



Title Risk Assessment Instruments for Predicting Recidivism of Spousal Violence

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Aim

To assess the research evidence on inter-rater reliability and predictive validity of risk assessment instruments used to predict male-to-female spousal violence recidivism and lethality in males who have had contact with the police system.

Conclusions and results

Eight primary studies were found that evaluated the predictive validity of several current instruments: Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA), Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA), Danger Assessment (DA), Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVTI), Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG), and Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R). The characteristics of the male offenders varied considerably across the included studies. Some were arrested, on probation, or in a maximum-security psychiatric facility, whereas others were referred to batterer treatment programs.

Inter-rater reliability was only reported for SARA, ODARA, and VRAG. Limited research indicated good inter-rater reliability for all 3 instruments.

In terms of predictive validity, none of the studies reported any lethal assault during the followup period. The area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (a measure of predictive validity) was less than 0.80 (range 0.59 to 0.77) for all instruments evaluated, suggesting only marginal to moderate improvement over chance in predicting non-lethal recidivism.

Recommendations

All of the instruments evaluated were better than chance in predicting spousal violence recidivism, but no conclusion could be made regarding the superiority of one tool over another, or their ability to predict lethal assault. The decision of which risk assessment instrument (RAI) to use should take into account the available evidence, the population assessed, the intended users of the instrument, and the purpose of the assess-

ment. As research evidence on the predictive validity of RAIs is limited, it is inappropriate to base any decision about an individual's risk of recidivism solely on these instrument scores.

Methods

All original, published systematic reviews or primary cohort studies were identified by systematically searching PubMed, the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination databases (National Health Service Economic Evaluation Database, HTA, Database of Abstracts of Review of Effects), EMBASE, Family & Society Studies Worldwide, Sociological Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Social Sciences Abstracts, Academic Search Premier, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and ABI/Inform from January 1995 to May 2007. Relevant library collections and the websites of HTA-related agency resources were also searched. Methodological quality of the included studies was not assessed.

Further research/reviews required

Universal, multidimensional definitions for spousal violence need to be developed that capture multiple domains of aggressive behavior. It would be helpful to correlate RAIs with different categories of recidivism severity, taking into consideration the treatment provided to the abuser. Evaluation of RAIs by independent researchers, rather than the instrument developers, is essential.

The feasibility, utility, and impact of RAIs need to be investigated in different settings. In Alberta, both SARA and ODARA are used. Data gathered from the Provincial Family Violence Treatment Program will allow a direct comparison of the predictive validity of SARA, ODARA, or a combination of both, in male abusers who enter the program.