



IMPRODOVA

Factsheet

Police as frontline responder in cases of domestic violence

Definition of domestic violence

Domestic violence is an abuse of power within a domestic relationship, between relatives, partners or ex-partners. It involves one person dominating or controlling another, causing intimidation or fear, or both. Domestic violence is often experienced as a pattern of abuse that escalates over time. It is not necessarily physical and can include:

- sexual abuse
- emotional or psychological abuse
- verbal abuse
- controlling and regulating the victim's everyday behaviour
- negligence (especially in child or elderly abuse)
- spiritual abuse
- stalking and intimidation, including using technology
- social and geographic isolation
- financial abuse
- cruelty to pets
- damage to property

Forms of violence

Physical violence is any use of physical force or threat which compels the victim to do or to abandon or to suffer or restrict or move her/him or to cause her/him pain, fear or humiliation, whether physical injury has occurred or not.

Psychological violence is the conduct and dissemination of information by which the perpetrator of violence causes fear, humiliation, feelings of inferiority, danger and other psychological distress in the victim, even when committed using information and communication technology.

Sexual violence is the conduct of sexual content that the victim does not consent to, is coerced into, or because of their level of development, does not understand their meaning, the threat of sexual violence, and the public disclosure of sexual content about the victim.

Verbal violence is part of psychological violence. Everything said by the perpetrator to or about the victim in order to harm him or her.

Economic violence is the unjustified control or restriction of a victim in disposing of income or property with which the victim independently disposes or manages or unjustifiably restricting the disposition or management of joint property of family members, unjustified failure to fulfil financial or property obligations to a family member or unjustified shifting financial or property liabilities to a family member.

Neglect is a form of violence where the perpetrator abandons the due care of the victim, which is needed due to illness, disability, age, developmental or other personal circumstances.

Stalking is a wilful repeated unwanted contact, pursuit, physical intrusion, observation, restraint in places where the victim moves or other form of unwanted intrusion into the victim's life.

Power and Control Wheel



The Power and Control Wheel illustrates the most common abusive behaviours and tactics.

Detailed information on the forms and dynamics of domestic violence is provided in [module 1](#).

Course of an emergency call

In addition to general information, additional information is required, e.g. the circumstances of the call (e.g. tone of voice, background sounds), mode of crime (e.g. types of violence), means used (e.g. knife, stick, gun), past unreported violations, specifics of the location of the violation (e.g. accessibility).

Dispatching police patrol to the scene

Information is provided to police officers about the alleged offender, namely: possession of a weapon, pre-punishment, possible applicable restraining order.

Coming to the scene and the beginning of the intervention

They have to establish a safe environment for the police operation. Immediately after entering the apartment, it is important to act decisively (to instil confidence in the victim, give the clear message to perpetrator that violence is unacceptable). Police officers must physically separate the perpetrator and the victim. To prevent the destruction of evidence, interviews have to be done separately. Police

officers should listen to children if they want to talk to them. Police officers should detect potential injuries of victims and observe their behaviour. Also, to inspect the crime scene and to secure and seize potential evidence.

For the police relevant indicators for domestic violence

The following are indicators associated with victims of domestic violence. Please note that none or all of these might be present and be indicators of other issues. This is where using these indicators as a guide can complement the practice of asking directly.

- The strongest indicator of future violence is the current and past behaviour of the suspect
- Previous calls to emergency centre (to the same address)
- Injuries and bruises
 - especially head, neck and facial injuries
 - bruises of various ages
 - injuries sustained do not fit the history given
 - bite marks, unusual burns
- Signs of maltreatment (for child or elderly abuse)
- Victim has symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Alcohol or other substance abuse
- Intrusive 'other person' assisting the victim, including partner or spouse, parent, grandparent or an adult child (especially for honour related violence and elder abuse)
- Children are hiding
- Children are sleeping despite the loud fight
- Damaged property, torn clothing
- Victim is reluctant to talk about the incident

Indicators of domestic violence are dealt with in more detail in [module 2](#).

How to interview the domestic violence victim

In any situation that you suspect domestic violence or abuse you can ask indirectly and then directly about domestic violence. If you have concerns that the client is experiencing domestic violence, you should ask to speak with them alone, separate from their partner or any other family members. It is important to understand that very often the victim blames herself/himself or tries to protect the perpetrator. You can always ask broad questions about whether your client's relationships are affecting their health and wellbeing.

For example:

'How are things at home?'

'How are you and your partner (or other family members) getting on?'

'How do you argue at home?'/ 'Can you disagree with your partner?'

'Has anything special happened lately?'

'Is anything else happening which might be affecting your safety?'

It is important to realize that victims who have been abused may want to be asked about domestic violence and are more likely to disclose if asked.

For example:

'Are you afraid when you are at home?'/ 'Are there ever times when you are frightened of your partner (or other family members)?'

'Are you concerned about your safety or the safety of your children?'

'Does the way your partner (or other family members) treat you make you feel unhappy or depressed?'

'Has your partner (or other family members) ever physically threatened or hurt you?'

'Has your partner (or other family members) forced you to have sex when you didn't want it?'

'Violence at home is very common. When being called to homes I often ask about abuse because no one should have to live in fear of their partners (or other family members).'

If the victim discloses experiencing domestic violence, it is recommendable to use a risk assessment form (e.g. DASH). Remember to ask all the questions in the questionnaire/check list since the victim may hesitate to disclose some sensitive issues or thinks that some abuse is a normal part of relationship. You are not allowed to steer the victim or the witness in a certain direction during questioning. It is important to record or save these preliminary interviews, as these can be later used as evidence in the trial.

If the victim's fluency in your mother tongue is a barrier to discussing these issues, you should work with a qualified interpreter. Don't use the victim's partner, other family members or a child as an interpreter. It could compromise their safety or make them uncomfortable to talk with you about their situation. Furthermore, using an interpreter from the same ethnic group may be questionable. Ask the victim if she/he prefers another language.

How to talk to victims of domestic violence is the subject of [module 3](#). For more information, please visit this module.

Responding to a disclosure

Your immediate response and attitude when a victim disclose domestic violence can make a difference. Victims require an initial response to disclosure, where they are listened to, validated and their own and their children's safety is assessed. They also need to be assisted on a pathway to safety.

- Listen
- Communicate belief
- Validate the decision to disclose

- Emphasize the unacceptability of violence but do not judge the perpetrator
- Be clear that the victim is not to blame
- Do not ask questions that could cause stress and a feeling of powerlessness in the victim

Aspects that should be considered after the disclosure of domestic violence such as information on police investigation and legal proceedings are addressed in [module 4](#).

How to treat the perpetrator

- Has to be treated respectfully to deescalate
- Need to cool down (e.g. in an arrest cell)
- Use police measure like warning speech or contact bans

Guidelines for filing a crime report

- Keep in mind that domestic violence does not always involve physical violence.
- If there are signs or report of others about negligence, or economic, digital, physical or sexual violence, which might constitute a criminal offence, always file a report.
- Always inform the child welfare authorities if there are any children involved.
- Write down exactly what the victim and the perpetrator have said.
- The documentation of what you have found, how the victim and perpetrator behaved and what they have said is particularly important and decisive for the further course of events.

Police officer has to accept the record of the admission of an oral criminal complaint, signed by the injured party. It is necessary to enter as many criminal practices in the record of the admission of an oral criminal complaint (it has a process value) or in the official note (if the record of the admission of an oral criminal complaint cannot be accepted). It has to be

defined if a crime was committed, evidence have to be attached, it should be written to whom the victim confided about the violence, medical certificates should be attached etc.

International standards and legal frameworks in Europe are discussed in more detail in [module 6](#).

Collection of notices

Police officer must obtain information from medical staff, school staff, employers, associations and finally finish the hearing of the suspect. In principle, interviews with children and minors can only be done with the permission of one parent, unless they are at risk. At that time, a social worker that from governmental side represents the child's rights from social services.

It is important to keep in mind that violence in private relationships remains hidden for a long time, because the victim has a difficult time deciding to leave the violent relationship due to the close personal relationship with the perpetrator, especially when there are children in the family. Violence often begins with psychological violence. The victim initially does not recognize this kind of behaviour as violent, even if she/he no longer has control of her/himself, with her/his time, her/his body and valuable. Violence always has psychological and physical consequences, especially traumatically affecting children. In police procedures, therefore, it is always necessary to pursue the goal of stopping violence, protecting the victim, to gather quality evidence and taking appropriate action against the perpetrator.

In [module 7](#) you will find more information on inter-organisational cooperation and risk assessment in cases of domestic violence in multi-professional teams.

Risk Assessment

Important circumstances to consider:

- Alcohol or drug abuse by the perpetrator
- Female victim earns more / has higher social status than male perpetrator
- Victim's pregnancy

Red flags: Immediate victim protection is needed!

- Victim shows signs of strangulation
- Victim lately has announced to split up with the perpetrator

The intervention of the police should include safety planning with the victim.

The safety plan usually includes possible measures for typical scenarios (e.g. when victim keeps living with perpetrator, when victims wants to leave abusive relationship and when victim does no longer live with perpetrator).

Find more information on risk assessment and safety planning in [module 5](#).

Sources

Women's Legal Service NSW (2019): When she talks to you about the violence – A toolkit for GPs in NSW: <https://www.wlsnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/GP-toolkit-updated-Oct2019.pdf>

Hegarty (2011): Intimate partner violence – Identification and response in general practice: <https://www.racgp.org.au/download/documents/AFP/2011/November/201111hegarty.pdf>