



Risk Assessments for Domestic Violence in Public Law Proceedings

**The Domestic Violence Intervention
Project
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Introduction

DVIP is a groundbreaking voluntary sector project and registered charity which was set up in 1991. Our main aim is to increase the safety of women and children who experience domestic violence; and to do so by providing a range of diverse services including assessing and challenging men, supporting women, working in partnership, influencing policy, and campaigning for change.

DVIP is considered a centre of excellence in the field of domestic violence intervention work and has been cited by the Home Office as a best practice project (Living Without Fear 1999, Interagency Guidelines 2000).

In October 2009 DVIP became one of the first organisations to be awarded accreditation by RESPECT. This accreditation is a national standard of excellence for organisations that provide a prevention programme for male perpetrators and integrated support services for their women partners and ex-partners. It is endorsed by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. Accreditation standard organisations are those that RESPECT assesses as providing a "high quality, safety focused service". <http://www.respect.uk.net/pages/accreditation-project.html>.

Risk Assessment

DVIP works with referrals from social services departments and offers risk assessments for child protection public law cases where domestic violence is a contributing factor.

DVIP risk assessments offer the courts assistance in assessing risk. The assessment will consider static risk indicators, such as lethality, use of weapons and history of violence and dynamic risk factors, such as denial of culpability, remorse and victim empathy.

Experts who prepare risk assessments for DVIP come from a range of different professional backgrounds. All assessors will be educated to at least graduate level from fields such as Psychology and Criminology. In addition to professional qualifications, assessors have a minimum of four years experience of delivering treatment and assessing clients in this field as well as experience of giving evidence in court as an expert witness. All assessors will also have completed the relevant domestic violence risk assessment training.

Referral Pathways

A DVIP Risk Assessment may be ordered in care proceedings where domestic violence is a contributing factor. Appropriate cases for referral will be those where domestic violence is thought to contribute a significant element to the overall risk to the children, and in particular, where the ending of the domestic violence might result in a significant increase in

safety, or where a greater understanding of the risk resulting from the domestic violence might affect the court's decisions.

This leaflet explains our referral pathways, types of assessment and fees, and offers information and advice on how to make a referral.

There are three referral routes into the risk assessment team which correspond with the type of assessment or intervention being requested. These are:

- **Public Law Risk Assessment**
- **Private Law Risk Assessment**
- **Contact Activity**

This leaflet contains information relating to **Public Law Risk Assessments**. Leaflets for Private Law cases, and Contact Activity Referrals are also available.

Public Law Assessment Types

In Public Law Court proceedings DVIP can provide the following assessments:

1. **A Full Risk Assessment of the Father**
2. **A Vulnerability Assessment of the Mother**
3. **A “Joint Risk” Assessment - incorporating a Risk Assessment of the Father and a Vulnerability Assessment of the Mother.**

1. Full Risk Assessments of the Father

The assessment will consider the perspectives of both parents and will require between 6 and 8 hours interview time with the alleged perpetrator and between 2 and 6 hours with the other parent.

There will be a detailed risk assessment report that is fully court compliant. This report will address:

1. All areas relating to risk including: the history of domestic violence, other violence, alcohol and drug use, the exposure and impact on the children and their wishes, and levels of denial and attitudes towards the abuse. From this, static and dynamic risk indicators will be taken into account in order to help inform the assessment.
2. The impact of the abuse on the victim.
3. The direct and indirect risk posed to the children as a result of domestic violence in the home.

Finally, recommendations will be made as to the best ways to manage the risks in the interests of the child/ren.

As a result of this assessment it may be recommended that the man access DVIP's Violence Prevention Programme.

2. Vulnerability Assessments of the Mother

A woman can also be referred independently from her partner for an assessment. In a vulnerability assessment the impact on the victim's parenting will be assessed alongside their vulnerability to future abuse. It will require 6 to 8 hours interview time with the woman in total.

Following the assessment, packages of services will be recommended to fit an

individual woman's needs and one recommendation may be that she attend DVIP's Women's programme.

There are two options we offer for our women's work when the case is in care proceedings:

Concurrent Reporting Option: The mother will participate with a Vulnerability Assessment and alongside we will also allocate her a place on the Women's Programme. Both the assessment and programme will run hand in hand. At the end of the woman's attendance on the programme, we will file a complete Vulnerability Assessment which will incorporate her time on the programme. In addition, if required we can provide a short interim report at around week 6 to give the Local Authority some information on her engagement. The interim report will not provide conclusions and recommendations on the case.

Consecutive Reporting Option: The mother will participate with the Vulnerability Assessment. If a recommendation has been made for the Women's Programme, once the assessment has been filed with the courts, and if the recommendation is taken up, the client can commence the programme immediately. A final report will need to be ordered so that the court can be provided with an assessment of whether the treatment goals have been addressed and whether she has successfully reduced her vulnerability. Funding for up to 16 hours work to prepare the report will also need to be confirmed. This report can be made available within one month of completion of the WSS programme.

3. “Joint Risk” Assessments - incorporating a Risk Assessment of the Father and a Vulnerability Assessment of the Mother

In a joint risk assessment the risk posed by the perpetrator will be assessed as in a full risk assessment. There will also be an assessment of the impact of abuse on the victim’s parenting, alongside their vulnerability to future abuse. It will look at these in detail and recommend risk management strategies and treatment options. It will require between 6 and 8 hours interview time with the alleged perpetrator and between 6 and 8 hours with the victim.

Referral process

When a risk assessment has been ordered by the court, the order should include the release of relevant documentation to DVIP. The instructing party should make the referral to DVIP right away. Once a completed referral (including all relevant paperwork) has been received, DVIP will allocate the case to a risk assessor and provide confirmation of filing dates etc.

Please note that the timescales for risk assessments are calculated from the receipt of **all relevant paperwork**, and we are unable to allocate cases to assessors until we have received all of the following:

Referral Form - This can be obtained by emailing riskassessment@dvip.org

Court Order - This should be correctly worded, instructing DVIP to undertake the assessment and whether this is to be a risk, vulnerability or joint assessment

Letter of Instruction - This should include

confirmation of our fees, and also who will be responsible for what proportion. More information about fees can be found in the Fees section of this leaflet.

Evidence of Domestic Violence – this may be in the form of police reports, admissions from the perpetrator or a transcript from a finding of fact hearing. DVIP cannot undertake risk assessments in disputed cases where there is no admission and no finding/conviction for domestic violence. In such cases it may be appropriate for the courts to make a finding of fact around the domestic violence as a pre-requisite to the risk assessment.

Social Services Reports and up to date chronology

Please return all the above documents to **DVIP, 3rd Floor, Devonshire House, 164-168 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7RW**

Timescales

Upon receipt of all relevant paperwork, cases are allocated to an assessor. A **risk or vulnerability assessment will be prepared within 8-10 weeks*** and a **joint assessment within 10-12 weeks***.

*Please note that this is an estimated time frame and subject to change when there is a high volume of referrals. The final filing date for risk assessments will be confirmed by the risk assessor once the case has been allocated.

We recommend that new contact should

not be ordered, nor existing contact arrangements changed, until the result of the risk assessment is before the courts.

Risk Management

DVIP’s Violence Prevention Programme

Attendance on a domestic violence prevention programme is one of the possible risk management measures that might be recommended in the risk assessment report. To refer a man onto the programme the Court or Local Authority must direct him to attend. Since attendance on a programme alone is not an indicator of risk reduction, subsequent follow-up reports should be ordered to indicate changes in risk – further details below. A place on the programme can be offered within six weeks of funding being confirmed

for the programme and the final risk assessment report.

The group work programme involves 32 structured sessions designed to help men to understand why they have used abusive behaviour, how they can change this, and how they can work towards constructing respectful relationships with women. Men are challenged to take responsibility for their actions and to critically assess their gender-based expectations of themselves and their partners. The DVIP programme is not a traditional anger management or counselling group, rather it is specifically designed to address domestic violence. It draws on a wide range of approaches including cognitive, behavioural, social learning theory, psychodrama,

psychotherapeutic and relationship skills teaching. This enables us to create a challenging environment while offering support for personal change.

About a third of the total sessions focus on ending physical and sexual violence. The larger part of the programme focuses on ending other forms of abuse, parenting and developing relationship skills. The groups run on a rolling programme with a new intake of men approximately every six weeks. Group sessions last two and a half hours and are held weekly in the evenings.

Further Reports

A final risk assessment report is prepared after one month of the client completing the programme. The final risk assessment revisits both parties as well as all the risk indicators considered in the original report and sets out where changes have been made. The overall risks of physical and emotional harm to the woman and children are again measured with recommendations as to whether and how these might now be managed. This is based on up to 20 hours work.

An interim report may be ordered at the halfway stage of the programme although this is often not considered necessary. Such a report can be prepared if ordered by the Court and funding for 10 hours work is confirmed. Please note that interim and final risk assessment reports can **only** be prepared once a full risk assessment has been undertaken.

Women's Support Service Programme

DVIP has developed a specialist programme of work for women who face losing residence of their children because of a perceived inability to protect themselves and their children from domestic violence. The programme focuses on the factors that leave some women particularly vulnerable to re-assault. Women can only be referred to the programme either in conjunction with or following completion of a vulnerability assessment.

To refer a woman onto the programme the Court or Local Authority must direct her to attend and funding be confirmed. Following This, a place can be made available immediately.

Before a woman can start the programme a preliminary meeting with the social worker, client and Women's Support Service (WSS) worker will need to be arranged. The aim of this meeting will be to set out the goals and expectations of the services.

Women attend for an agreed contract of work which is usually 10 individual sessions and 10 group sessions, amounting to two visits per week over a 10 week period. This is then followed by a review of how best to continue.

The programme is aimed at helping women to plan and act for their own and their children's safety by:

1. Developing safety planning skills
2. Exploring attachment to abusive partners
3. Offering support
4. Giving clear messages about abuse – challenging denial and minimisation and developing a clear understanding of responsibility
5. Promoting realistic expectations of our work with their ex/partners
6. Giving information about their options and the services available
7. Considering substance use / abuse
8. Developing parenting skills
9. Exploring women's experiences of being parented themselves
10. Exploring earlier life experiences of abuse
11. Teaching anger management skills
12. Helping women develop and hold boundaries
13. Supporting women to work with protective systems
14. Offering advocacy and report writing

A short final report on completion of the WSS programme could offer further advice on whether the treatment goals had been reached. Such a report can be prepared if ordered by the Court and funding for 16 hours work is confirmed.