline officers at the scene of relevant incidents. A total of 22 forces had received training in the use of this tool at the time of writing (Karma Nirvana, personal communication).

Description: A structured professional judgement tool split into three sections. The first section is an information collection tool using a mix of open and closed questions (including circumstances, relationships, pregnancy, change of religion, sexuality, dishonourable behaviour, importance of honour in the victim's community, threat of or impending forced marriage, potential perpetrators and family information). The second includes a series of aggravating features/risk factors (yes/no questions) and a professional judgement open text section, and the third a categorisation of risk of standard, medium or high (based on the OASys definitions).

Development: The tool was developed by a human rights charity, Karma Nirvana, drawing on practitioner experience and research on commonalities in homicide (Karma Nirvana, personal communication).

Evaluation: No evaluation evidence has been identified.

11. Missing person report (COMPACT)

Use: The risk assessment tool forms part of a missing person report, which is part of the COMPACT intranet system. It is currently being used by more than 20 of the police forces in England and Wales.

Description: COMPACT is a case management system that has been developed by WPC Software in collaboration with UK police forces.¹⁴ The risk assessment consists of 19 yes/no questions about the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and potential vulnerability of the missing person, with space for supporting comments. The risk assessment is based on professional judgment, which is used to assign the individual to either a low, medium or high risk level.

Development: No information has been identified regarding the development of the tool.

Evaluation: No evaluation evidence has been identified.

¹⁴ [COMPACT – missing persons case management](#)

Additional risk assessment tools

The following risk assessment tools are not currently, to our knowledge, used by police forces in England and Wales but were identified through this research as being frontline vulnerability-focused tools supported by some evaluation evidence. Two – B-SAFER and ODARA – are awaiting further validation by the RMA. The third, LAP, has been adopted by some police agencies in the United States. A description of each of the tools and their evaluation evidence is included below.¹⁵

12. Brief spousal assault form for the evaluation of risk (B-SAFER)

Use: For the assessment and management of risk in adult males and females¹⁶ with a history of domestic abuse.

Description: A 10-item structured guide – items are divided into two main sections: participant's history of domestic abuse (section one) and participant's psychological and social functioning (section two). A third domain was added in the second version of the tool in 2010 containing five risk factors about the victim such as 'unsafe living situation' (Storey and Strand, 2012; Svalin, 2018). Cut-off scores are not applied to determine the nature or degree of risk posed by an offender, and risk is rated as low, moderate or high after users have considered the risk to intimate partners if no intervention was taken (Kropp and Hart, 2004).

Development: B-SAFER was developed for the police in response to recognition that the existing SARA¹⁷ was lengthy and required specific judgements regarding mental health. The tool was derived from the SARA and is grounded in professional and scientific literatures on spousal violence (Kropp and Hart, 2004).

Evaluation: IRR (the degree of agreement among raters on estimates of behaviour) and validation history including how accurately the tools predict risk of harm and

¹⁵ These risk assessment tools were included in the version of the risk assessment tools table presented to the Guideline Committee. For the purpose of this report, the table has been modified and only tools which meet the original criteria for this work are included (see Appendix B).

¹⁶ The authors state the tool can be used with female offenders although there is limited empirical evidence to support this at present.

¹⁷ The Spousal Assault Risk Guide (SARA) has been validated. For more information, see the [RATED](#).

applicability of the tool to female offenders have been evaluated. More information is provided on the RATED.¹⁸

13. Ontario domestic assault risk assessment (ODARA)

Use: To assess the likelihood of domestic violence recidivism in male adult offenders. Designed for use by police and other frontline risk responders and intended for use by first responders (Hilton and Ham, 2015; Messing and others, 2017).

Description: A 13-item actuarial risk assessment instrument. Higher scores indicate that a suspect accused of assault will be more likely to commit more assaults, commit them in a short space of time and cause more injury than suspects with lower scores.

Development: The ODARA tool was constructed from risk factors found to be statistically significant in predicting assault recidivism. The ODARA was developed and tested only for 'male-to-female' assault, but is currently being tested in other relationships. Users are required to complete online training (see Appendix B for further information on the ODARA training and license). For further development details, please see the RATED.

Evaluation: Evaluation evidence is available, although the majority of studies have been conducted by the authors of this tool. More information is provided on the RATED.¹⁹

14. The Lethality Screen (part of the Lethality Assessment Program – LAP)

Use: The Lethality Screen is intended to be used in combination with the Lethality Assessment Protocol, which together make up the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP).

Description: A shortened (11-item) version of the danger assessment (DA) created for first responders and designed to maximise sensitivity. It is applicable to male or

¹⁸ [Evaluation evidence for B-SAFER.](#)

¹⁹ [Evaluation evidence for ODARA.](#)

female victim-survivors and has a scoring system of 'high danger' or 'not high danger'.

Development: Each of the risk factors included in the Lethality Screen has been found to increase risk for intimate partner femicide in previous research.

Evaluation: The Lethality Screen had considerable sensitivity (92-93%) – the ability to correctly identify the people who will be revictimised – and a high negative predictive value (93-96%) for near lethal and severe violence (Messing and others, 2017). It also had good agreement with the DA and with women's perception of risk. However, specificity – the ability to correctly identify the people who will not be revictimised – was low (21%), attributed to a high number of false positives. For further information, see Appendix B.

Summary of evidence

A total of 11 independent tools that met the criteria for this work were identified, and some evaluation evidence was identified for four of these tools – DARA, DASH, S-DASH and SASH – though the evidence for each was extremely limited and restricted to one or two studies. The evidence base for the DASH, the most widely used frontline risk assessment tool, was limited to a retrospective review of implementation, and a small number of studies assessing the ability of the DASH to predict high-level physical assaults or homicide. No or very limited evaluation evidence was identified for the remaining seven tools.

A further three tools were identified which meet most of the criteria for this work, although they are not currently being used in the England or Wales. Two of these – B-SAFER and ODARA – are awaiting further validation by the RMA. The third, LAP, is used by some police agencies in the United States. All three had some supporting evidence.

The summaries provided are a brief overview of the risk assessment tools identified for potential use by frontline officers in the vulnerability sphere. More detailed evaluation summaries have been produced for the seven tools with some evaluation evidence following the RATED template for studies awaiting further validation and are provided in Appendix B.

Links to risk assessment tools that are available online are included in Appendix C.

Risk assessment models

To support the Guideline Committee to consider all relevant, available evidence, three overarching risk assessment models commonly used in policing were also reviewed.

1. National Decision Model (NDM)

The NDM is a decision-making framework used by many police forces in England and Wales that can be used to help support risk assessment. It can be applied:

- to spontaneous incidents or planned operations
- by an individual or team of people
- to both operational and non-operational situations

The NDM was designed by national policing leads to replace the Conflict Management Model as a more universally applicable model.²⁰ The NDM has six key stages that officers can follow when making any type of decision.

- Code of Ethics – principles and standards of professional behaviour.
- Information – gather information and intelligence.
- Assessment – assess threat and risk and develop a working strategy.
- Powers and policy – consider powers and policy.
- Options – identify options and contingencies.
- Action and review – take action and review what happened.²¹

No information has been identified regarding the development of the model, or whether this model has been evaluated.

2. THRIVE/+

The THRIVE model is used by many police forces in England and Wales. It was developed as a framework for risk assessing public need, vulnerability and other key elements of service delivery.

²⁰ [National Decision Model](#)

- **Threat:** A threat is a communicated or perceived intent to inflict harm or loss on another person.
- **Harm:** Harm is to do or cause harm, for example to injure, damage, hurt – physical or psychological.
- **Risk:** Risk is the likelihood of the event occurring.
- **Investigation:** Investigation is the act or process of examining a crime, problem or situation and considering what action is required.
- **Vulnerability:** Vulnerability is defined for the purposes of incident management as ‘a person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care or protect themselves, or others, from harm or exploitation’.
- **Engagement:** Engagement is where organisations and individuals build a positive relationship for the benefit of all parties (**Expectations** in Cleveland – use to justify afterwards why follow-ups have been suggested etc.)

More recently, THRIVE has been expanded to THRIVE+, representing **Prevention** and **Intervention** (identifying opportunities to prevent further incidents occurring or worsening of threat, risk and harm and allocating the most appropriate resource (police or partnership) to intervene before further, more serious police intervention is required).

No information has been identified regarding the development of the model, or whether this model has been evaluated.

3. THOR

THOR is a structured risk assessment model adapted from THRIVE and used in Hampshire Constabulary. Similar models may also be being used by other police forces. It is used to help first responding officers make informed and rationalised decisions in response to varying vulnerabilities and risks.

- **Threat:** the source of actual or potential harm.
- **Harm:** encompassing injury, economic loss and damage to community cohesion and legitimacy.

- **Opportunity:** to achieve a desired outcome (for example, where evidence meets the Crown Prosecution Service threshold, or opportunity to safeguard vulnerable victims and manage ongoing risk, or reassure the community and increase community confidence).
- **Risk:** the possibility or likelihood of harm occurring.

Each of the four sections is graded either high, medium or low before an overall assessment is made on the same scale.

No information has been identified regarding the development of the model, or whether this model has been evaluated.

Synthesis of vulnerability factors

A thematic analysis was conducted to draw out any commonalities across risk assessment tools that may enable the identification of common signals, indicators or signs of vulnerability. As only seven of the tools identified through this work were supported by some evaluation evidence, and this evidence was limited, the findings from this exercise should be interpreted with caution.

There are two tools for stalking and harassment (S-DASH and SASH) and five for domestic abuse. The seven tools are each of differing lengths (ranging from one page to approximately seven) and offer different levels of detail to guide the user in their assessment.

Risk assessment tools reviewed:

1. Screening assessment for stalking and harassment (SASH).
2. S-DASH risk identification checklist for use in stalking and harassment cases.
3. Brief spousal assault form for the evaluation of risk (B-SAFER).
4. Domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence risk, identification, assessment and management model (DASH).
5. Domestic abuse risk assessment (DARA).
6. The Lethality Screen (part of the Lethality Assessment Program – LAP)
7. Ontario domestic assault risk assessment (ODARA)

Table 3: Items that occur in five or more of the seven tools reviewed²²

Item	Description of factors measured	n
Victim fear and concern	Whether the victim is frightened, or if they are afraid the perpetrator will seriously harm or kill them, they are concerned that they or their children will be assaulted again, or anything else that worries them about their safety.	6
Control	Whether or how often the perpetrator is in control of the victim's daily activities. 'Control' includes: how often the perpetrator denies access to money or controls spending; making the victim account for where they have been or monitors their phone, email or social media; whether the perpetrator believes the victim is their property; and whether the perpetrator did anything to prevent the victim from leaving their location (in relation to this reported incident).	5
Previous violence (or other related offending behaviour)	Whether the perpetrator has a history of physical or sexual violence or harassment involving any victim (whether or not the police were or are involved). This may be during or prior to the current incident.	6
Current violence, threats, intimidation and aggression	Whether the perpetrator has made threats to kill or harm, or been aggressive or intentionally intimidating towards the victim, their children or anyone else (including pets or property). This behaviour may include following, spying on or leaving threatening messages.	7
Frequency and escalation	How often the perpetrator engages in physically harmful, threatening or coercive behaviours against the victim (for domestic abuse) or visits the victim, for	5

²² The column titled 'n' gives the number of risk assessment tools that investigated each item.

	example at home or their place of work (for stalking and harassment) and whether these behaviours have become worse (for example more frequent, serious, intrusive or frightening).	
Perpetrator pursuing proximity	Whether the perpetrator has tried to get near to the victim, for example by approaching or following them, or loitering around their home or place of work, or made other unwanted contact.	5
Substance abuse	Whether the perpetrator is known to be, or displays indicators of abusing drugs and/or alcohol, or is experiencing problems caused by substance use.	5
Mental health problems (perpetrator)	Whether the perpetrator has ever threatened or attempted suicide (and how often), has been treated for depression or other mental health issues, has exhibited any strange behaviour or has experienced emotional distress.	5

The theme of coercion and control was commonly identified across the risk assessment tools. A rapid evidence assessment (REA) conducted to support the development of the same guidelines (available in [related reports and information](#)) concluded that control is often linked to power imbalances between victims and those who seek to exploit them and that understanding how control is used may be crucial to identifying vulnerability.

Four similar factors concerning the nature of the incident – (1) previous history of violence and abuse, (2) details about the current violence, (3) whether it's getting worse or becoming more frequent and (4) whether the perpetrator is trying to get close to the victim by following them or loitering or making unwanted contact – were also present in five or more of the risk assessment tools reviewed. Information about the nature of the incident is commonly supported by an investigation of two aggravating factors: substance abuse or mental health problems.

In addition, there is support in some literature for asking victims about their own level of risk and fear of assault or harm. Findings from an REA of domestic abuse risk

factors suggests that officers should consider the victim's own assessment of risk when undertaking risk assessments (Wheller and Wire, 2014). The DARA evaluation report also suggests that victims' own perceptions of risk could be as reliable as some actuarial risk assessment tools. However, victims often underestimate or downplay their own risk and so an officer's judgement of the situation should always support any decisions (Wire and Myhill, 2018).

Limitations

Evaluation evidence is concentrated in the fields of domestic abuse and stalking and harassment and so the themes presented in table 3 may have limited relevance and generalisability to other vulnerability areas.

Summary and conclusions

Proponents suggest that structured risk assessment can be an effective way of improving police responses to crimes (such as stalking and domestic abuse) that require proactive, preventative policing (Hehemann and others, 2017). However, this study has identified a paucity of evidence to support the few risk tools available to frontline officers to assess and address vulnerability.

Of the 11 risk assessment tools that met the criteria for this work, some evaluation evidence was identified in relation to only four – DASH, DARA, S-DASH and SASH. No or very limited evaluation evidence was identified for the remaining seven tools. The available evidence for each of the tools identified, including the factors they are designed to measure, is included in a summary table in Appendix D.

In the case of the DASH, the national model for risk assessment in England and Wales, none of the research studies identified provided empirical support for the efficacy of the model. The Robinson and others (2016) study revealed inconsistencies in and issues with implementation of the model, especially on the front line. The remaining studies suggested the DASH does not accurately predict future high-harm abuse (although it should be remembered that the DASH was not designed specifically to predict future discrete acts of high-level physical violence). No study was identified that specifically evaluated the impact of DASH on safety outcomes for victims.

A further three tools were identified, which met most of the criteria for this work, although they are not currently being used in England or Wales. Two of these – B-SAFER and ODARA – are awaiting further validation by the RMA. The third, LAP, is used in some jurisdictions in the United States. All three had some supporting evidence.

Three broader risk assessment models widely used in policing in England and Wales were also identified: the NDM, THRIVE/+ and THOR. No information was identified regarding the development of the models or whether they have been evaluated.

Drawing on the seven risk assessment tools supported by some evaluation evidence, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify commonalities that may enable the identification of common signals, indicators or signs of vulnerability.

Several common factors appeared in five or more of the tools, although the available evidence is concentrated in the areas of domestic abuse and stalking and harassment and so these themes may not be as relevant or generalisable to other vulnerability areas:

- victim fear and concern
- control
- previous violence (or other related offending behaviour)
- current violence, threats, intimidation and aggression
- frequency and escalation
- perpetrator pursuing proximity
- substance abuse
- mental health problems (perpetrator)

Findings from an REA of domestic abuse risk factors and risk assessments by Wheller and Wire (2014) suggested there was a strong argument for recommended practice to include a routine question(s) asking victims directly about their perceptions of their own level of risk and fear of assault. The researchers concluded that officers should carefully consider the victim's own assessment of risk when undertaking risk assessments.

In sum, there is little available empirical evidence to support risk assessments used currently by first responders in England and Wales, or for models used in other jurisdictions. The majority of extant research has focused on the predictive accuracy of existing tools, even though some were not intended primarily to predict discrete future victimisation. Although implementation of the current national model for risk assessment in cases of domestic abuse in England and Wales has been shown to be inconsistent, there is not currently a compelling case for moving away from a model of structured professional judgement incorporating a victim risk identification interview. Application of machine learning methods to this field is currently in its infancy, and algorithmic prediction has focused primarily on physical violence (re) reported to the police, which represents a very narrow conceptualisation of harm in domestic abuse. While the College believes machine learning methods may enhance the current system of risk assessment, we are sceptical that algorithms

could ultimately replace fully professional judgment, due to the highly personalised and context specific nature of some forms of domestic abuse.

In the absence of robust empirical evidence, consideration must also be given to the theoretical aims and benefits of a risk model. While both professional judgement and algorithmic prediction models may be seen to have the same ultimate aim – prioritise cases for intervention – there are additional potential benefits to a structured victim interview. These include: validation of experiences for victims (risk assessment as an intervention in and of itself), prompting/enabling opportunities to disclose, encouraging officers to ask about factors beyond physical violence that research suggests they may not otherwise consider, and providing operationally actionable information for primary safeguarding. Robust evaluation of these potential benefits would be welcome. The existence of these potential benefits favours algorithmic prediction as a promising supplement to structured professional judgement, as opposed to a replacement for it. Structured judgement itself might be improved through better understanding of domestic abuse and coercive control in particular; the initial evaluation of the DARA is promising in this respect.

Above all, further testing and evaluation of existing tools is needed to ensure that they perform the role for which they are intended robustly and reliably, and to ensure that risk assessment in policing is appropriately supported by evidence.

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Appendix A: Keyword searches

Risk assessment tool	Search terms/key words
DASH	"DASH" AND evaluation AND police; "DASH" AND validity AND police; "Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence" AND evaluation AND police; "Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence" AND reliability AND police; "Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence" AND validity AND police
ASB matrix	"ASB matrix" AND evaluation AND police; "ASB matrix" AND reliability AND police; "ASB matrix" AND validity AND police; (For web of science) - "ASB matrix" AND evaluation AND police; "ASB matrix" AND reliability AND police; "ASB matrix" AND validity AND police; "antisocial behaviour matrix" AND validity AND police; "antisocial behaviour matrix" AND reliability AND police; "antisocial behaviour matrix" AND evaluation AND police
Vulnerable adult risk assessment (VARA)	"Vulnerable adult risk assessment" AND evaluation AND police; "Vulnerable adult risk assessment" AND validity AND police; "Vulnerable adult risk assessment" AND reliability AND police
ASB risk assessment (ASBRA)	"ASB risk assessment toolkit" AND reliability AND police; "ASB risk assessment toolkit" AND validity AND police; "ASB risk assessment toolkit" AND evaluation AND police; "ASBRA" AND evaluation AND police; "ASBRA" AND reliability AND police; "ASBRA" AND validity AND police
Karma Nirvana (HBV)	"FORCED MARRIAGE AND HONOUR BASED ABUSE RISK ASSESSMENT" AND validity AND police; "FORCED MARRIAGE AND HONOUR BASED ABUSE RISK ASSESSMENT" AND reliability AND police; "FORCED

	MARRIAGE AND HONOUR BASED ABUSE RISK ASSESSMENT" AND evaluation AND police
Vulnerability screening tool (ViST)	"Vulnerability screening tool" AND reliability AND police; "Vulnerability screening tool" AND validity AND police; "Vulnerability screening tool" AND evaluation AND police; "Vulnerability screening tool (VIST)" AND reliability AND police; "Vulnerability screening tool (VIST)" AND validity AND police; "Vulnerability screening tool (VIST)" AND evaluation AND police;
MISPER (missing person within COMPACT)	"MISPER" AND evaluation AND police; "MISPER" AND reliability AND police; "MISPER" AND validity AND police
S-ASH (Screening assessment for stalking and harassment)	"screening assessment for stalking and harassment" AND validity AND police; "screening assessment for stalking and harassment" AND reliability AND police; "screening assessment for stalking and harassment" AND evaluation AND police
Merseyside risk identification tool (MeRIT)	"Merseyside Risk Identification Tool" AND reliability AND police; Merseyside Risk Identification Tool AND validity AND police; Merseyside Risk Identification Tool AND evaluation AND police
S-DASH (Stalking risk identification)	"S-DASH (Stalking Risk identification)" AND validity AND police; "S-DASH (Stalking Risk identification)" AND reliability AND police; "S-DASH (Stalking Risk identification)" AND evaluation AND police (for Web of Science) - "S-DASH" AND reliability AND police; "S-DASH" AND validity AND police; "S-DASH" AND evaluation AND police; "Stalking risk identification" AND evaluation AND police, "Stalking risk identification AND validity AND police, "stalking risk identification AND reliability AND police

H-DASH	"H-DASH" AND validity AND police; "H-DASH" AND reliability AND police; H-DASH AND evaluation AND police
DARA	College of Policing internal sources
ODARA	Already validated/being considered by RMA
B-SAFER	Already validated/being considered by RMA
National Decision Model (NDM)	"National decision model" AND evaluation AND police; "National decision model" AND validity AND police; "National decision model" AND reliability AND police
THRIVE/+ (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and Engagement)	THRIVE (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and Engagement) AND evaluation; "THRIVE" AND validity AND police; "THRIVE" AND reliability AND police; "THRIVE" AND evaluation AND police; "Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and Engagement" AND reliability AND police; "Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and Engagement" AND validity AND police; "Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and Engagement" AND evaluation AND police
THOR	"THOR" AND evaluation AND police; "THOR" AND validity AND police; "THOR" AND reliability

Appendix B: Tool evaluations

Name of tool	The Lethality Screen (part of the Lethality Assessment Program – LAP)
Author/publisher (year)	Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) (2005)

Description

- The LAP is a collaboration between police and social service providers consisting of two steps. First, a police officer responding to the scene of a domestic violence incident uses the Lethality Screen to identify victims at risk of homicide. Second, women that screen in as high risk based on the Lethality Screen are put in immediate telephone contact with a collaborating social service provider who provides them with advocacy, safety planning and referral for services.
- The Lethality Screen is a shortened (11-item) version of the danger assessment (DA) created for first responders and designed to maximise sensitivity. The scoring system is designed for ease of use with results of ‘high danger’ or ‘not high danger’. The Lethality Screen is intended to be used in combination with the Lethality Assessment Protocol. Together, the screen and the protocol make up the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP).
- The Lethality Screen asks questions only of the victim-survivor of violence and is designed to predict severe violence/homicide and intended to maximise sensitivity. It assists police officers and other community professionals to identify victims of domestic violence who are at the highest risk of being seriously injured or killed by their intimate partners.

Tool development

- Each of the risk factors included in the Lethality Screen has been found to increase risk for intimate partner femicide in previous research.

- **Messing and others (2017)** – measured the predictive validity of the Lethality Screen through a quasi-experimental trial with a follow-up period of approximately seven months:
 - The Lethality Screen had considerable sensitivity (92-93%) – the ability to correctly identify the people who will be revictimised – and a high negative predictive value (93-96%) for near lethal and severe violence. The Lethality Screen also had good agreement with the DA and with women’s perception of risk.
 - When examining experiences of any IPV or abuse at follow-up, the sensitivity of the Lethality Screen decreased (84-87%).
 - Specificity was low (21%) – the ability to correctly identify the people who will not be revictimised. This is primarily because the Lethality Screen classified many women as high danger that did not experience subsequent near fatal violence during the follow-up period (false positives).
 - The high sensitivity and low specificity should be considered carefully when determining whether the Lethality Screen is appropriate for particular areas of practice with survivors and/or perpetrators.

General notes

- The LAP incorporates professional judgement: officers can screen victim-survivors into the intervention if they believe they are at high risk, regardless of the score on the Lethality Screen.
- Findings from this study are also reported in Messing and others (2014) and Messing and others (2015).
- The DA was developed by Campbell (1986). See:
vawnet.org/material/danger-assessment

Name of tool	Screening assessment for stalking and harassment (SASH)
Author/publisher (year)	McEwan and colleagues (2015)

Description

- The SASH is a brief triage assessment designed to be used at the time a stalking case is first reported to the police or another frontline responder. It is intended to inform immediate decision-making among frontline police officers and other professionals who are dealing with stalking situations but don't have access to specialised risk assessments.
- The SASH requires the user to judge the presence of up to 16 items about the stalking behaviour, characteristics of the perpetrator's history and the victim's situation (13 relevant to all stalking situations, and an additional three questions specific to situations in which the stalker is a former sexual or dating partner). The answers are used to identify how concerned the user should be about the stalking case, allowing them to prioritise resources towards cases that should cause the greatest concern.
- The level of concern is calculated using a three-point scale: low concern (0-2 items scored present), moderate concern (several items present), or high concern (many items present). Two items lead to an automatic high level of concern if present (victim fear of fatal violence and the presence of 'last resort thinking' in the perpetrator).

Tool development

- The SASH was developed and tested by clinicians and researchers with experience in stalking and domestic abuse based on a review of relevant risk assessment literatures and the content of three existing risk assessment instruments: the stalking risk profile (SRP), the guidelines for stalking assessment and management (SAM) and the brief spousal assault form for the

evaluation of risk (B-SAFER). Originally developed in 2010 as the stalking assessment screen (SAS), the tool was revised to create the SASH in 2015.

- **Hehemann and others (2017)** – measured the IRR and predictive validity of the SASH with the Netherlands National Police. A total of 115 reports of stalking were scored from the file review and followed up over six months.
 - Although the level of concern underestimated the subsequent severity of stalking in 16 cases (10% of the total sample), the outcome was effective in differentiating between subsequent stalking of different severities, particularly for identifying and ruling out cases where subsequent stalking was of low severity.
 - IRR: analyses suggested that SASH can be used consistently (the SASH was scored in the same way 80% of the time, a rate that was significantly different from chance, although there was variability by individual item). The IRR of overall concern judgements was lower, achieving a 59% agreement and only a moderate level of IRR. This was partly due to incorrect application of the SASH by users who did not follow the instructions provided.
 - Predictive validity: The majority of low concern cases had a low severity outcome, and only 2% had a high severity outcome. Examination of sensitivity (the ability to correctly identify the people who will be revictimised) and specificity (the ability to correctly identify the people who will not be revictimised) showed that using a threshold of 'more than low concern' to determine who would receive additional resources would correctly capture 83% of people who did go on to experience moderate or high severity stalking.

General notes

- The SASH allows users to override the level of concern that is apparent based on item scores with reference to their professional judgement and unique characteristics of the case.

- The SASH is intended as a screening or triage tool, it is not a comprehensive risk assessment tool. For individuals who are identified as presenting a moderate or high concern, the authors recommend more comprehensive risk assessment instruments such as the SAM or the SRP so that a tailored risk management plan may be developed.
- For organisations wishing to implement SASH as a standard screening procedure, training is required. See: stalkingriskprofile.com/stalking-risk-profile/sash

Name of tool	S-DASH risk identification checklist for use in stalking and harassment cases
Author/publisher (year)	Lorraine Sheridan, Karl Roberts and Laura Richards (2009)

Description

- The S-DASH is a set of 11 risk identification questions that forms part of the domestic abuse, stalking and honour-based violence (DASH) risk identification, assessment and management model. It is intended to aid the identification of stalking and harassment patterns and behaviours, and provide an indication of a victim's/victims' risk of harm. The checklist is followed by a free text section, which should be used to record any additional observations or relevant information.
- The guidance states that the checklist should be used when there are two or more incidents of stalking and harassment (reported or unreported) and/or if the victim is extremely frightened. The higher the number of 'yes' responses, the higher the risk that the perpetrator may harm the victim.
- Risk categories of standard, medium or high (modelled on Offender Assessment System (OASys) definitions, developed by the Prison and Probation Services (UK)) are included as part of the full DASH assessment.

Tool development

- The development of the questions was based on correlates of serious stalker violence, as well as correlates produced by earlier studies, such as explicit threats made by the stalker, previous intimate relationship between victim and stalker and evidence of substance abuse by the stalker.
- **Sheridan and Roberts (2011)** – The development of the S-DASH questions was informed by data collected through anonymous questionnaires from 1,565 stalking victims. Two binary regressions were run to assess the variables that

best predicted physical assault by the stalker. The authors conclude that the S-DASH has good reliability and validity:

- 43 past violent stalking case files were assessed using the yes/no questions and clinically based judgements of risk made by a police-accredited behavioural investigative advisor and the results compared. The assessments matched well in terms of differentiating between low, medium and high-risk cases ($r=0.85$, $p<0.001$).
- Similarly reliable results were found for cases that resulted in murder ($r=0.78$, $p<0.01$).
- Caution should be taken when interpreting the findings, as the regressions were based on answers of self-defined victims of stalking, meaning results are not generalisable to all victims of this type of harassment.

General notes

- This evaluation study was conducted by the authors of the risk assessment tool (Sheridan and Roberts, 2011) and tested the development of the questions retrospectively using past case files. No further evaluation evidence has been identified.
- For the S-DASH questions, see:
reducingtherisk.org.uk/cms/sites/default/files/resources/risk/StalkingAndHarassmentS-DASH.pdf

Name of tool	The domestic abuse risk assessment (DARA)
Author/publisher (year)	College of Policing (2018)

Description

- The DARA is a primary risk assessment intended initially for use by first responding police officers in England and Wales. It consists of 17 fixed-response questions asked directly of victims, and a free text section where officers are encouraged to give context to victims' responses and a rationale for their assessment of risk.
- Officers completing the DARA are required to assess the risk of harm to the victim as 'standard', 'medium' or 'high'. These categories were adapted from those used in the OASys assessment for general offending used by the probation and prison services in England and Wales.
- The DARA is a structured professional judgement tool; it is not possible to 'score' the DARA.

Tool development

- The DARA was developed following a review of the existing DASH risk model led by Professor Amanda Robinson at Cardiff University. The College of Policing jointly conducted the DASH review research and led on developing the DARA.
- The questions contained in the DARA are based on prior research that has identified a core set of risk factors for domestic abuse (see Robinson, 2010). There is a particular emphasis on behaviours associated with coercive control (see Stark, 2007).
- During the development of the DARA, in-depth interviews were undertaken with survivors of domestic abuse and first responding police officers. There was also consultation with specialist service providers and leading academics.

- **Wire and Myhill (2018)** – evaluated a pilot of the DARA in three police forces in England and found:
 - using the DARA, first response officers' initial assessments of risk were less likely to be regraded, during a post-incident review, than assessments made using the existing DASH risk assessment
 - victims in one force disclosed perpetrators' coercive and controlling and stalking and harassment behaviours at greater rates using the piloted risk assessment tool
 - first response officers recorded proportionately more crimes of coercive control during the pilot, though numbers overall were still small

General notes

The DARA will be tested in a further four forces commencing in the summer of 2019.

Name of tool	Domestic abuse, stalking and honour-based violence (DASH)
Author/publisher (year)	ACPO working group

Description

- The DASH is a structured professional judgement risk assessment used by most police forces across the UK. It comprises 27 risk identification questions. The questions explore the victim's current situation, history of domestic abuse and information about the abuser.
- The DASH questions aim to capture domestic abuse risk factors that appear to be consistent with academic literature (Robinson, 2010). Questions are asked of victims, usually by first responders at the scene of a domestic abuse incident. As well as 'yes/no' questions on whether specific risk factors are present, there are free text boxes to allow officers to contextualise the response to each question.
- Responses to the DASH questions inform officers' professional judgement of overall risk of harm to the victim, which they are required to grade as 'standard', 'medium' or 'high'. A greater number of risk factors present suggests a higher risk of harm, but officers may use their judgement to assess the risk as high based on a combination of a small number of risk factors. The risk grading is sometimes reviewed and potentially altered at a second stage by specialist units.

Tool development

The DASH was developed by a national policing working group and built on existing risk assessment models in South Wales (FSU9) and the Metropolitan Police (SPECSS).

DASH was not evaluated following implementation. A subsequent review of the DASH model (Robinson and others, 2016) found inconsistency in the way it was implemented. It also highlighted inconsistency in how first response officers conducted the risk assessment and inconsistency in how data was recorded.

Despite not being designed to predict further discrete incidences of violence, the remaining research relating to DASH has focused on its ability to predict violent recidivism.

- **Thornton (2017)** looked retrospectively at case files of serious assault or domestic murder and found:
 - in 55% of the domestic assault and murder cases, there was no prior contact with the police
 - a combined false negative rate of 90% for murder and non-deadly assault
- **Chalkley and Strang (2017)** replicated Thornton's study and found:
 - an overall false negative rate of 67% where deadly violence cases with prior police contact were not graded as 'high risk'
 - a 99% false positive rate where those graded as 'high risk' reported no further serious harm

Neither study appeared to account for the dynamic nature of risk assessment in relation to false negatives (in other words, a grade of standard or medium may have been valid at the time of the risk assessment and a later change of circumstances may have raised the risk of harm prior to the homicide). Chalkley and Strang (2017) acknowledged that a false positive rate could be in part a result of effective intervention rather than poor prediction or incorrect risk grading.

- **Turner, Medina and Brown (2019)** used machine learning methods to conclude that the DASH is not enabling officers to identify high-risk revictimisation.
- **Grogger, Ivandic and Kirchmaier (2020)** also used machine learning methods to examine the ability of DASH risk assessments to predict revictimisation and concluded that they are not very accurate.

Both studies used a narrow outcome measure for revictimisation (physical violence with injury).

General notes

- The DASH incorporates professional judgement. Officers should grade risk using professional judgement using the score on the DASH as a guide only.
- In a national mapping exercise, three models of risk-led policing were identified: frontline officers identify risk factors at an incident but the risk grading is applied afterwards by specialist officers or police staff; officers both identify risks and apply a risk grading and a secondary assessor reviews a subset of cases graded as medium or high; officers attending an incident both identify risk and apply a risk grading and a secondary assessor reviews the risk grading in all cases (Robinson and others, 2016).
- For the DASH questions, see: dashriskchecklist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/DASH-2009.pdf

Recommended reading

LAP

Messing JT and others. (2017). 'The Lethality Screen: The Predictive Validity of an Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment for Use by First Responders'. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(2), pp 205-226.

Messing JT and others. (2015). 'The Oklahoma Lethality Assessment Study: A Quasi-Experimental Evaluation of the Lethality Assessment Program'. *Social Service Review*, 89(3), pp 499-530.

Messing JT and others. (2014). 'Police Departments' Use of the Lethality Assessment Program: A Quasi-Experimental Evaluation'. Washington DC: US Department of Justice.

SASH

Hehemann K, van Nobelen D and Brandt C. (2017). 'The Reliability and Predictive Validity of the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH)'. *Journal of Threat, Assessment and Management*, 4(3), pp 164-177.

S-DASH

Sheridan L and Roberts K. (2011). 'Key Questions to Consider in Stalking Cases'. *Behavioural Sciences & the Law*, 29(2), pp 255-270.

B-SAFER

Au A and others. (2008). 'A Preliminary Validation of the Brief Spousal Assault Form for the Evaluation of Risk (B-SAFER) in Hong Kong'. *Journal of Family Violence*, 23, pp 727-735.

Kropp PR and Hart SD. (2004). 'The Development of the Brief Spousal Assault Form for the Evaluation of Risk (B-SAFER): A Tool for Criminal Justice Professionals'. Canada: Department of Justice, Research and Statistics Division.

Storey JE and Strand S. (2013). 'Assessing violence risk among female IPV perpetrators: An examination of the B-SAFER'. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 22(9), pp 964-980.

Svalin K. (2018). ['Risk assessment of intimate partner violence in a police setting: reliability and predictive accuracy'](#). Malmö University, Faculty of Health and Society [Accessed 12 December 2019]

ODARA

Bowen E. (2011). 'An overview of partner violence risk assessment and the potential role of female victim risk appraisals'. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 16, pp 214-226.

Hilton NZ and others. (2010). 'Risk Assessment Among Incarcerated Male Domestic Violence Offenders'. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 27, pp 815-832.

Hilton NZ and others. (2004). 'A brief actuarial assessment for the prediction of wife assault recidivism: The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment'. *Psychological Assessment*, 16, pp 267-275.

DARA

Wire J and Myhill A. (2018). ['Piloting a new approach to domestic abuse frontline risk assessment: Evaluation report'](#), College of Policing: London [Accessed 20 November 2019]

DASH

Chalkley R and Strang H. (2017). 'Predicting domestic homicides and serious violence in Dorset: A replication of Thornton's Thames Valley analysis'. *Cambridge Journal of evidence-based policing*, doi: 10.1007/s41887-017-0010-2.

Grogger J, Ivandic R and Kirchmaier T. (2020). 'Comparing conventional and machine-learning approaches to risk assessment in domestic abuse cases'. London: London School of Economics.

Robinson A. (2010). 'Risk and intimate partner violence'. In: Kemshall H and Wilkinson B, eds. 'Good practice in risk assessment and risk management' (3rd ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp 119-138.

Robinson AL and others. (2016). ['Risk-led policing of domestic abuse and the DASH risk model'](#). College of Policing [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Thornton S. (2017). 'Predicting Domestic Murder and Serious Assaults in the Thames Valley'. *Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing* 1.

Turner E, Medina J and Brown G. (2019). 'Dashing Hopes? The predictive accuracy of domestic abuse risk assessment by police'. *The British Journal of Criminology*, (59)5, pp 1013-1034.

Appendix C: Risk assessment tools that can be freely accessed online

B-SAFER	justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/fl-lf/famil/rr05_fv1-rr05_vf1/rr05_fv1.pdf
ODARA	nj.gov/lps/dcj/agguide/directives/ODARA-Scoring-Form.pdf
LAP	ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/247456.pdf
S-DASH	reducingtherisk.org.uk/cms/sites/default/files/resources/risk/TalkingAndHarassmentS-DASH.pdf
DASH	dashriskchecklist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/DASH-2009.pdf
H-DASH	dashriskchecklist.co.uk/honour-based-abuse/
DARA	whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/DA_risk_assessment_pilot.pdf
Missing person report (COMPACT)	whatdotheyknow.com/request/390683/response/949951/attachment/3/Blank%20Compact%20Booklet.pdf

Appendix D: Risk assessment tools table

Adults at risk					Rating
1	Vulnerability screening tool (ViST)		Applicability All victims of crime	Developed by Devon and Cornwall Police	
			Type Structured professional judgement	Items 10	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	This is a locally developed tool, which was developed and refined through a six-month pilot and consultation in force. This tool has not been formally evaluated.	Not tested	Not tested	Previous incidents; escalation; impact on victim; feeling safe; stalking/harassment; other victims; support available; influence of prejudice or hate.	
2	Anti-social behaviour (ASB) risk assessment matrix		Applicability Adult victims of ASB	Developed by Thames Valley Police	
			Type Actuarial assessment (+judgement)	Items 8	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	This is a locally developed tool. No information has been identified regarding the development of the tool or whether it has been evaluated.	Not tested	Not tested	Frequency; escalation; intimidation; target of incident; influence of prejudice or hate; impact on victim; victim at risk/vulnerable; support available.	
3	Anti-social behaviour risk assessment (ASBRA)		Applicability Adult victims of ASB	Developed by Cumbria Police	
			Type Actuarial assessment (+judgement)	Items 15	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	This is a locally developed tool. No information has been identified regarding the development of the tool or whether it has been evaluated.	Not tested	Not tested	Abuse type; injury present; weapons violence; living and carer arrangements; consistent accounts given; age; ability to communicate; mental health; disability; suicidal; sexually active; history of domestic abuse; power of attorney; living conditions; isolation; capacity to consent.	

Domestic abuse					Rating	
5	Domestic abuse risk assessment (DARA)		Applicability Adult victims of domestic abuse		Developed by College of Policing	Some evidence
			Type Structured professional judgement		Items 17 (+ free text)	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured		
	The questions are based on a core set of risk factors for domestic abuse identified through previous research (Robinson, 2010), with emphasis on coercive controlling behaviours (Stark, 2007). In-depth interviews were undertaken with police officers and survivors of domestic abuse and service providers and academics were consulted.	Wire and Myhill (2018) evaluated a pilot of the DARA in three UK police forces and found first response officers' initial assessments of risk were less likely to be regraded, during a post-incident review, than assessments made using the DASH.	Wire and Myhill (2018) found victims in one force disclosed perpetrators' coercive and controlling and stalking and harassment behaviours at greater rates using the piloted risk assessment tool, and that first response officers recorded proportionately more crimes of coercive control during the pilot, though numbers overall were still small.	Threats (to victim, dependents, pets); emotional abuse; control (monitoring, child arrangements, daily activities, suicide threats); financial abuse; stalking; feelings of isolation; physical violence; sub-lethal violence; weapons violence; plans to separate; escalation of abuse; victim perception of risk.		
6	Domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence (DASH) risk identification, assessment and management model		Applicability Adult victims of domestic abuse		Developed by ACPO working group	Some evidence
			Type Structured professional judgement		Items 27	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured		
	The DASH was created on behalf of ACPO and in partnership with Safe Lives.	Robinson and others (2016) completed a review of the DASH model, and found there were inconsistencies with how the model was implemented, and inconsistencies in how first response officers collected and recorded information during the DASH victim interview.	Though not designed specifically to predict discrete future incidents of victimisation, extant research had focused on the ability of the DASH to predict future physical assaults. Thornton (2017) and Chalkley and Strang (2017) found cases of domestic homicide had rarely been assessed as high risk. Both studies appeared not to have considered the dynamic nature of risk (that an assessment may have been appropriate at the time, and a change in circumstances occurred prior to the homicide). Chalkley and Strang (2017) acknowledged that a high 'false positive' rate may be explained in part by effective safeguarding measures. Turner, Medina and Brown (2019) and Grogger, Ivandic and Kirchmaier (2020) both used machine learning methods to conclude that DASH was not good at predicting further victimisation. Both studies used a narrow measure of future victimisation/harm (physical violence with injury).	Injury present; victim fear; frequency; escalation; control; jealousy; weapons; isolation; suicidal thoughts; separation; conflict over child contact; presence of children; pregnancy; threats to harm or kill (victim or children); animal mistreatment; money problems; substance abuse; offence history; violation of court orders; stalking or harassment; threats from others.		

Stalking and harassment					Rating
7	Screening assessment for stalking and harassment (SASH)		Applicability Victims of stalking and harassment	Developed by McEwan and others (2015)	Some evidence
			Type Structured professional judgement	Items 16	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	The SASH was developed and tested by expert clinicians and researchers based on a review of relevant risk assessment literature and the content of three existing risk assessment instruments.	Hehemann and others (2017) found the SASH was scored in the same way in 80% of cases, suggesting it can be used consistently. The IRR of the overall risk rating was lower (59% agreement), partly due to incorrect application of the SASH.	Hehemann and others (2017) found the final rating (termed the level of concern outcome) effectively differentiated between subsequent stalking of different severities (particularly subsequent low severity stalking, which allows resources to be targeted more effectively).	Perpetrator seeking proximity; threats and aggression (victim or close others); property damage; violation of court orders; escalation; mental health (suicide, last resort thinking, significant loss); perpetrator history; unavoidable contact; victim fear; possessiveness or jealousy; substance abuse; disputes, children or property.	
8	S-DASH risk identification checklist for use in stalking and harassment cases		Applicability Victims of stalking and harassment	Developed by Sheridan and others (2009)	Some evidence
			Type Structured professional judgement	Items 11 (+ free text)	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	The development of the S-DASH questions was informed by analysis of prior research and data collected through questionnaires from 1,565 stalking victims (Sheridan and Roberts, 2011). Two binary regressions were run to assess the variables that best predicted physical assault by the stalker.	Not tested	Sheridan and Roberts (2011) tested the development of the questions retrospectively using past case files: 43 violent stalking case files were assessed using S-DASH and clinical judgement. The assessments matched well, differentiating between low, medium and high cases.	Victim fear; previous harassment; property damage; frequency; loitering; threats; harassment of others; violence against others (past and present); third party involvement; substance abuse.	

Honour-based abuse (HBA)					Rating
9	HBA screening questions (H-DASH)		Applicability Victims of HBA	Developed by ACPO working group	
			Type Structured professional judgement	Items 10	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	The DASH was created on behalf of ACPO and in partnership with Safe Lives. No information has been identified to suggest that the H-DASH questions have been evaluated.	Not tested	Not tested	Truancy; self-harm; isolation; victim fear (forced marriage, abroad travel, relationship); control; threats to harm or kill; threats to remove children; separation.	
10	Forced marriage and HBA risk assessment		Applicability Victims of forced marriage and/or honour-based abuse	Developed by Karma Nirvana	
			Type Structured professional judgement	Items Data collection + 25 risk questions	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	The development of the tool was informed by practitioner experience and research into commonalities in homicide (Karma Nirvana, personal communication). Developed as a secondary risk assessment tool, some elements have been incorporated into frontline policing by some forces. The tool has not been formally evaluated.	Not tested	Not tested	Information on specific circumstances; threats to harm or kill; violence; sexual abuse; weapons; control; forced marriage (imminence, family history, to first cousin, overseas or abduction suspected); pregnancy; plans to flee; suicidal; vulnerability; stalking or harassment; perpetrator history; violation of court orders; substance abuse; family network; 'dishonour' or 'shame'.	

Missing persons					Rating
11	Missing person report (COMPACT)		Applicability Missing persons	Developed by UK police forces and WPC Software Ltd collaboration	
			Type Structured professional judgement	Items 19	
	Evidence base for development	Reliability	Effectiveness	Factors measured	
	No information has been identified regarding the development of the tool or whether it has been evaluated.	Not tested	Not tested	Age; odd behaviour; suspected crime in progress; suicidal; possible reasons/indications of disappearance (intentions, family situation, domestic abuse, prejudice, money, employment, other incidents); mental health; other illness; previous disappearances; capacity; on child protection register; medication needs.	

About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

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