



Explanation of High Risk Factors in Family and Domestic Violence

Whilst there are many factors which contribute to the risk of FDV, research indicates that some risk factors are associated with a higher likelihood of violence reoccurring, serious injury, or death in the context of intimate partner violence by men against women. These factors and an explanation of these are listed below.

The relationship between these factors and risk of re-assault or lethality are not always straightforward, and no one factor can be considered 'causal'. These factors often interact in many and complex ways.

High Risk Factors

High Risk Factor	Explanation
History of FDV	The most consistently identified risk factor for intimate partner lethality and risk of re-assault is the previous history of violence by the perpetrator against the victim.
Separation (actual or pending)	Women are most at risk of being killed or seriously harmed during and/or immediately after separation.
Intimate partner sexual violence (including coerced sexual activity or unwanted touching)	Men who sexually assault their partners are more likely to use other forms of violence against them. Research has shown that intimate partner sexual violence was the strongest indicator of escalating frequency and severity of violence, more so than stalking, strangulation and abuse during pregnancy
Non-fatal strangulation (NFS) (or choking)	NFS is one of the most lethal forms of IPV and is a strong indicator of future lethality. Women whose partner has tried to strangle or choke them are more likely than other abused women to be killed. Often there are minimal visible signs that a woman has been choked.
Stalking	Stalking, when coupled with physical assault, is strongly connected to murder or attempted murder. Stalking behaviours include technology surveillance, GPS tracking, persistent phoning/texting, and contact against court order conditions.
Threats to kill	Women whose partners threaten to kills them (or their children) are more likely than other women being abused to be killed. Evidence suggests that a perpetrator's threat to kill a person is often genuine. Attempted strangulation should be considered an attempt to kill.

Perpetrator's access to, or prior use of weapons	If a perpetrator uses any tool in the most recent violent incident, this is considered high risk (as past behaviour predicts future behaviour). However in addition, NFS is one of the most lethal forms of IPV.
Escalation (frequency and/or severity)	The escalation in frequency and severity of violence over time is linked to lethality and often occurs when there are shifts in other dynamic risk factors, such as the victim planning to leave the relationship. Other triggers may be police investigations, and court proceedings.
Coercive control	Coercive control can include verbal and financial abuse, psychologically controlling acts and social isolation. Coercive and controlling patterns of behaviour can heighten the risk of lethality, particularly in contexts where other high-risk factors are present, such as attempts by the victim to leave the relationship.
Pregnancy and new birth	Violence perpetrated against pregnant women by a partner is a significant indicator of future harm to the woman and child, and is the primary cause of death to mothers during pregnancy. Violence often begins when a woman is pregnant and, when previously occurring it often escalates in frequency and severity.

Other Risk Factors

Below are a list of other risk factors which may also assist in building an understanding of the level of risk of harm to victims/survivors, particularly when occurring with any of the above factors.

High Risk Factor	Explanation
Victims self-perception of risk	Whilst a person's perception of their own risk of experiencing future violence is not sufficient by itself to accurately determine severity or incidence of violence, it is important to consider. A person's own assessment of their level of risk can also provide information in relation to their safety management.
Suicide threats and attempts	Threats of suicide, like most threats in the context of FDV, are a strategy used by perpetrators to exert control. Threats or attempts at suicide have been found to be a risk factor for murder-suicide.
Court orders and parenting proceedings	FDV often escalates among separating parents. Perpetrators may use their joint parenting role or judicial options as a way of exercising control over their former partner.
Misuse of drugs or excessive alcohol consumption	Perpetrators of FDV can be more dangerous when they are under the influence of alcohol and other drugs and this may increase the severity of future violence. Victims/survivors may use alcohol or other drugs to cope with the abuse, which can lead to their increased vulnerability.
Isolation and barriers to seeking help	Isolation, including limiting interactions with family, friends, social supports and community support programs is a control strategy used by some perpetrators and increases the risk of severe harm.



Abuse of pets and/or other animals	Cruelty and harm directed to pets and other animals can indicate risk of future or more severe violence and are often used as a control tactic by perpetrators.
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