

15 HIGH RISK FACTORS OF SERIOUS HARM AND HOMICIDE IN DOMESTIC ABUSE (DA) CASES

1. **Victim's perception of risk of harm:** victims of domestic abuse often tend to underestimate their risk of harm from perpetrators of domestic violence. However, If they say they fear further harm to themselves, their child(ren) or someone else this should be taken seriously when assessing future risk of harm.
2. **Separation (child contact):** victims who attempt to end a violent relationship are strongly linked to intimate partner homicide. Many incidents happen as a result of child contact or disputes over custody.
3. **Pregnancy/new birth (Under 18 months old):** domestic abuse can start or get worse in pregnancy. Victims who are assaulted whilst pregnant, when they have recently given birth or who have young children should be considered as high risk. This is in terms of future harm to them and to the unborn/young child.
4. **Escalation:** repeat victimisation and escalation must be identified. DA victims are more likely to become repeat victims than any other type of crime; as violence is repeated it gets more serious.
5. **Community Issues/Isolation:** needs may differ amongst ethnic minority victims, newly arrived communities, asylum seekers, older people, people with disabilities, as well as travelling or gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people. This might be in terms of perceived racism, language, culture, insecure immigration status and/or accessing relevant support services. Be aware of forced marriage and honour based violence whereby family/community try to restore their mistaken sense of honour and respect. Victims may be particularly isolated and/or vulnerable. Take their concerns seriously.
6. **Stalking:** Persistent and consistent calling, texting, sending letters, following. DA stalkers are the most dangerous. Stalking and physical assault, are significantly associated with murder and attempted murder. This is not just about physical violence but coercive control and jealous surveillance. Consider the perpetrator's behaviour and whether victim believes it is being done to deliberately intimidate.
7. **Sexual Assault:** those who are sexually assaulted are subjected to more serious injury. Those who report a domestic sexual assault tend to have a history of domestic abuse whether or not it has been reported previously. Many domestic sexual offenders are high risk and potentially dangerous offenders. Be aware of the link between domestic and stranger rape.
8. **Strangulation(choking/suffocation/drowning):** Escalating violence, including the use of weapons and attempts at strangulation must be recorded when identifying and assessing risk. This includes all attempts at blocking someone's airway.
9. **Credible Threats to kill:** A credible threat of violent death can very effectively control people and some may carry out this threat.
10. **Use of Weapons:** Abusers who have used a weapon, or have threatened to use a weapon, are at increased risk of violent recidivism.
11. **Coercively Control and/or Excessive Jealous Behaviour:** Complete control of the victim's activities and extreme jealousy are associated with serious violence and homicide. Consider honour based violence – the victim may not have the freedom of choice. Examples may include fear of or actual forced marriage, controlling sexual activity, DA, child abuse, rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, threats to kill, assault, harassment, forced abortion. The perpetrator may well try and control professionals as well.
12. **Child Abuse:** Evidence shows that both DA and child abuse can occur in the same family. Child abuse can act as an indicator of DA in the family and vice versa - please note if the child(ren) witness or hear the abuse.
13. **Animal/Pets Abuse:** there is a link between cruelty to animals, child abuse and DA. The use or threat of abuse against pets is often used to control others in the family. Abuse of animals may also indicate a risk of future harm.
14. **Alcohol/Drugs/Mental Health:** the abuser's use of drugs and alcohol are not the cause of the abuse, as with all violent crime they might be a risk of further harm. Physical and mental ill health does appear to increase the risk of DA.
15. **Suicide-Homicide:** Threats from an offender to commit suicide have been highlighted as a factor in domestic homicide. A person who is suicidal should also be considered homicidal.