

# Developing a Valid Risk Assessment in Cases of Domestic Violence based on the Experience of Local Victims, Research and Data

Melissa Scaia, MPA

Director of International Training

# Why create a risk assessment?

To create a standardized methodology to be used by all police that makes the *severity* and *frequency* of the domestic violence *visible* to all justice practitioners.

# The Process is Just as Important as the End Result

- Resist “copying and pasting” another jurisdiction’s risk assessment and using it as your own.
- While there are similarities globally related to risk factors of lethality and re-abuse, there are also differences that must be accounted for.

# What Makes a Risk Assessment Valid and Relevant

- Research
  - Risk factors are backed up internationally by findings from researchers for the past 20 years
- Literature review
- Data
- Focus groups and interviews of victims of domestic violence

# Example: Republic of Georgia and the creation of Georgia Risk Assessment for Domestic Abuse (GRADA)

- Focus groups with victims of domestic violence
- Focus groups with advocates
- Data and research from the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia
- Data from UN Women Georgia
  
- Other possible data sources:
  - Fatality review data
  - Data from local domestic violence shelters
  - Surveys

# Georgia Risk Assessment for Domestic Abuse (GRADA)

- GRADA began to be implemented on September 1, 2018 and includes:
  - GRADA form to be filled out and used by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia
  - GRADA Guide provides step-by-step support for all agencies using GRADA
  - GRADA Bibliography links to valid research for each piece of the risk assessment

# Objectives of Assessing Risk

**OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence risk information**

**OBJECTIVE 2: Establish a process that shares the risk information collected**

# OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence risk information

Gather and organize information that *focus*

on:

- a) Context
- b) Dangerousness
- c) Risk

## OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence risk information

### a) CONTEXT – Three types of domestic violence

**1. Coercive controlling violence and abuse** is an ongoing patterned use of intimidation, coercion, and violence, as well as other tactics of control to establish and maintain a relationship of dominance over an intimate partner. Perpetrators of this type of domestic violence believe they are entitled to control the actions, thinking, and behaviors of their partner and children. This type of domestic violence creates fear for the victim and creates a significant gap of power in the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. There is very limited autonomy for a victim in this type of relationship.

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence  
risk information

a) CONTEXT – Three types of domestic violence

2. **Resistive violence** includes both legal and illegal use of force by a victim of domestic violence in response to their abuser's coercive and controlling tactics or in reaction to other men's violence against them as women. Resistive violence is part of a victim's broader strategy to stop (contain) the abuse.

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence  
risk information

a) CONTEXT – Three types of domestic violence

**3. Abuse unrelated to coercive control** is used by one intimate partner against the other and is neither an ongoing attempt to exert coercive control, nor a response to coercive control. It encompasses all other acts of domestic violence, which can be subdivided into categories such as: a) situational violence; or b) violence that stems from mental health ONLY with no coercive controlling behaviors or entitlement thinking.

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence  
risk information

b) DANGEROUSNESS

**Dangerousness** – the level of violence and harm that has occurred with relation to this current and any prior victims.

Dangerousness assessment looks at and gathers data from the past.

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence  
risk information

c) RISK

**Risk** – The level of violence and harm that will likely occur in the future - with relation to this current and potentially any future victims.

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence  
risk information

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION ASSESSING RISK

Gather and organize information from **two**  
***primary sources:***

- 1) Victims of domestic violence
- 2) Other public agency data sources

A valid risk assessment must have both.

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence  
risk information

**WHO GATHERS THE DATA FOR THE RISK ASSESSMENT**

- Most commonly law enforcement and in some communities it also includes prosecution or probation staff.
- In some communities it includes a Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team (DVERT), which include NGO advocacy staff and criminal justice agency staff

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence  
risk information

## WHAT INFORMATION TO GATHER FOR ASSESSING RISK

Gather and organize information  
about the **current incident and any  
past incidents:**

- Current incident being investigated
- History of domestic violence in the relationship

## OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence risk information

### FORMAT AND TYPE OF QUESTIONS

In the Republic of Georgia it was negotiated as:

- a combination of close-ended and narrative questions
- 17 questions to be asked by Ministry of Internal Affairs to victims of domestic violence
- Recommendation: Using ONLY yes / no questions takes the violence out of context and makes validity questionable

# Sample GRADA Question to Victims

## Yes/No example with narrative questions

- Sample question on GRADA that has both a yes/no and narrative questions:

**1. Do you think (*offender's name*) will seriously injure or kill you, your children, or someone close to you? YES NO**

**1a. What makes you think yes? 1b. What makes you think no?**

FROM THE GRADA GUIDE:

*LRF 5 If the victim answers yes to this question, circle LRF5 and add 5 points to the total GRADA Risk Score*

*1a. or 1b. It is important that the victim answers the follow-up question so that context is given to the answer provided in question 1. It is possible that the victim's answer to this question may lead to further questions, follow-up investigation, and possible additional criminal charges.*

# Sample GRADA question asked to victims

**2. How frequently does (*offender's name*) physically assault or abuse you?**

# Sample GRADA narrative question asked to victims

**3. Describe the time you were the most frightened or injured by (*offender's name*).**

## Sample question designed by victims of domestic violence in Georgia regarding economic violence

**8. Does (offender's name) restrict your access to money, food, or other resources of the household or family? YES  
NO**

**8a. If yes, how?**

**FROM THE GRADA GUIDE:**

The purpose of this question is to find out if the offender is committing economic violence and if so, how.

8. If the victim answers yes to this question, circle RRA3 and add 3 points to the total GRADA Risk Score.

8a. If the victim answers YES to question 8, then ask the victim question 8a to find out from the victim how the offender controls and restricts her access to money, food, or other resources of the household.

## OBJECTIVE 1: Gather and organize domestic violence risk information

### GRADA: INFORMATION COLLECTED FROM AGENCIES

**The following data is collected and answered by the patrol officer or other official at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This information is NOT asked to the victim:**

- Was the offender gone on arrival when the police first arrived to the current incident?
- Criminal background for ANY domestic violence related crime at any level and prior domestic violence incidents from police reports
- Current and past restrictive and protective orders
- Violations of probation
- Other criminal acts

# GRADA Scoring and Assessment for Context, Dangerousness and Risk

Utilizing the information collected, practitioners will then make subjective decisions regarding the level of potential risk that the offender of domestic violence poses.

- Total number of Lethality Risk Factors (LFR5) from victims
- Total number of Risk Factors for Re-Abuse (RRA) from victims
- Total number of Risk Factors from data collected

## OBJECTIVE 2: Establish a process that shares the risk information collected

Key practitioners need to access the GRADA risk information.

They must be:

- Trained and competent to act on the situations that predict a high likelihood of repeat abuse or escalating and lethal violence.
- Routinely documenting and appropriately disseminating new information about the presence of risk factors in domestic violence cases.

## OBJECTIVE 2: Establish a process that shares the risk information collected

- Develop models of victim engagement that recognize the need for information from victims to accurately read what is occurring.
- Engagement requires meaningful dialogue with victims. Recognition of the changing nature of risk and the inherent dangers to victims of communicating with outside interveners is crucial.
- This also requires MIA (huh?) to make a direct link to local NGOs serving victims of domestic violence.

# Questions / Comments

- Questions and comments from the audience

Want a PDF of the PowerPoint?

[mscaia@grwomen.org](mailto:mscaia@grwomen.org)