



PACTS

Family Violence:

Risk Assessment

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Outline of Lecture

- ▶ What is risk assessment?
- ▶ What do you need to know about undertaking a risk assessment?
- ▶ Some guidelines for undertaking a family violence risk assessment

What is risk assessment in family violence?

- ▶ A process of evaluating people and situations to determine:
 - ▶ The presence or otherwise of safety and risk indicators for family violence
 - ▶ The factors affecting the severity and the likelihood of the risk; that is, of family violence
 - ▶ The possible consequences of the risk
 - ▶ The options available to people to seek and maintain safety
 - ▶ How a safety plan may be developed

Why would I undertake a risk assessment?

- ▶ You are in a professional position where you can take action to assist people to be safe
- ▶ You have identified risk factors (see unit guide module 2)
- ▶ The patient/client is likely to trust you, particularly if they have disclosed violence to you
- ▶ To assist the client/patient to understand their risk and feel confident to seek support
- ▶ You have a duty of care

How do I undertake a risk assessment?

- ▶ A number of models/guidelines are available
- ▶ One example: Victorian Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF)
- ▶ Designed to be used by family violence specialist services, legal and statutory services and mainstream services such as health, education and disability services

How do I undertake a risk assessment?

- ▶ Three levels of risk assessment, dependent on:
 - ▶ Your professional role & responsibilities
 - ▶ Your knowledge & skills
 - ▶ Your organisation's core business

How do I undertake a risk assessment?

- ▶ Health care professionals are encouraged to undertake a basic level of assessment when they suspect, but are not clear, that a client/patient has or is experiencing family violence
- ▶ These professionals include GPs, OTs, nurses, social workers and paramedics who do not work in specific family violence organisations and whose core work is NOT family violence.

A basic level of risk assessment requires you to:

- ▶ Identify possible indicators of violence in women and/or their children
- ▶ Develop a basic assessment of risk and safety
- ▶ Make relevant, appropriate and timely referrals to organisations such as specialist FV services, the police or child protection, depending on the level of risk assessed to exist.

How do I undertake a basic risk assessment?

- ▶ Check what resources your organisation uses for risk assessment
- ▶ Use existing models and frameworks, such as the CRAF, to guide your risk assessment
- ▶ Adapt or create your own risk assessment template
- ▶ Ensure your risk assessment processes are consistent across time and across clients/patients
- ▶ Integrate risk assessment questions into your usual communication & conversational style with clients/patients.

Examples of questions you might ask

- ▶ Will depend on how well you know the patient/client; the indicators you have observed; and other specific factors.
- ▶ How are things at home?
- ▶ Is there anything happening that might be affecting your health?
- ▶ When I see injuries like this, I wonder if someone could have hurt you?

Three main guiding factors when undertaking a risk assessment

- ▶ The client's/patient's own assessment of their level of risk
- ▶ A sound evidence base which identifies factors that indicate an increased risk of, or reoccurrence of, family violence
- ▶ The practitioner's professional judgement

Possible indicators of family violence shown by (adult) clients/patients:

- ▶ Appear nervous, ashamed or evasive
- ▶ Describe their partner as controlling or prone to anger
- ▶ Seem uncomfortable or anxious in the presence of their partner
- ▶ Give unconvincing explanations of injuries they/their child has sustained
- ▶ Recent separation/divorce
- ▶ Anxiety, depression, panic attacks
- ▶ Have a stress-related illness
- ▶ Have a drug abuse problem including dependency on tranquilisers or alcohol

Possible indicators of family violence shown by (adult) clients/patients:

- ▶ Chronic headaches and/or vague aches and pains
- ▶ Abdominal pain, gynaecological problems, miscarriage
- ▶ Report sexual dysfunction
- ▶ Sleeping and/or eating disorders
- ▶ Attempted suicide/self-harm
- ▶ Psychiatric illness
- ▶ Physical signs of violence
- ▶ Patterns of repeated injury or signs of neglect

Risk factors from perpetrator (1)

- ▶ History of violent behaviour, within the family and outside the home
- ▶ Access to lethal weapons
- ▶ Anti-social and aggressive behaviour
- ▶ Relationship instability, separation, divorce
- ▶ Life stressors such as unemployment

Risk factors from perpetrator (2)

- ▶ Violent behaviour in family of origin
- ▶ Mental illness/mental health stressors
- ▶ Resistance/lack of motivation to engage with services
- ▶ Violence-supportive attitudes
- ▶ Rigid gender stereotypes & expectations

Final considerations

- ▶ Risk assessment is an ongoing process
- ▶ You are likely to become part of a team of other health and allied health practitioners working with a patient/client: Be collaborative
- ▶ You do not have to prove that violence has occurred/is occurring
- ▶ Consult with colleagues and others with knowledge about family violence