

Risk assessment and risk management by police

Step 3: Identify the most relevant risk factors for police risk assessment

To effectively determine the level of risk and identify the safety needs of women and children, the following elements should inform police risk assessment processes and practices.

- The specificities of each national legal context should be considered in developing risk assessment tools and identifying risk factors for different forms of intimate partner violence.
- Risk factors for intimate partner violence that reflect patterns of abuse and behaviour associated with coercive control (102), which are highly correlated with intimate partner violence and homicide, must be taken into account, including:
 - psychological/emotional/verbal abuse;
 - sexual abuse/coercive sex;
 - extreme and/or violent jealousy towards a partner;
 - controlling most of a partner's daily activities;
 - limiting a partner's access to a phone or transport;
 - controlling access to technology and/ or monitoring online behaviour, including cyberstalking;
 - isolation from family/friends/social network;
 - control of a partner's access to economic resources and employment (economic abuse);
 - stalking, threats, destroying a partner's property;

- use of a weapon to threaten a partner.
- The victim's own assessment of her safety and risk levels should be used, either by integrating this into the risk assessment tool or, alternatively, allowing the victim's assessment to raise the risk level identified.
- The perspectives of children affected by intimate partner violence should be considered (see [Principle 5](#) on risk assessment).
- An intersectional approach should be followed, taking into account the characteristics of each individual case, including those associated with disadvantaged groups that may pose barriers to accessing support and protection, including:
 - lack of social support and isolation;
 - financial/economic dependence;
 - demographic variables (e.g. socioeconomic status, ethnic background, age, immigrant status).
- All appropriate and available sources of information including the victim, the perpetrator, case files and other agencies, including child protection and specialist women's services, should be taken into account.

A risk factor is a characteristic (individual, relational, community or societal) whose presence increases the likelihood that abuse, violence or homicide will occur or recur (99).

Risk factors are related to:

- the victim (e.g. pregnancy/new birth, depression/ other mental health issues, isolation);
- the perpetrator (e.g. history of violence, mental health issues, access to weapons, previous or current breach of protection order);
- the relationship (e.g. separation, escalation of violence, financial difficulties);
- the community (e.g. poverty, lack of institutional support);
- social risks (external conditions such as norms and practices that may exacerbate the level of risk for a victim) (100).

Risk factors included in assessments should be as comprehensive as possible and applied in all cases of intimate partner violence in order to effectively assess all types and levels of risk, as well as individual needs. Levels of risk are typically grouped into three categories (standard, medium and high). In terms of identifying risk factors specific to intimate partner violence, it is important to take into account the evidence-based and emerging research on risk factors and their relevance for effectively assessing risk and informing risk management strategies.

- Although the evidence does not support demographic variables such as ethnicity, age, education, employment and income as predictors of abuse (101), it is important to take into account the personal characteristics of both the victim and the perpetrator. Collecting this information provides more precise knowledge about the individual characteristics of each case, which can be used to determine if and to what extent certain actions would be beneficial for improving the victim's safety and effectively reducing the perpetrator's offending (see [Principle 2](#) on risk management).
- New research on emerging forms of controlling and coercive behaviours should be taken into account, including factors such as perpetrators controlling access to technology, monitoring victims' online behaviour and cyberstalking.
- The use of risk factors that do not reflect or take into account the gendered nature and impact of intimate partner violence against women may result in a lower level of risk being identified, thereby misdirecting the scope and nature of the resulting multiagency safety planning and risk management strategies. This can have the unintended consequence of the risk of harm to victims and their children going unaddressed, despite the implementation of a risk-led approach (see [Principle 5](#)).
- Risk factors can co-occur and interact in many complex ways; all are important for a robust risk assessment. Risk tools should be based on reliable information and fully completed.

It is also important to consider that intimate partner violence is not recognised as a specific offence in most Member States and that legal definitions of different forms of intimate partner violence may vary. This may affect how specific types of intimate partner violence are defined and described in risk assessment tools. For example, there are many terms used to describe the criminal offence of rape, including 'sexual assault', 'sexual violence', 'sexual offence', 'sexual abuse', 'coercive sex' or 'unwanted sexual behaviour'. For stalking, other legal terms used nationally include 'intrusive behaviour' and 'persistent persecution'. It is important that the specifics of each national legal context be taken into account in developing risk assessment tools for intimate partner violence, to avoid confusion and to promote a shared understanding of the risks involved.