



# IMPRODOVA

Improving Frontline Responses  
to High Impact Domestic Violence

## **Frontline Responses to Domestic Abuse in Scotland: assessing, managing and mitigating risk**

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# Scottish Government definition

Since 2000, Scottish Government has adopted a **gendered** definition of domestic abuse:

*“Domestic Abuse, as gender-based violence, can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends.”*

# Domestic Abuse Scotland Act 2019 : a new 'bespoke' criminal offence of domestic abuse

Creation of a new specific statutory offence of domestic abuse intended to better reflect the experience of victims

- by recognising the impact and consequences of all types of abusive behaviour, improve the criminal justice response and facilitate access to justice.

Draws on the concept of 'coercive control' (Stark 2007)

- Stark's work (2007; 2009) emphasises the importance of power and control in relationships characterised by domestic abuse;

Coercive control is

- a cumulative form of subjugation that uses a range of tactics - physical abuse alongside a pattern of non-physical abusive behaviors such as threats, intimidation, stalking, destruction of personal property, manipulation, psychological abuse, economic oppression, limitations on movement and restrictions on liberty – that both isolate women and 'entrap' them in relationships with men by making them constantly fearful (Stark 2007).

## Abusive behaviour is defined in two ways:

- a) behaving towards the **partner/ex-partner** in a violent (physically or sexually), threatening or intimidating manner, OR
  
- b) behaviour directed at their **partner/ex-partner**, at a **child** of their partner/ex-partner or at another person, which either has as its purpose or would be considered by a **reasonable person** to be likely to have any of the following effects:
  - Making the victim dependant on or subordinate to them
  - Isolating the victim from friends, relatives or other sources of support
  - Controlling, regulating or monitoring the victim's day to day activities
  - Depriving or restricting the victim's freedom of action
  - Frightening, humiliating, degrading or punishing the victim

# Requirements

- was behaviour **abusive** ?
- **intentionally causing harm** or reckless as to the causing of such harm
- a '**course of conduct**'
  - at least two occasions'
- '**reasonable**' person
- focus on **perpetrator intent**

# Identifying and Assessing Risk

## DASH Risk Checklist (focus on victim)

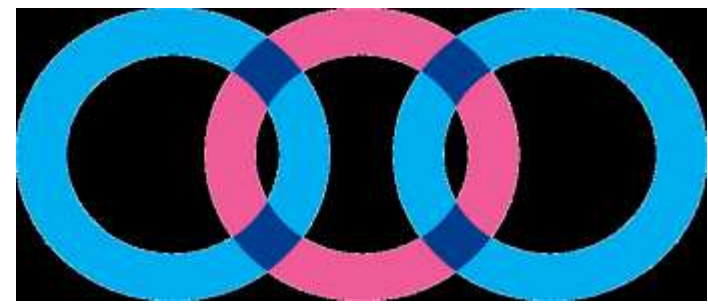
- a tool for practitioners who work with adult victims to help them identify those who are at high risk of harm
- many of the DASH questions relate directly to behaviours that would constitute coercive control
- information used to inform overall professional judgement of the risks and needs of the victim, and safety planning



## Domestic Abuse Questionnaire (DAQ) (focused on victim)

- a standardised risk assessment tool based on the 24 DASH RIC questions, extended to include 3 additional questions relating to children and dependents

# Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)



- Focused on those considered to be 'high risk' victims
- MARAC's facilitate, monitor and evaluate effective information sharing to enable appropriate actions to be taken to increase public safety.
- MARACs combine relevant risk information with an assessment of a victim-survivor's needs (Robinson 2003).
- Multi-agency level cooperation
  - MARACs bring front-line response agencies together to share information and draw up a safety plan that aims to improve victim's safety.
- Safety planning is dynamic and updated to take account of any changing circumstances of the victim and the perpetrator

# Independent domestic abuse advocates (IDAAs)

*'... involves the professional provision of advice, information and support to survivors of intimate partner violence living in the community about the range, effectiveness and suitability of options to improve their safety and that of their children. This advice must be based on a thorough understanding and assessment of risk and its management, where possible as part of a multi-agency risk management strategy or MARAC process.'*

- Key players in MARAC, play an important role in terms of crisis intervention, risk assessment and safety planning, and coordinating other services
- Role of IDAA is to keep the victim-survivor's perspective central to the process inc. representing their views at MARACs
- Their work also includes the provision of longer-term solutions, which may include specific actions from the MARAC as well as sanctions available through the criminal and civil courts, housing options and other available services



# Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordinating Group (MATAC) (perpetrator focus)

- In addition to MARACs, 14 police-led MATACs in Scotland as a means of targeting repeat domestic abuse perpetrators.
- MATAC is a Police Scotland initiative to identify and manage the most harmful domestic abuse *perpetrators*.
- Through partnership working, information sharing, tasking and coordination, the MATAC aims to identify and proactively target those domestic abuse perpetrators who pose the greatest risk of harm to victims and their families.
- Crucially, use of MARAC and MATAC reflects a victim-centred and perpetrator-focused approach to policing.

# Emerging findings from IMPRODOVA in Scotland

- use of risk tools used to **proactively** investigate and assess DA
- alongside structured professional judgement
- work well as **entry points into wider partnership** pathways designed to further assess risk and respond to victims' safety
- frontline staff **exercise discretion** in victims' favour when deploying these pathways, suggesting that DA in Scotland is embedded within the imaginations and practices of frontline staff
- **multi-agency working** crucial for both assessment and management of risk



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