Using Risk Assessment in a Culturally-Specific Context

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Faye Luppi, J.D.
Héritier Nosso, Immigrant Resource Center of Maine
Introduction to Risk Assessment and ODARA
What is Risk Assessment?

Risk assessment is a procedure “whereby we measure some characteristic of a person or situation and then use that information to predict the likelihood of some negative event” — re-abuse by the offender, or lethal assault on the victim.

Why Use Risk Assessment?

- Common Language for Risk Communication
- Efficient Use of Scarce Resources
- Educates system players about DV dynamics
- Enhances victim safety
- Informs assertive safety, containment measures from criminal justice professionals
- Integral component of High Risk Response Teams – increased linkages and information sharing
- Provides another lens through which victims may view themselves, batterers and their situation.
ODARA: Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment - an actuarial tool which indicates the likelihood that a person who has already committed an assault on a domestic or dating partner will do so again in the future.

It is NOT a tool that will determine whether one partner in the relationship is abusing the other, or should be arrested.
1998: May/Iles Inquest
1999: Joint Comm. on Domestic Violence
   Report to the Attorney General
1999: Collaboration of Ontario Provincial
   Police and mental health experts

2002: Hadley Inquest
2004: DV Assessment Project
ODARA Development and Protocols

- **Cases:** 589 cases of men with police record of violence against a female domestic partner
- **Sources:** police database (rural, municipal and First Nations)
- **Eligibility:** assault by male on current or former female domestic partner
- **Recidivism:** an act of violence or charge of assault against a female domestic partner
- **Cases followed for five years**

Hilton, Harris, Rice, Lang, Cormier, & Lines (2004) *Psychological Assessment*
Case Variables of Study

- Assault Details
- Domestic Criminal History
- Nondomestic Criminal History
- Sociodemographic Characteristics
- Victim Reports
- Relationship Characteristics
Best predictors of violence are valid across demographic characteristics

ODARA predictiveness confirmed in samples from Greater Toronto area, Canada’s largest and most ethnically diverse metropolis

Data included First Nations communities

“We are confident the predictive value of ODARA … is generally applicable”

The original variables were reduced to 13 using statistical analysis (several steps, a series of analyses).

The 13 ODARA items significantly and independently predict recidivism.

ODARA has been cross-validated in numerous additional studies since the original research.
ODARA Questions: Criminal History

1. Prior domestic incident of assault in a police or criminal record
2. Prior non-domestic incident of assault in police or criminal record
3. Prior custodial sentence of 30 days or more
4. Failure on prior conditional release
10. Prior violent incident against a non-domestic partner (not in a police record)
ODARA Questions: the incident

5. Threat to harm or kill at the index assault
6. Confinement of the victim at the index assault
7. Victim concern about future assaults
8. More than one child
9. Victim’s biological child from a previous partner
11. Two or more indicators of substance abuse – (person being assessed)
12. Assault on the index victim when she was pregnant
13. Barriers to victim support: geographic isolation, no phone, children in the home, substance abuse
Percent who Recidivate
As a Function of ODARA Category

Construction N=589
All Cross-validations N=836
Percent in Category N=1425
Implementation of ODARA in Maine
Maine Context

A cluster of domestic violence homicides created an emotional tipping point in Maine and a focus on change.
Understanding their journey

“Young lady, it never happens in our community”

“Systems in our country that worked for us”

No access to elected officials in countries of origin

Distrust of government

Elder system: respect but controlling

Unknown trauma history of victims
Implementation of ODARA: Awareness Requires Action

- Identify content experts and a vehicle for multi-disciplinary task group study:
  - Maine Commission on Domestic and Sexual Abuse
  - Maine Domestic Abuse Homicide Review Panel

- Develop partnership between content experts and implementation experts.

- Link final recommendations with an integrated implementation plan that coordinates centrally and rolls the initiative out statewide.
Commission Report Recommendations

✓ Use validated, evidence-based tool: ODARA.

✓ Law enforcement should complete the assessment, provide results to decision-makers (judge, DA, bail).

✓ Use risk assessment tools in settings for which they were designed.

✓ Use of other RA/lethality assessment tools by advocacy or medical communities may be indicated.

Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment

odara.waypointcentre.ca
RA instruments in English “may have excluded the experience of different ethnic or minority groups” leading to bias that influences effectiveness with these groups.

Women of color, when asked detailed questions, “may be particularly reluctant to disclose personal information to advocates, police, or other criminal justice personnel.”

January 1, 2015: law enforcement officers must make a good faith effort to administer a validated, evidence-based domestic violence risk assessment recommended by the Maine Commission on Domestic and Sexual Abuse and approved by the Department of Public Safety [ODARA].

..and shall provide results… to the bail commissioner and district attorney…

19-A M.R.S. §4012, sub-§6
Exercise: What barriers/challenges can you identify in using ODARA with diverse communities in your jurisdiction?
Culturally Specific Context and Integrating Community Voices
Integrating Community Voices: having the conversation, building the relationships

- CCR
- Risk and Danger checklists
- Survivor workshops/focus groups
- Developing training materials
- Consulting with IRCM, foreign born professionals
- New Mainer DV/SA Advisory Council
“Ms. Marcarenño… said she tried to tell the police that her husband had pushed her down, but instead of taking him to jail, the responding officers arrested her and carried her barefoot and badly bruised to the 120th Precinct station house. She was charged with obstruction of governmental admin., ..after pleading with officers for an interpreter.”

More Challenges

- Definition of “family, intimate partner”
- Criminal history gaps: country of origin, refugee camps, primary site
- DOB issues
- Item 13 barriers limited
Increased Risk to Victims

- Risks of sharing information
- Small communities, lack of confidentiality
- Immigration issues/deportation
- Community isolation, stigma
- Risk to family in countries of origin
Dealing with the Challenges

- Language access: language lines for law enforcement, plus training
- Item 13 barriers: include additional information in narrative
- Family definitions: use common sense, do they qualify as “children?”
- Criminal history gaps: other information sources?
Create partnerships with allies in various systems BEFORE the crisis

Peer mentor support

Trusted relationships: the vehicle that drives our work

Cultural brokering: advocacy to help navigate the systems

Community education and outreach
Inter-Agency Collaborative Process for Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault agencies

- Prescreen/Intake
- Referral
- Service Review
- Coordination of Services
- Follow-up and Support Services
**REFERRAL**
- Obtain release from the survivor to speak to partner agency
- Provide history, intake process update and background of the case
- Determine language access & transportation needs
- Schedule 1st meeting with the survivor

**SERVICE REVIEW**
- Hold initial meeting with survivor
- Determine services needed, resources available and additional referrals
- Draft a comprehensive plan of services
- Set up a plan of communication
- Set up follow up plan and next steps

**FOLLOW UP & SUPPORT SERVICES**
- Provide ongoing support/resources
- Regular check in with the survivor
- Provide interpreter services

**COORDINATION OF SERVICES**
- Coordinate and implement delivery of services
- Provide interpreter services
- Communicate with the partner agencies and survivor on regular basis
- Identify other partner agencies that can provide other services beyond agency scope of services
Intervention/Risk Management
Who is at the table?
- DA, advocates, LEOs, Probation, Pretrial, Jail
- Cultural brokers
- Housing
- Legal aid
- Immigration attorneys
- Electronic monitoring
Engage diverse community members in ways that are culturally competent and safe for the participants.

Train BIP facilitators to create an inclusive environment reflecting the populations local to the programs – and to understand their own biases.

Partner with local culturally specific advocacy agencies for training.
Contact information

Faye Luppi, J.D., Project Director
Violence Intervention Partnership, a Project of Cumberland County Government
luppi@cumberlandcounty.org

odara.waypointcentre.ca for ODARA information

Héritier Nosso, Community Education and Prevention Coordinator, Immigrant Resource Center of Maine
hnosso@uswofmaine.org