Lethality Assessment

Introduction

Lethality assessments are designed to evaluate the risk of severe violence, including homicide, in situations of intimate partner violence. These assessments can help law enforcement officers identify individuals at high risk of serious harm. By analyzing specific factors—such as the presence of weapons, past threats, and patterns of escalating violence—lethality assessments help professionals make informed decisions about resources that can reduce or prevent future violence and fatal outcomes.

There is a large body of literature that suggests when first responders use lethality assessments, the frequency and severity of violence decrease, and victims may adopt protective strategies and seek help more often. Lethality assessments are also designed to educate victims about risk factors for danger, to improve their decision-making about self-care, and to encourage them to pursue shelter and advocacy services.

The following are some validated lethality assessment instruments commonly used in law enforcement:

1. **Danger Assessment (DA)**

   o **Developed by**: Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell.

   o **Purpose**: This tool assesses the risk of homicide in cases of intimate partner violence (IPV). It uses a weighted scoring system based on responses to questions about the victim's experiences with the abuser.

   o **Application**: Primarily used by clinicians, domestic violence advocates, and law enforcement. It helps to identify high-risk cases and guide safety planning.

   o **Validation**: The Danger Assessment tool has been extensively validated and is widely used in both clinical and law enforcement settings.

   o **More information at**: https://www.dangerassessment.org/

2. **Lethality Assessment Program (LAP)**

   o **Developed by**: Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence.

   o **Purpose**: LAP is a protocol used by police officers at the scene of domestic violence incidents. It involves a screening tool called the "Lethality Screen" to determine if a victim is at high risk of being killed by their intimate partner.

   o **Application**: Used by law enforcement to make immediate referrals to domestic violence services if the screening indicates high risk.

   o **Validation**: The LAP has been validated through research, showing effectiveness in identifying high-risk victims and reducing domestic violence-related homicides.

   o **More information at**: https://www.mnadv.org/lethality-assessment-program/lap-program-overview-2/

3. **Danger Assessment for Law Enforcement (DA-LE)**

   o **Developed by**: The Geiger Crisis Center, Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell, and Dr. Jill Messing.

   o **Purpose**: A shorter derivative of the Danger Assessment instrument, also created by Dr. Campbell, tailored specifically for use by law enforcement officers. DA-LE is an 11-question evidence-based risk assessment instrument designed to help police officers assess the risk of lethal violence in domestic situations.

   o **Application**: It provides a quick, evidence-based method for officers to evaluate the potential for severe harm or death in IPV cases.

   o **Validation**: Research supports the DA-LE's validity as a tool for predicting the risk of lethal violence in domestic violence situations.

   o **More information at**: https://geigerinstitute.org/da-le/

4. **Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA)**

   o **Developed by**: Canadian researchers at the Ontario Provincial Police and other institutions.

   o **Purpose**: ODARA is used to predict the likelihood of domestic assault recidivism among male offenders.

   o **Application**: Used by police, corrections, and other criminal justice professionals to assess the risk of future domestic violence by an offender.

   o **Validation**: ODARA has been validated across multiple studies, demonstrating its effectiveness in predicting re-assault among domestic violence offenders.

   o **More information at**: https://cdnsm5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_9960/File/Research/Odara/ODARA%20FAQs%20WP.pdf

The following literature review includes relevant peer-reviewed research on lethality assessments.

Anderson, Kristen (2021). Examining the Relationship between the Lethality Assessment/Domestic Violence High-risk Team Monitoring (LAP/DVHRT) Program and Prosecution Outcomes.

John Hopkins School of Nursing. *Danger Assessment*. https://www.dangerassessment.org/.

   This website states that for 25 years, the Danger Assessment Instrument has been used by law enforcement, healthcare professionals, and domestic violence advocates. The instrument is a 20-question, evidence-based form that is available for download. Online training is offered for $125/participant.

Klein, A. R. (2012). Lethality assessments and the law enforcement response to domestic violence. *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations*, 12(2), 87-102.

The author questions the success of lethality assessments based on decreases or increases in domestic violence-related homicides since there are "too few domestic violence homicides that occur each year in any given jurisdiction to use as a reliable measure of success or failure" (p. 92). The sole measure of success cannot be proven by a single response to domestic violence. Lethality assessments may have little to do with reducing domestic violence homicides. Since firearms are the overwhelming weapon of choice for abusers, any program that limits firearms in the hands of abusers and expands the number of domestic violence arrests reduces domestic violence homicides is probably the single most important response to reducing lethality.

Messing, J., et al. (2015). The Oklahoma Lethality Assessment Study: A Quasi-Experimental Evaluation of the Lethality Assessment Program. *Social Service Review.* https://evawintl.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Oklahoma-Lethality-Assessment-Study-1.pdf

The authors examined the effectiveness of the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence model by conducting structured telephone interviews with survivors after the incident of violence and again approximately 7 months later. Findings suggest a decrease in the frequency and severity of violence, particularly among those who chose to speak to a hotline advocate. The authors conclude the model is associated with increased use of safety strategies and reduced violent victimization.

Richards, T. N., Gillespie, L. K., Kafonek, K., & Johnson, M. (2020). An examination of the lethality assessment program (LAP): Perspectives on implementation, help-seeking, and victim empowerment. *Violence against women*, *26*(12-13), 1517-1537. https://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2095&context=all_fac

Lethality assessment participants did not report greater rates of self-protective measures, which is contrary to the results from Messing et al. (2015). Victims who participated in the lethality assessment reported greater rates of safety planning and more applications for restraining orders than those who did not participate in the assessment. Only a slight majority of individuals reported taking part in safety planning after receiving the assessment. The findings did not provide strong evidence that the lethality assessment leads to other types of service utilization (i.e., shelter services, or counseling).