



Research Brief

Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF)

Introduction

This research brief seeks to explain the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (otherwise known as the Common Risk Assessment Framework or CRAF). The CRAF was designed to help general practitioners working in a wide range of fields and the specialist family violence workforce to understand their role and responsibilities, and to ensure a coordinated approach to risk identification, assessment and management that is appropriate and consistent across the state.

Background

The CRAF is a key instrument in the development of an integrated family violence system (Department of Human Services 2012). Developed in 2007 in consultation with over 500 stakeholders including police, courts and service providers, it has been designed so that professionals and organisations can identify family violence, provide helpful, supportive and timely responses to victims, and contribute to holding perpetrators accountable for their actions (Department of Human Services 2012; Royal Commission into Family Violence 2016).

The approach to risk assessment in the CRAF is known as 'structured professional judgement'. It combines practitioner's professional judgement, the assessment of risk by the person who is experiencing family violence and the evidence based risk factors, including highlighting high risk indicators that identify an increased risk of death.

Underpinning Principles

The Framework details that:

- family violence is a fundamental violation of human rights
- physical or sexual violence within the family is a crime that warrants a strong justice response
- responses must recognise and address the power imbalance in family violence incidents
- family violence is gendered, with the majority of incidents perpetrated by men against women and children
- the safety of women and children is paramount
- perpetrators of violence should be held accountable
- family violence affects the entire community; services must respond appropriately to those from diverse backgrounds
- family violence is not acceptable in any community or culture

- responses are strengthened by the integration of services
- the whole community is responsible for preventing family violence (Department of Human Services 2012).

Strengths of the Framework

Risk assessment tools provide a lens through which practitioners can gain an understanding of the dynamics of each case of family violence. The CRAF promotes a structured professional judgement approach, which is considered by some to be more accurate than other approaches as it is flexible, consistent, transparent, and allows for the use of professional judgement (Northcott 2012). The Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) has noted that structured professional judgement has provided a solid basis for assessing and managing risk of family violence to date. However, the Commission has recommended implementation of an actuarial approach in future (RCFV 2016).

Limitations of the Framework

While the CRAF provides for the assessment of risk of family violence, there are several limitations that have been noted. First, the tool has not been empirically validated (COAG Advisory Panel 2016; Coroner's Court of Victoria 2015; RCFV 2016), and has not been reviewed since its implementation in 2007. Other limitations identified include that the assessor may examine a fixed set of factors, which can lead them to ignore other information and minimise important information (RCFV 2016). These factors are not weighted (Coroner's Court of Victoria 2015), meaning that less significant risk factors are likely to increase the risk assessment, and that the presence of a key indicator of family violence may also be downplayed.

The resulting level of risk is not recorded, meaning that the risk is hard to interpret outside of the family violence sector (Coroner's Court of Victoria 2015). While the tool measures the propensity of family violence against women, it does not include any measure of violence against children or for other vulnerable communities (Coroner's Court of Victoria 2015). Finally, there is also an absence of any risk assessment tool to assess and manage the risk posed by perpetrators.

Recommended Amendments

In recent years, a number of documents such as the National Plan to Eliminate Violence against Women and Children, the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the Luke Batty Inquest findings all provide a number of recommendations to strengthen the use of the CRAF in creating a cohesive, multi-agency response to family violence. The first of these recommendations is that the CRAF needs to be empirically validated, audited, and reviewed consistently (Coroner's Court of Victoria 2015; RCFV 2016).

A second recommendation is that the tool is amended to assess potential risk and impacts to children, rather than primarily the potential threat of family violence posed to their mothers (RCFV 2016). Information sharing between police, courts, and service providers is proposed, which will allow for multi-agency collaboration to increase their understandings of family violence (COAG Advisory Panel 2016; RCFV 2016; National Council 2013). This will also provide long-term case management for individuals identified as having a high risk of perpetrating family

violence (RCFV 2016; National Council 2013).

For this information sharing to occur, the CRAF must be standardised and systematically imbedded across agencies, and staff must be trained regularly in its implementation (RCFV 2016). Perpetrators identified as being high risk should be marked with a warning flag in the LEAP system, be subject to more intensive monitoring, and be given priority for serving of warrants and for court hearings (Coroner's Court of Victoria 2015). Finally, it has been recommended that the tool be amended to take better account of vulnerable populations of victims, such as those from a non-English or Indigenous background (RCFV 2016; National Council 2013).

References

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