



# Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence



Fall 2015

## Featured in this issue:

### *Risk Assessment in Domestic Violence Cases*

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## From the Executive Director



I hope you all had a wonderful summer. Now that the warmer months are winding down, many of us are preparing for several upcoming holidays and significant events. As we do every fall, we welcome October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time when we focus our efforts and outreach more than ever on raising awareness and sharing information to support victims and the programs that serve them.

In this issue, we examine the role and function of lethality and dangerous assessment tools. There exists an ongoing conversation in the domestic violence prevention field about whether these tools can predict and/or prevent future acts of domestic violence, and various perspectives exist regarding whether and how such tools should be used. In our Q&A with Suzanne Dubus, Kelly Dunne, and Patricia Hohl, we take a broad look at the role and purpose of these assessments, and explore the distinctions between, and intended use, of each. Our feature article, by Kim Siciliano, explains the process that Schenectady County's multidisciplinary High Risk Team developed and implemented to monitor domestic violence cases that their pilot project assessed as "high risk" with technical assistance from [The Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center](#).

Once again, I invite you to join our October "[Shine the Light on Domestic Violence](#)" campaign. This is our eighth year, and I challenge us all to build on the success of previous campaigns by turning even more of the state purple in 2015! For ideas and guidance, please refer to the [toolkit](#) on our website.

*Gwen Wright*

### New Resources from OPDV!

We have recently created several new resources to inform and assist you in your ongoing prevention and response efforts. As with [all our publications and materials](#), the following are now available on our website:

1. [The SHARE Card](#) informs victims of domestic violence and sexual assault of their right to free, confidential screening and counselling and encourages them to talk with their health care providers to obtain referrals to professionals and resources.
2. [Intimate Partner Abuse of Older Adults: Special Considerations for the LGBTQ Community](#) presents specific tactics abusers use against their older adult (formerly referred to as "elder") LGBTQ current or former intimate partners, and explains the barriers to service that exist for this population due to their age, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

## NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline 1-800-942-6906

English & español, Multi-language Accessibility  
 Nat'l Relay Service for Deaf or Hard of Hearing: 711  
 In NYC: 311 or 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)  
 TDD: 1-866-604-5350  
 24/7 • CONFIDENTIAL



October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month! What are you planning to turn purple this year? Check out our [Toolkit](#) for ideas. During DVAM, post on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram with the hashtags #ShineTheLight and #NYSpurple.

### In Our Next Issue: Teen Dating Violence!

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. Are you planning ahead? Check out [our 2014 efforts](#) and stay tuned for details and ideas for 2015!

### Did You Know...

In New York State in 2014, the amount of money paid for domestic violence claims was \$2,655,234, and the amount of money paid for sexual assault claims was \$849,599.

This information was taken from the [2014 NYS Domestic Violence Dashboard](#)

# High Risk Domestic Violence Team of Schenectady County

Kim Siciliano, Director of Women and Family Services, YWCA NorthEastern NY

Over the past two years, the [YWCA of NorthEastern NY](#) (YWCA NENY), the [Schenectady Police Department](#), the [Schenectady District Attorney's office](#), the [Schenectady Probation Department](#), and the [Schenectady County Sherriff's Department](#) have developed and implemented a multidisciplinary High Risk Team for domestic violence cases. With funding from the [New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#) and [technical assistance](#) from the [Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center](#) in Massachusetts, this pilot project focused on two major areas of domestic violence case evaluation: Providing risk assessment to victims of domestic violence, and recommending higher levels of ongoing monitoring and containment for perpetrators.

## Case Selection and Review Process

Partners select and present cases they consider “high risk” at formal monthly meetings, at which point the rest of the team reviews and votes on which cases to accept.

They are currently monitoring twenty-four active cases, and have six inactive cases, nine closed cases, and four cases that they reviewed and voted not to accept, based on a number of factors. However, even when the group decides not to accept a case, the case remains open and is assigned to one of the YWCA's advocates, who maintains daily communication with the victim to regularly assess for escalation to the level of high risk.

## Lethality Assessment vs. Danger Assessment: What's the Difference?

According to the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center, “the escalation of domestic violence to a lethal level follows an identifiable pattern, with identifiable indicators.” Although all domestic violence cases are unique, law enforcement and domestic violence service providers regularly see similar characteristics that indicate a higher level of danger and necessitate more intense monitoring of the abuser and more enhanced victim safety and support. These characteristics are referred to as [“identifiable indicators” of lethality](#).

For each case it accepts, the team has an opportunity to evaluate these indicators on two separate occasions. First, when the responding officers use a lethality assessment tool to evaluate the scene of the domestic incident, and later, when the victim meets with a YWCA NENY advocate, who is certified to administer and score the [Danger Assessment tool](#).

Neither the Lethality Assessment nor the Danger Assessment tools can predict the behavior of an abusive individual. They can only serve as guides for comparing one case to others that have scored high as well. They are also only a small part of the information gathering process. Timelines are also established to outline the history of abuse, and police reports and orders of protection are gathered from current and past incidents of abuse. Better information allows for more informed decision making with the goal of preventing reassault. This process also decreases the number of victims needing to come into shelter. In fact, out of the thirty-nine cases the team has worked with, only one utilized a domestic violence shelter.

## Lethality Assessment Tool

The Lethality Assessment tool allows responding officers to look beyond the current incident and into the context and history of the perpetrator's behavior, allowing for more comprehensive communication across the many disciplines/agencies who will, or who already have, engaged with that specific victim and/or perpetrator.

The officer completes the questionnaire and can refer a client directly to a domestic violence advocate at the victim's request. Answers to the questionnaire remain confidential unless/until the victim signs a written, informed consent that specifies a time limit in which the information can be shared.

## Danger Assessment Tool

The team's evidence-based model utilizes the work of [Dr. Jacqueline Campbell](#), who, in consultation with battered women, shelter workers, law enforcement officials, and other clinical experts, developed the original Danger Assessment tool in 1986 to help determine the level of danger an abused woman has of being killed by her intimate partner. YWCA Advocates are certified to administer the tool and then determine the likelihood of homicide in a particular case. After scoring the assessment, trained, certified advocates assign it to one of the following categories: Variable danger, Increased danger, Severe danger, or Extreme danger.

To create an umbrella of safety and resources for domestic violence victims, it is important to have as many pieces of the puzzle in place, for thorough understanding of the whole picture. In order to help victims make the most informed decisions, it is essential for everyone to have as much clarity and information as possible. Assessments provide necessary pieces to the larger picture and assist the team in enhancing victim safety and perpetrator accountability.

## Identifiable Indicators

The Lethality Assessment tool and the Danger Assessment tool identify indicators associated with increased risk of homicide for domestic violence victims.

### The Lethality Assessment tool evaluates an abuser's:

- Threats to kill
- Acts of strangulation
- Employment status
- Access to weapons
- Drug or alcohol use
- Threats of suicide

### The Danger Assessment tool evaluates an abuser's:

- Control of the victim's daily activities
- Abuse of the victim while victim is pregnant
- Threats to harm children
- Strangulation of victim(s)
- Living arrangements
- Access to weapons

# Q&A: The Jeanne Geiger Domestic Violence High Risk Team Model

This Q&A was conducted with Suzanne Dubus, Chief Executive Officer of the [Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center, Inc.](#) and Kelly Dunne, Director and Patricia Hohl, Program Coordinator, both of the Center's National Training and Technical Assistance unit.

## Q What is the Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT) Model?

**A** Research has shown that many intimate partner homicides are predictable; and at the [Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center \(JGCC\)](#) we believe that if they're predictable, they're preventable. [JGCC's Domestic Violence High Risk Team \(DVHRT\) Model](#) leverages that predictability by incorporating evidence-based risk assessment into a community's domestic violence response to identify the most dangerous cases. A multidisciplinary team monitors cases that share information and implements case-specific intervention plans to mitigate the danger.

The DVHRT Model also acts as a real-time audit of the community's response system. A fluid, coordinated response and review helps agencies identify gaps in the system and quickly adjust accordingly.

## Q What role does risk assessment play in the Model?

**A** Early identification of cases at high-risk of a lethal or near-lethal assault is key to the successful operation of a DVHRT. Cases are assessed by the domestic violence agency, using the [Danger Assessment](#) developed by [Dr. Jacqueline Campbell](#), and by law enforcement using a risk-screening tool based on the Danger Assessment and adapted for use on scene by police officers. Once

a case is identified as high-risk, the DVHRT Model employs several risk management strategies, including enhanced access to domestic violence services, case monitoring by a multi-disciplinary DVHRT, and informed prosecutorial decision making at pretrial.

## Q How is the DVHRT risk assessment tool different from other tools?

**A** The DVHRT screening tools assess for risk of lethality or near lethal assault in cases of intimate partner violence, and are designed to identify the most dangerous cases in a community.

The original purpose of the Danger Assessment tool was to help victims understand the risk they were in, so they could take informed protective actions. Our law enforcement screening tool serves this purpose, by informing victims of their risk and encouraging services, but also expands the function of risk assessment by becoming a supplement to the police report and providing additional information to the criminal justice system. The information gathered in the risk screening tool moves forward to prosecutors where it can inform charging decisions, bail requests, and pretrial conditions.

Uniquely, the DVHRT tool is somewhat customizable to the jurisdiction. Customization increases usability in a community's criminal justice system.

## Q Why focus on such a small segment of cases?

**A** Domestic incidents that result in homicide represent a small percentage of cases but present the most significant threat to the entire community - the intended victim, family members, first responders, and beyond. By focusing on the highest risk cases, the DVHRT Model intervenes in incidents with the most severe potential consequences. Additionally, the DVHRT model brings together prosecutors, corrections, victim advocates and law enforcement. Cases are reviewed from the initial 911 call through prosecution, victim services and corrections. This constant review of the entire process creates an important opportunity to audit the response in real time and identify and close gaps for all victims.

## Q Doesn't the DVHRT risk screen just repeat information that might normally be put in the police report?

**A** The information gathered on the risk-screening tool may or may not be in a police report. But even if it is, the tool organizes this information through the lens of risk assessment putting individual incidents of violence in context as it moves through the criminal justice system.

Just as importantly, the tool provides a common language of risk among the various agencies that play a role on the DVHRT.

# The 2014 New York State Domestic Violence Dashboard

Since 2007, New York State agencies have been compiling and analyzing information from a range of systems in an effort to paint a picture of both the prevalence of domestic violence, and the strength of New York State's response.

Although accurate data on domestic violence has historically been difficult to obtain, [The Domestic Violence Dashboard Project](#) is our attempt to develop and report on various indicators that inform and impact domestic violence services and resources statewide.

The [2014 NYS Domestic Violence Dashboard](#) was released in September and is available on [our website](#). Now

in its eighth year, the 2014 Dashboard reveals several noteworthy trends and data points. For example, since 2013:

- Intimate partner homicides were at their lowest point since 2008.
- Strangulation offenses charged in arrests and arraignments were down outside of NYC.
- Use of firearms in intimate partner homicides dropped almost 4%.
- The number of domestic violence probation cases added to local probation department caseloads increased by 20%.
- Statewide calls to domestic local domestic violence hotlines

decreased by 5%.

- There was a 4.5% decrease in shelter denials of adults and children from 2013 to 2014.

We encourage you to review the complete [2014 Dashboard](#) along with [all previous annual Dashboards](#) archived on our site.



## OPDV Welcomes Shannon Cantiello, Director of Finance and Operations



**Hello! I am Shannon Cantiello, the Director of Finance and Operations at the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.**

I joined OPDV in October of 2014 after departing the New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee where I served as a Legislative Budget Analyst with a focus on the area of Human Services. Prior to my time at the Assembly, I worked as a Legal Advocate with [Wellspring](#) (formerly known as Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Services of Saratoga County).

Currently, I oversee the Agency's finances while fostering proper and efficient operational processes. I also serve as the Internal Controls Officer. Additionally, I have had the opportunity

to assist in the creation of policy that will improve the lives of those affected by domestic violence.

It is a true honor to serve the Agency under the exceptional leadership of our Executive Director, Gwen Wright, and to work with all of our esteemed staff who have dedicated their professionalism and talents to improving the lives of survivors across the State. I am ever-grateful for the opportunity and look forward to all that is to come!

## Incorporating Risk Assessment into the Courts

### The Domestic Violence Risk Factor Guides for New York State Judges

In order to increase safety for victims, many criminal justice agencies have implemented risk assessment tools in domestic violence cases. However, few tools have been specifically designed for use by Courts. To address this gap, the [Center for Court Innovation](#) worked with the [New York State Unified Court System](#) to consider how and where [risk factors](#) should be taken into account by courts.

In 2012, with federal funding, project planners created an advisory group of judges and court personnel to meet

with national experts and review local and national best practices. Center staff then worked with the [Office of Court Administration](#) to draft a guide for judges that was reviewed by the advisory group and stakeholder agencies and [piloted](#) during the summer of 2013. The pilot, conducted with [Haven House](#) in Erie County, showed positive effects on safety and effectiveness of protective orders.

The Domestic Violence Risk Factor Guide For Family Court Judges is two-sided and includes a chart identifying risk factors, information to look for in

a petition, and New York Family Law specific to each of the factors. The guide was designed to support effective decision-making, *not* as an actuarial tool or a guide for questioning litigants. In a sense, the Guide serves as a tuning fork for the judge's ear. Guides were distributed statewide after training to family and matrimonial judges.

A similar guide was created for matrimonial judges in 2014 and a guide for criminal court judges is in the process of being developed. For more information, please [email](#) the Center for Court Innovation.

NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence [www.opdv.ny.gov](http://www.opdv.ny.gov)

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