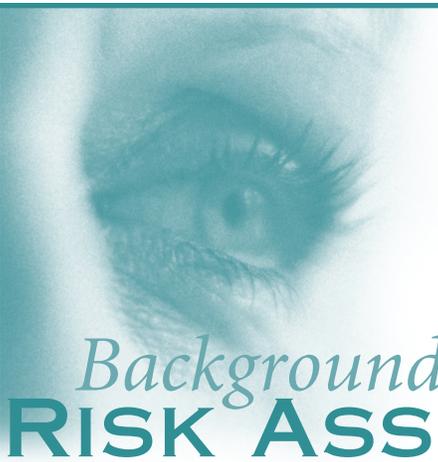


SANCTIONS

UPDATE

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The Family Violence Risk Assessment Project and its Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI-R)

Background of the **FAMILY VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT PROJECT**

A primary goal of the Family Services Unit of the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division (CSSD) is to prevent recurring domestic violence behaviors. Recent initiatives developed within the Unit have led to a dramatic change in court and community responses to family and domestic violence, with the intent of keeping victims safer and holding offenders accountable.

One of the most significant recent steps has been the refinement and use of the Domestic Violence Screening Instrument-Revised (DVSI-R), an instrument being validated specifically for use in the State of Connecticut to measure who is at highest risk for recidivism. A DVSI-R risk assessment is completed by a Family Relations Counselor on every family violence offender prior to the defendant's arraignment. This tool not only helps predict the risk of recidivism, but helps the Family Relations Counselors recommend the level of protective order, placement, and intensity of services or treatment to the court.

This Update focuses on the DVSI-R -- what it is; how it is used in the courts; how it benefits system players and victims; and what the next steps are for refining it even further.

*The Hon. William J. Lavery
Chief Court Administrator*

The Family Violence Risk Assessment Project is one of many developments that have occurred in the State of Connecticut since the enactment of the 1986 Family Violence Prevention and Response Act. That act declared family and household violence a crime, and formalized working relationships between the judiciary and non-profit, community-based domestic shelter programs providing services to battered women, their children, and other victims of domestic violence. Although the act specifically defines its target group as "family and household members," the act in fact covers a wider range of relationships. This facilitates appropriate and rapid responses to intimate partner violence and other forms of intimate violence. Whenever police officers in Connecticut determine that such violence has occurred, the act mandates arresting the suspect(s)

and charging him or her with the appropriate crime.

The DVSI was adopted in May 2002 as the risk assessment instrument to be used in Connecticut. Several modifications were made in 2003 to result in the DVSI-R (Revised) assessment tool that currently is in use to assess the risk of intimate partner violence. Recent research shows promising results on the validity of this instrument.¹ This research also is timely because risk assessment is increasingly recognized as the first step in crafting strategies to prevent the recurrence of this violent behavior and to promote the safety of victims.

This tool augments the skill levels of Family Relations Counselors and enhances the information and recommendations presented to the court regarding individuals arrested for family violence.

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The purpose of the Family Violence Risk Assessment Project is to augment the clinical skills of the Family Relations Counselors (FRCs) with a validated risk assessment instrument that is suitable to the hectic, demanding, and time-limited conditions under which domestic violence assessments are conducted in Connecticut. Buttressing the expertise of the FRCs with a risk assessment instrument enhances the efficiency and consistency of the assessment process and standardizes the language about risk throughout the judicial system. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the recommendations made to the court and the services offered are tailored to the risk of continued violence posed by the numerous perpetrators the FRCs must assess and case manage.

STEPHEN GRANT, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, FAMILY SERVICES, COURT SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION

The Role of **RISK ASSESSMENT**

THE IMPORTANCE OF RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk assessment has become a common practice among professionals who determine what should be done to prevent intimate partner violence. Indeed, many now consider risk assessment the cornerstone of professional efforts to prevent this violent behavior.

Public health and criminal justice practitioners and professionals, victim advocates, shelter workers, and emergency room health care providers, among others, must estimate the likelihood of recurrent or escalating violence involving people in intimate relationships. Sometimes this is required as an official administrative process; sometimes it is an unofficial “guess” about the danger posed by perpetrators and the safety of victims. Violence prevention researchers have mobilized to support this practice by developing instruments to guide risk assessments specific to domestic violence. These instruments take numerous risk factors that have been identified through empirical research as increasing the risk of violence or escalating its seriousness and consolidate them into a single measure, thus providing an efficient and comprehensive method of calculating risk scores for ongoing or repeat violence.

THE DVSI-R IS NOW COMPLETED BY A FAMILY RELATIONS COUNSELOR (FRC) ON EVERY FAMILY VIOLENCE OFFENDER PRIOR TO THE DEFENDANT’S ARRAIGNMENT. THE FRC ADMINISTERS THE DVSI-R AND DETERMINES HOW HIGH THAT PERSON SCORES. TYPICALLY, THOSE WHO SCORE LOW ARE PEOPLE WHO STATISTICALLY ARE NOT GOING TO BE ARRESTED AGAIN. AS THE SCALE GOES UP, IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT THE PERSON WILL RECIDIVATE. THE DVSI-R IS A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE THAT HELPS THE FRC MAKE A RESPONSIBLE CLINICAL JUDGMENT.

THE PROCESS OF BASIC RISK ASSESSMENT IN CONNECTICUT

Persons arrested on family violence charges in Connecticut must be arraigned the next day court is in session. During the period between arrest and the initial court appearance, FRCs conduct a pre-arraignment assessment of all cases entering the system. The DVSI-R now plays a major role in this assessment and is supplemented by perpetrator interviews, a review of police reports, criminal history and protective order registry reviews, and victim interviews conducted by victim advocates. The assessments guide recommendations made by the FRCs to the court on protective orders, placement (criminal prosecution or pre-trial diversion), and the intensity of services or treatment recommended for the offender.

While the DVSI-R includes a summary statistical risk rating that is scored/completed by the Family Relations Counselors, it also includes two ratings – “imminent risk of violence toward victim” and “imminent risk of violence toward others” – that provide FRCs an opportunity to exercise their professional judgment in assessing risk. ■

What HAS BEEN LEARNED

HOW DOES THIS TOOL HELP THE FAMILY RELATIONS COUNSELORS AND THE COURTS?

Although the DVSI-R is not a crystal ball, it provides three important benefits:

1. The findings from the DVSI-R inform the way family counselors review cases significantly, specifically in their assessments of risk.
2. The DVSI-R has become a useful tool in assessing the overall picture of risk and informing the court in ways that might benefit the individual and help reduce recidivism.
3. The instrument has been shown to have a relatively high degree of statistical accuracy in predicting which offenders are more likely to engage in repeat behavior.

HOW HAS THIS STUDY OF THE DVSI-R HELPED PREDICT REPEAT VIOLENCE?

Four variables in the DVSI-R research were found to have significant effects predicting repeat violence:

1. **DVSI-R risk score:** The higher the DVSI-R risk score, the greater the likelihood of recidivism.
2. **Type of violence:** Intimate partner violence had greater recidivism compared to other forms of family violence. The odds of recidivism for intimate partners was 1.44 times higher than violence in other family or family-like relationships.
3. **Multiple victims:** If there were multiple victims associated with a case, there was a higher likelihood to recidivate.
4. **Imminent risk rating completed by the Family Relations Counselor:** The FRCs were able to adjust their judgments regarding low and high risk cases using the summary risk ratings that required their professional judgment in addition to the actual numeric score generated by the DVSI-R.

DVSI-R AND VALIDITY

In a more statistical explanation of findings, research regarding the DVSI-R showed that the screening instrument has both concurrent and predictive validity:

- ♥ DVSI-R risk scores do not appear to be biased by age, gender, ethnicity and/or type of intimate violence.
- ♥ The DVSI-R is a valid indicator of behavioral risk. There was a high correlation between the DVSI-R scores and two other measurements of behavioral risk (multiple vs. single victims and the imminent risk score determined by the Family Relations Counselor). The high correlation supports concurrent validity.

- ♥ The DVSI-R significantly improves the prediction of repeated violence or recidivism beyond chance. The DVSI-R risk scores, when combined with the imminent risk scores as determined by Family Services and multiple vs. single victims, have a large impact on predicting recidivistic violence. ■

Validating and demonstrating the robustness of a risk assessment instrument is only a first step in preventing violence involving intimate partners or others in family or family-like relationships. The challenge is to train professionals responsible for addressing the problem of such violence to link valid risk assessments to well-crafted strategies of supervision and treatment so the victimized or other potential victims are protected and perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.

NEXT STEPS

Based on these encouraging results, another phase of this project is ready for implementation. This will be a recidivism study conducted on a sample of family violence offenders who were administered the DVSI-R risk assessment at arraignment beginning in October and continuing through November of 2005. This will further refine the robustness and predictive accuracy of the tool.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

A sample of slightly more than 4,000 family violence offenders who were administered the DVSI-R risk assessment at arraignment will be studied for this next research phase. Three measurements will be used:

1. Re-arrest (both in Connecticut and arrests for incidents outside the state)
2. Violations of protective order
3. Violation of pre-trial court orders.

GOALS

There are two primary goals of this study:

1. **Predictive validity of the DVSI-R:** To further determine the predictive validity of the DVSI-R and establish the continuum of risk scores for the State of Connecticut. The recidivism component will focus on the first six months of the defendant after the DVSI-R Assessment, but will also track re-arrest after 12 and 18 months.
2. **Evaluation of potential modifications to the DVSI-R instrument:** To determine if modifications are necessary to the DVSI-R. Individual DVSI-R items will be evaluated based on their ability to predict repeat violence. If individual items do not predict recidivism, they may be substituted by others that more accurately predict re-arrest.

Training for Family Services staff regarding outcomes from the project and other technical assistance will be part of CSSD Family Services ongoing quality assurance process.

¹The most complete description of the DVSI-R and its application to Connecticut is found in the article, "Empirically Examining the Risk of Intimate Partner Violence: The Revised Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI-R). It is authored by:

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Department of Sociology
Robert Presley Center for Crime and Justice Studies,
University of California, Riverside
and
Stephen R. Grant, MA, CAGS
Deputy Director, Family Services
Court Support Services Division,
Connecticut Judicial Branch

The paper includes the full methodology of the study, statistical analysis, results (with discussion), and bibliographic references. A copy of the full study can be requested from:

Court Support Services Division
936 Silas Deane Highway
Wethersfield, CT 06109

The INSTRUMENT Itself



THE PROFILE OF ASSESSMENTS

A sample of 14,970 risk assessments that were generated by Family Relations Counselors from September 1, 2004, through May 2, 2005, was used as the data base to study the validity of the DVSI-R instrument. This sample covered all of the 23 judicial geographic areas in Connecticut, meaning the full population of domestic violence offenders 16 years of age or older for the entire state during this period. The majority of the risk assessments involved men (71%), and the average age of those in the sample was 33, with about 65% of the sample being between the ages of 22 and 44. Most of the risk assessments (66%) entailed some form of intimate partner violence, with 18% involving other intimate relationships and 16% being parent and child violence. The ethnicity of perpetrators had the following distribution: Non-Hispanic White, 53%; African-American, 29%; Hispanic or Latino, 17%; and Asian, Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaskan Native, less than 1%. The category of Asian, Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaskan Native was combined because of the small number of cases for these ethnic categories (N = 115).

WHAT ARE THE DVSI-R ELEMENTS?

The current DVSI-R includes 11 separate items:

Behavioral history: Seven of the 11 items address the behavioral history of perpetrators:

- ♥ Non-family assaults, arrests, or criminal convictions
- ♥ Family assaults, arrests, or criminal convictions
- ♥ Prior family violence intervention or treatment
- ♥ Violation of orders of protection or court supervision
- ♥ Prior or current verbal or emotional abuse
- ♥ Frequency of violence in past six months
- ♥ Escalation of violence in past six months.

Other: The other four items pertain to:

- ♥ Substance abuse
- ♥ Objects used as weapons
- ♥ Children present during prior or current violent incidents
- ♥ Employment status.

HOW ARE THE DVSI-R SCORES SUPPLEMENTED?

The DVSI-R also is enhanced by tapping five “evidence”

sources to supplement evidence indicating the presence and intensity of the items on the DVSI-R:

- ♥ Defendant
- ♥ Victim
- ♥ Police report
- ♥ Criminal history review
- ♥ Protective order registry.

IS THE TOOL RELIABLE ACROSS TYPES OF DEFENDANTS?

For risk assessment to be the cornerstone of violence prevention efforts, it must be trusted and solid. Or, in the language of the research study, results must be “robust” – i.e., empirically valid across populations of perpetrators of intimate partner violence, including men and women’s involvement in such behavior and other forms of domestic violence. Otherwise, the instrument will not have universal applicability and “bias” might be introduced in the risk assessment process. Scarce resources would be misguided, and prevention efforts might be ineffective. At this point, Connecticut studies have determined that the DVSI-R is robust in its application. ■

Court Support Services Division
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The Family Violence Risk
Assessment Project and its
Domestic Violence Screening
Instrument (DVSI-R)

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ANYONE WISHING TO CONTRIBUTE ARTICLES OR IDEAS FOR ARTICLES TO THE SANCTIONS UPDATE ARE INVITED TO CONTACT JIM GREENE AT THE COURT SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION AT 860-721-2175 EXT 3110.

ALTERNATIVE SANCTIONS PROGRAMS AND PROVIDERS IN CONNECTICUT

ADULT PROGRAMS

Access and Visitation
AMPS, Inc.

Adult Behavioral Health Services

Barbara Grover
Community Health Resources
(aka: North Central
Counseling Services, Inc.)
Community Prevention and
Addiction Services, Inc.
Connecticut Renaissance, Inc.
The Connection, Inc.
Family Re-Entry, Inc.
Hockanum Valley Community
Council, Inc.
Midwestern CT Council on
Alcoholism (MCCA)
Morris Foundation, Inc.
Natchaug Hospital
Network Connecticut, Inc.
New Directions, Inc. of
North Central Conn.
Perception Programs, Inc.
Regional Network of Programs
Rushford Center, Inc.
Southeastern Council on
Alcoholism & Drug
Dependence, Inc. (SCADD)
Stonington Institute
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

Adult Mediation Services
Community Mediation, Inc.
Community Partners in Action
Dispute Settlement Center, Inc.

Adult Risk Reduction Center
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

Adult Sex Offender Treatment Services
The Connection Inc.

Alternative Incarceration

Center Services
Community Partners in Action
Community Renewal Team

The Connection, Inc.
Corporation for Justice
Management, Inc.
CSI Connecticut, Inc.
CTE, Inc.
Norwalk Economic
Opportunity Now, Inc.
Perception Programs, Inc.
Project More
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

**Bridgeport Domestic Violence
Intervention Services**

Family Re-Entry, Inc.

Building Bridges

Community Foundation of
Greater New Haven
City of Hartford

Community Court

Community Partners in Action
CSI Connecticut, Inc.

Community Service Officers

Norwalk Economic Opportunity
Now, Inc.
United Community & Family Services
United Way of Meriden &
Wallingford, Inc.
United Way of Greater New Haven
Volunteer Center of
Southwestern Fairfield County
The Volunteer Center of
Western Connecticut

Domestic Violence - Evolve (52 wk)

The Consultation Center, Inc.
(aka: CCB)

Families in Crisis, Inc.
Family Re-Entry, Inc.

Domestic Violence - Explore (26 wk)

Association of Religious
Communities, Inc.
Families in Crisis, Inc.
Family Re-Entry, Inc.

Mandel Mellow and Went (dba: N.A.)
Opportunities Industrialization Center
(OIC) of New London County, Inc.
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

Drug Intervention Program

Family Re-Entry, Inc.
Hill Health Corporation
Liberation Programs, Inc.
Perception Programs, Inc.

Family Violence Education Program

Association of Religious
Communities, Inc.
Catholic Charities/Catholic
Family Services
Community Health Resources
(aka: North Central Counseling
Services, Inc.)
The Consultation Center, Inc.
(aka: CCB)
Family Re-Entry, Inc.
Mandel Mellow and Went (dba: N.A.)
Marianne Christiano
Maxine L. Varanko (dba: FMHS)
United Services, Inc.
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

Gender Specific - Female

Career Resources, Inc.

Latino Youth Offender Services

Catholic Charities/Catholic
Family Services

Residential Services - Halfway House

Corporation for Justice
Management, Inc.

Residential Services - Jail Re-Interview

The Connection, Inc.

**Residential Services -
Medical Detoxification**

Rushford Center, Inc.

Residential Services - Project Green

CSI Connecticut, Inc.
Project More

**Residential Services -
Substance Abuse Intermediate**

APT Foundation, Inc.
Morris Foundation, Inc. -
Morris House
Rushford Center, Inc.

**Residential Services -
Youthful Offender**

CSI Connecticut, Inc.

Women and Children Services

Community Renewal Team, Inc.
The Connection, Inc.
CSI Connecticut, Inc.

**Zero Tolerance Drug
Supervision Program**

Project More

JUVENILE PROGRAMS

Adolescent Clinical Treatment

Catholic Charities/Catholic
Family Services
Connecticut Renaissance, Inc.
Natchaug Hospital
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.
Yale University

**Alternative to Juvenile
Detention Program**

Community Renewal Team
Community Partners in Action
Corporation for Justice
Management, Inc.
St. Francis Home for Children, Inc.

**Center for Assessment
Respite Enrichment**

Connecticut Junior Republic
St. Francis Home for Children, Inc.

Community Detention for Girls

Community Partners in Action

**Court Based Juvenile
Assessment Services**

Campagna Associates, LLP
Clinical Consultants of Connecticut

The Connection, Inc.
Natchaug Hospital
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

Hartford Juvenile Review Board
Catholic Charities/Catholic
Family Services

Juvenile Diversion Program Services

The Connection, Inc.
Family & Children's Agency, Inc.

Juvenile Justice Centers

City of Meriden
City of Stamford
City of West Haven
Community Renewal Team, Inc.
CSI Connecticut, Inc.
New Britain Youth Services
Rushford Center, Inc.
United Services, Inc.
Waterbury Youth Services System, Inc.
Windham Regional Community
Council, Inc.

Juvenile Mediation Services

Community Mediation, Inc.

Juvenile Risk Reduction Center

Connecticut Renaissance, Inc.
CSI Connecticut, Inc.
Forensic Health Services, Inc.
The Village for Families and Children, Inc.

Juvenile Sex Offender Services

The Connection, Inc.

Multi Systemic Therapy

Connecticut Renaissance, Inc.
Connecticut Junior Republic
CSI Connecticut, Inc.
NAFI Connecticut, Inc.
Wheeler Clinic, Inc.