

Current Known High Risk Indicators

The indicators below are research based and are known to be indicative of increased risk to the victim. They in themselves are not a measure of the likelihood of, or indeed the type of, violence that may be carried out. They can be used to guide the professional's understanding about the probability of violence happening again and thus the advice to their clients.

It is hoped that, if risk factors are widely known by professionals and the interventions understood, help can be instigated earlier and potential violence reduced. When identifying risk indicators, always consider:

1. **who** is at risk
2. the **context** of the **behaviour**
3. **how** the risk factors interact with each other
4. the victim's perception of risk.

The indicators can be organised into factors relating to the behaviour and circumstances of the perpetrator and to the circumstances of the victim. Most of the available research evidence, upon which the following factors are based, is focused on male abusers and female victims in a current or previous intimate relationship.

15 high risk factors of serious harm or homicide in domestic violence cases

1. **Victim's perception of risk of harm:** victims of domestic violence often tend to underestimate their risk of harm from perpetrators of domestic violence. However, if they say they fear further harm to themselves, their child(ren) or someone else this should be taken seriously when assessing future risk of harm.
2. **Separation** (child contact): victims who attempt to end a violent relationship are strongly linked to intimate partner homicide. Many incidents happen during child contact or where disputes over custody have become a site of control.
3. **Pregnancy/new birth** (less than 18 months old): domestic violence can start or get worse in pregnancy. Victims who are assaulted whilst pregnant, when they have recently given birth or who have young children should be considered as high risk. This is in terms of future harm to them and to the unborn/young child.
4. **Escalation:** repeat victimisation and escalation must be identified. Escalation includes increase in frequency, increase in severity or decrease in the predictability of the violence. DV victims are more likely to become repeat victims than any other type of crime; as violence is repeated it gets more serious.
5. **Community issues/isolation:** needs may differ amongst ethnic minority victims, newly arrived communities, asylum seekers, older people, people with disabilities, as well as travelling or gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people. This might be in terms of perceived racism, language, culture, insecure immigration status and/or accessing relevant support services. Be aware of forced marriage and honour based violence whereby family/community try to restore their mistaken sense of honour and respect. Victims may be particularly isolated and/or vulnerable. Take their concerns seriously.

6. **Stalking:** persistent and consistent calling, texting, sending letters, following. DV stalkers are the most dangerous. Stalking and physical assault, are significantly associated with murder and attempted murder. This is not just about physical violence but coercive control and jealous surveillance. Consider the perpetrator's behaviour and whether victim believes it is being done to deliberately intimidate.
7. **Sexual assault:** those who are sexually assaulted are subjected to more serious injury. Those who report a domestic sexual assault tend to have a history of domestic violence whether or not it has been reported previously. Many domestic sexual offenders are high risk and potentially dangerous offenders.
8. **Strangulation** (choking/suffocation/drowning): escalating violence, including the use of weapons and attempts at strangulation must be recorded when identifying and assessing risk. This includes all attempts at blocking someone's airway.
9. **Credible threats to kill:** a credible threat of violent death can very effectively control people and some may carry out this threat.
10. **Use of weapons:** abusers who have used a weapon, or have threatened to use a weapon, are at increased risk of violent recidivism.
11. **Controlling and/or excessive jealous behaviour:** complete control of the victim's activities and extreme jealousy are associated with serious violence and homicide. Consider honour based violence – the victim may not have the freedom of choice. Examples may include fear of or actual forced marriage, controlling sexual activity, DA, child abuse, rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, threats to kill, assault, harassment, forced abortion. The perpetrator may well try and control professionals as well.
12. **Child abuse:** Evidence shows that both DV and child abuse can often occur in the same family. Child abuse can act as an indicator of DV in the family and vice versa.
13. **Animal/pets abuse:** there is a link between cruelty to animals, child abuse and DA. The use or threat of abuse against pets is often used to control others in the family. Abuse of animals may also indicate a risk of future harm.
14. **Alcohol/drugs/mental health:** the abuser's use of drugs and alcohol are not the cause of the abuse, as with all violent crime they might be a risk of further harm. Physical and mental ill health does appear to increase the risk of DA.
15. **Suicide-homicide:** threats from an offender to commit suicide have been highlighted as a factor in domestic homicide. A person who has used violence and is suicidal should also be considered homicidal.

Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) risk categories

Standard – no significant current indicators of risk of harm.

Medium – there are identifiable indicators of risk of harm. The offender has the potential to cause harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances, for example, failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, and drug or alcohol misuse.

High – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.