

Reducing Recidivism in Domestic Violence Cases



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Introduction

Domestic violence typically refers to physical, verbal, emotional, and/or psychological violence between intimate partners (Dutton, 2009; Johnson, 2006), and is a common societal phenomenon, affecting approximately one-third of women in their lifetime (Statistics Canada, 2009; Nathens, Kernic, Holt, & Rivara, 2004). Equally significant, recidivism among offenders is relatively common and often occurs soon after the previous offence (Kingsnorth, 2006; Gondolf, 2000). This report briefly reviews the literature available on domestic violence recidivism, calls attention to risk assessment tools available to assist in predicting recidivism, and provides an analysis and discussion of recidivism data associated to incidents of domestic violence responded to by a Detachment of the “E” Division Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Literature on Domestic Violence Recidivism

Between one-fifth to one-third of domestic violence offenders officially recidivate, many within six months of their initial assault (Hanson, Helmus, & Bourgon, 2007; Hendricks, Werner, Shipway, & Turinetti, 2006; Ventura and Davis, 2004). According to Gondolf (2000), nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) of domestic violence recidivism occurred within six months of the previous offence, with slightly more than one-third (37 per cent) of the repeat victimization occurring within three months. As expected, recidivism occurs sooner following the previous offence when using self-reported data compared to data collected from official criminal justice statistics.

Several key factors, such as gender, age, and previous arrest history, are consistent predictors of domestic violence recidivism (Hanson and Wallace-Capretta, 2006; Ventura and Davis, 2004; Ventura and Davis, 2005). In Canada, the domestic abusers most likely to recidivate are generally young, unmarried, have an unstable lifestyle, have substance abuse issues, have low verbal intelligence, hold negative attitudes regarding spousal assault and interpersonal relationships, and have a history of criminal behaviour (Hanson and Wallace-Capretta, 2006). Some studies have also predicted recidivism based on whether an offender used a weapon and whether the offender already had a protective order issued against them (Kingsnorth, 2006).

Having a history of police calls for service, as well as having a prior arrest, whether for a domestic violence offence or some other type of offence, both predicted recidivism (Ventura and Davis, 2004; Kingsnorth, 2006; Klein and Tobin, 2008). In fact, a history of domestic violence has consistently been the leading factor in whether an offender recidivates (Ventura and Davis, 2005). Thus, it appears that once an offender has begun to inflict violence on their partner, the behaviour becomes difficult to change. This suggests that when trying to identify the chronic domestic violence offender, police should consider prior arrest record, the presence of protective orders, whether a weapon was used in a previous domestic violence incident, and the number of previous charges (Kingsnorth, 2006).

The entrenched tendency towards violence may be the result of other factors that contribute towards the recidivism of domestic violence offenders, including mental health characteristics (Robinson, 2006). In addition, offender alcohol and/or drug problems also appear to play an important role in domestic violence offending and recidivism (Bennett, Tolman, Rogalski, & Srinivasaraghavan, 1994; Block, 2003;

Collins and Messerschmidt, 1993; Hall et al., 2006; Klein and Tobin, 2008; Robinson, 2006; Sharps, Campbell, Campbell, Gary, & Webster, 2003).

It is also possible that the nature of the criminal justice system response to the domestic violence incident, such as arrest, charge, and conviction, may influence the likelihood of recidivism. Interestingly, domestic violence offenders are not always deterred from recidivating by the severity of the criminal justice sanctions against them. Being arrested at the initial domestic violence incident and potentially spending time in prison does not necessarily reduce or prevent recidivism (Dunford, 1992; Dunford, Huizinga, & Elliott, 1989; Hanson and Wallace-Capretta, 2006). However, more recent studies have shown a deterrent effect associated to criminal justice convictions and sanctions. Still, the deterrent effect was weakened with the use of less severe sanctions, such as a fine, probation, or a suspended sentence (Klein and Tobin, 2008; Ventura and Davis, 2004). Taken together, these more recent research studies suggested that to effectively deter domestic violence recidivism, the offender should be arrested, convicted (where guilty), and given a severe sanction; otherwise, any deterrent effect is likely to be lost (Klein and Tobin, 2008; Ventura and Davis, 2004; 2005).

Risk Assessment Tools for Domestic Violence

To successfully identify those likely to recidivate, the characteristics that separate high-risk from lower risk domestic violence offenders must be understood. For instance, previous violation of a no contact order appears to be particularly important in predicting recidivism (Bourgon and Bonta, 2004). These characteristics should be built into assessment tools to quantify risk for recidivism (Goodman, Dutton, & Bennett, 2000; Robinson, 2006).

There are many such tools available for assessing risk for spousal assault recidivism. Generally, these instruments, such as the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA; Kropp and Hart, 2000), collect information on historical static factors regarding the nature of the offence (e.g. history of domestic assault convictions, violations of no-contact orders, use of weapons), and dynamic individualized risk factors (e.g. attitudes towards violence in relationships, victim empathy, treatment motivation, and acceptance of responsibility for the assault) to assess a domestic violence offender's likelihood of recidivism. While instruments, like the SARA, are offender based, others, such as the Danger Assessment Scale (DAS; Campbell et al., 2003), collect information from the victim's perspective.

Other instruments were developed specifically for use by front-line criminal justice system professionals. Hilton and colleagues (Hilton et al., 2004) developed the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA). Much of the ODARA can be completed through a simple review of police or institutional files as it is based on historical information, such as whether the offender had a history of domestic assault or other violence, current offence information, such as whether the offender threatened to kill the victim during the offence, and victim related information, such as whether the victim was able to obtain support (Hilton et al., 2004). The ODARA has successfully predicted domestic violence recidivism by male offenders against female victims (Hilton, Harris, Popham, & Lang, 2010).

Kropp and Hart (2004) revised the original SARA into the Brief Spousal Assault Form for the Evaluation of Risk (B-SAFER) for use by police. They divided ten risk factors for domestic violence recidivism into two sections: Spousal Assault (Serious Physical/Sexual Violence; Serious Violence, Threats, Ideation, or Intent; Escalation of Physical/Sexual Violence or Threats, Ideation, or Intent; Violations of Criminal/Civil

Court Orders; and Negative Attitudes regarding Spousal Assault) and Psychosocial Adjustment (Other Serious Criminality; Relationship Problems; Employment and/or Financial Problems; Substance Abuse; and Mental Disorder). They also provided suggested risk management strategies and an interview for use with victims. By combining their assessment of the risk factors along with the recommended management approach, the police officer conducting the evaluation can conclude where the case should be placed in terms of case prioritization, risk for life threatening violence, risk for imminent violence, and likely victims of violence. Using the B-SAFER, police can quickly classify the level of risk presented by the offender. A SARA could then be completed for those domestic offenders requiring a more in-depth assessment.

In effect, there currently are risk assessment tools available to the police that can increase the likelihood of successfully predicting domestic violence offenders who will recidivate. Unlike tools like the SARA and DAS, these tools require little training and no knowledge of statistics to use. Moreover, user manuals and sample interviews from the development of the B-SAFER can be easily accessed online through the Department of Justice website (http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2005/rr05_fv1-rr05_vf1/toc-tdm.html).

Current Study

The current study arose out of a request from a Domestic Violence Unit of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) for a statistical review of their files and a description of common characteristics of repeat domestic violence offenders. The Domestic Violence Unit was established by the Detachment to provide a concentrated focus on supporting victims and on preventing recidivism of domestic violent offenders. The project was completed through the British Columbia Centre for Social Responsibility, which is provincial research and resource centre focusing on problematic social behaviours. The CSR is located in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of the Fraser Valley.

The data forming the basis of the study was collected directly from the Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME) system. The RCMP provided a list of 848¹ reports of family violence occurring in 2007, which was one year prior to the formation of this RCMP Domestic Violence Unit.² After reviewing these cases, a total of 239 files were identified as meeting the criteria for analysis as they consisted of a unique offender who engaged in domestic violence in 2007.³ These files were analysed for offence and offender demographic characteristics, as well as for a six-month to one-year follow-up history of recidivism measured by re-appearance of the offender in the PRIME databases as a subject of complaint or accused (e.g. a suspect, suspect chargeable) for domestic violence.

¹ This represented a random sample of 50% of domestic violence calls for service in 2007.

² The decision to analyse the data from prior to the establishment of the Domestic Violence Unit was made to allow for future comparative analysis with the proportion and nature of calls following the implementation the specialized unit.

³ The excluded files consisted of an offender already included for a domestic violence offence in 2007, domestic non-violence, or mutual violence with no clear offender identified.

Findings

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey was used to classify the nature of the calls (of which 84% occurred in a private residence during the evening) and more than two-thirds (71 per cent) were categorised as common assaults. Nearly one-quarter (22 per cent) involved threats, while slightly more than one-in-ten (14 per cent) involved assaults with a weapon, and less than 1% involved an aggravated assault.⁴ The current study did not include any occurrences resulting in homicide; however, rather than implying that no homicides occurred, it is important to note that due to the serious nature of the offences, these files may receive a private/invisible file designation which was not accessible to the researchers. The same may also be true of serious assault cases; while not every homicide or serious assault will necessarily be marked private/invisible, these types of files may be more likely to receive this designation, which may explain why there were little or no occurrences in the current study. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the severity of the offences in the current study was consistent with prior research in that only a small minority of domestic violence calls for service involved severe violence (Hutchison, Hirschel, & Pesackis, 1994).

Over three-quarters (79 per cent) of the suspects in this sample were male, and nearly half (49 per cent) were Caucasian. The age of offenders ranged from 14 to 82 years old with a mean age of 34 years old. Interestingly, 12 offenders in this sample were teenagers (17 years old and under). As domestic violence is typically defined as violence between intimate partners, this was an interesting finding. After exploring the nature of the relationship further, the data were divided into 165 cases of partner-based violence and 65 cases of family-based violence which occurred between other family members (e.g. siblings) rather than between intimate partners, and were analysed separately in some of the findings presented below.⁵ These files were analysed separately in some cases to determine whether the existing literature on domestic violence applied equally well to traditional versus non-traditional forms of violence. In effect, the following analyses were generally conducted firstly for all cases of domestic violence (family and intimate partner), and then in some cases separately by partner-based violence versus family-based violence.

The victim profile was similar in ethnicity and age. Half were Caucasian, and the average victim age was 33 years old (ranging from less than one year to 84 years old). Again, given the age range of victims, it was clear that not all incidents of domestic violence in the current study involved intimate partners; therefore, later in this report domestic violence was divided into partner-based versus family-based violence. Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) were female. Interestingly, while females were more likely to experience partner-based violence (77 per cent) than family-based violence (23 per cent), males were equally likely to be victims of partner-based (51 per cent) and family-based violence (49 per cent).

Offender's Criminal History

While research has consistently found that domestic violence offenders tend to have criminal records, less than one-fifth (18 per cent) of the current sample of offenders had a criminal record. However, those that

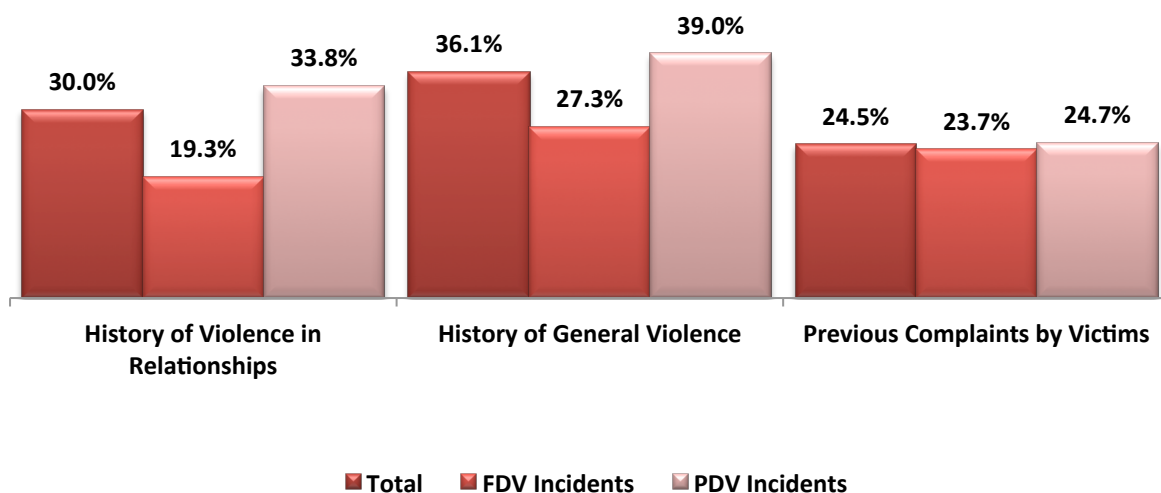
⁴ As incidents can be assigned up to four distinct UCR codes, the proportion of offence types can exceed 100%.

⁵ The remaining 9 files did not clearly identify the nature of the victim-offender relationship.

did have a criminal record appeared to be particularly serious offenders, as their record, on average, spanned 10 years. These offenders had, on average, four previous stays and seven prior convictions, ranging from no priors to 52 prior convictions. On average, these offenders previously spent 401 days in prison, ranging from one day ($n = 3$) to nearly 7½ years ($n = 1$). In contrast with previous research that concluded that many repeat offenders were convicted while still facing their previous charges or serving the sentence associated with these prior convictions, over half (59 per cent) of the domestic violence offenders in the current sample had never been convicted of an offence while serving another sentence. In addition, few had a history of non-compliance while under probation or other conditional orders ($X = 1.57$ non-compliant convictions). Despite the fact this smaller group of offenders appeared to be fairly serious in nature, very few had a previous conviction for a violent offence ($X = 1.63$ prior violent convictions). In sum, whereas the larger sample of domestic violence offenders did not appear to be particularly criminogenic, those who did have a criminal history appeared to be more serious offenders, although not especially violent ones.

As shown in Figure 1, nearly three-quarters (70 per cent) of offenders did not have a documented history of violence in their relationships at the time of the current incident, and three-quarters (76 per cent) did not have a history of complaints against them by the current victim. Overall, a slight majority (55 per cent) of offenders had none of these risk factors, whereas one-fifth (19 per cent) had only one of these risks. Moreover, only 33 offenders (16 per cent) had histories of all three forms of violence. Although the sample was generally not prone to violence, offenders who engaged in partner-based domestic violence (PDV) for their current offence were more than 1.5 times as likely to have had a history of violence in their relationships (34 per cent) than offenders who engaged in family-based domestic violence (FDV) (19 per cent).⁶

FIGURE 1: PRESENCE OF HISTORICAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENTS



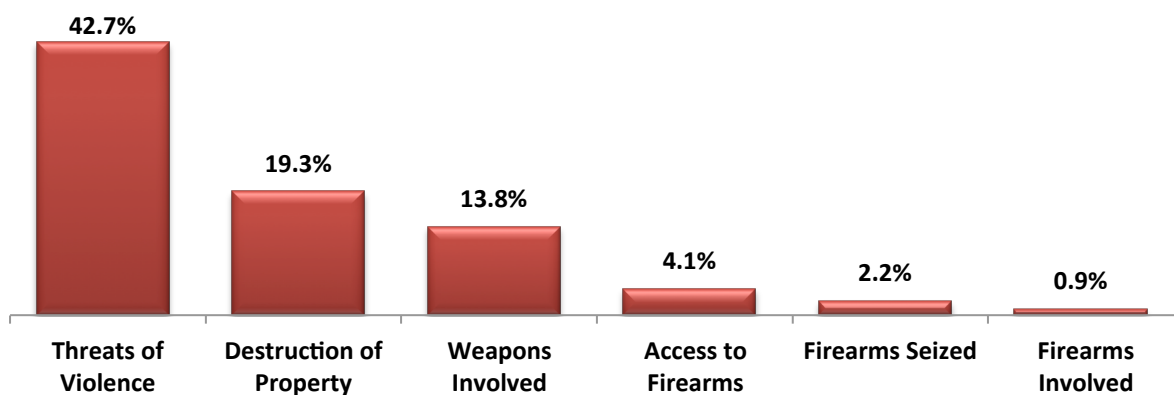
⁶ $\chi^2 (1) = 4.1, p = .042$

Initial Domestic Violence Incident

A slight majority (54 per cent) of the incidents occurred at a joint residence, while another one-quarter (19 per cent) occurred at the victim's residence. Slightly less than half (44 per cent) of the domestic violence cases involved spouses, while an additional one-quarter (27 per cent) involved a dating couple. The remaining cases involved other family relationships. When looking specifically at the partner-based domestic violence (PDV), an interesting finding that conflicted with much of the past research was that the vast majority of PDV involved non-separating partners (85 per cent). Whereas the previous research suggested a heightened risk for physical injury and death to occur when the victim attempted to leave the offender, in the current study, PDV was much more likely to involve those who were currently co-habiting.

Risk factors that can influence the severity of domestic violence incidents include threats and the presence of weapons. The risk factors found in the sample can be found in Figure 2. The most common risk factor was the threat of violence, which occurred in nearly half (43 per cent) of all cases. In contrast, few cases involved either firearms (1 per cent) or an offender with access to firearms (4 per cent).

FIGURE 2: FACTORS INFLUENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POTENTIAL SEVERITY



Degree of Violence

Three-quarters of all the domestic violence cases involved actual violence; however, only half (51 per cent) of these 168 violent incidents resulted in a visible, physical injury. Among those incidents with injuries, the injuries tended to be minor, with half involving either bruises/abrasions or bleeding/cuts/scratches. Therefore, the degree of violence associated with these domestic violence cases in this sample was relatively minor.

In general terms, substance use is a predictor of increased violence (Bennett, Tolman, Rogalski, & Srinivasaraghavan, 1994; Block, 2003; Collins and Messerschmidt, 1993; Hall et al., 2006; Klein and Tobin, 2008; Robinson, 2006; Sharps, Campbell, Campbell, Gary, & Webster, 2003). Alcohol use was identified in over one-third (36 per cent) of the cases. In total, half (51 per cent) of these incidents were characterized by both offender and victim use of alcohol; when only one individual used alcohol, this was substantially more likely to be the offender (74 per cent). Consistent with the previous literature, when

alcohol was present, violence (87 per cent)⁷ and injuries (69 per cent) were both more likely to occur than when alcohol was absent (68 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively).⁸ Thus, alcohol did appear to increase the severity of the domestic incident.

Police Response to Incident

Although 91% of calls were responded to immediately by a police officer, in less than two-thirds (61 per cent) of cases, the offender was present when the officer(s) arrived. This may explain why an offender was arrested in only half of the incidents (46 per cent). Of note, offenders were significantly more likely to be arrested for PDV (53 per cent) than FDV (35 per cent).⁹ Moreover, police were more likely to arrest when there was evidence of physical injury (71 per cent) than when no injuries were visible (29 per cent).¹⁰ In other words, police were more likely to arrest the offender when there was corroborating evidence that an assault had occurred, which supports grounds for an arrest. This conclusion was further supported by the finding that offenders were 1½ times as likely to be arrested when a witness to the incident was present (73 per cent versus 46 per cent).¹¹

In addition to evidence supporting that an offence had occurred, police also appeared to rely on the offender's criminal history as a guide to whether they should arrest the offender. Although a history of violence was generally uncommon in this sample, the vast majority of offenders who had a history of violence in relationships were arrested (84 per cent) compared to less than half of those offenders without a history of violence in relationships (45 per cent).¹² Similarly, offenders with a history of violence in general were more likely to be arrested (72 per cent) than offenders without a history of violence (47 per cent),¹³ and offenders with a history of complaints by the same victim were more likely to be arrested (73 per cent) than those without such a history (51 per cent).¹⁴ In effect, police were more likely to arrest the offender when they were present at the scene, when the domestic violence involved intimate partners, when an injury occurred and/or a witness was present to corroborate the offence, and when the offender had a history of violence.

Overall, half (49 per cent; $n = 115$) of offenders were given a no contact order following the initial domestic violence incident in 2007. However, no contact orders were significantly more likely to be given in cases where the offender was charged (83 per cent) than when they were not charged (9 per cent)¹⁵, and when an individual was arrested (81 per cent) compared to when they were not arrested (8 per cent)¹⁶. No

⁷ $\chi^2(1) = 10.7, p = .001$

⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 13.8, p = .000$

⁹ $\chi^2(1) = 5.4, p = .02$

¹⁰ $\chi^2(1) = 24.7, p = .000$

¹¹ $\chi^2(1) = 15.1, p = .000$

¹² $\chi^2(1) = 27.1, p = .000$

¹³ $\chi^2(1) = 12.7, p = .000$

¹⁴ $\chi^2(1) = 8.1, p = .004$

¹⁵ $\chi^2(1) = 125.0, p = .000$

¹⁶ $\chi^2(1) = 119.8, p = .000$

contact orders were also statistically significantly more likely to be given in PDV incidents (85 per cent) than FDV incidents (66 per cent)¹⁷. In effect, in the majority of cases that were responded to more seriously by the police, a protective order preventing the offender from seeing or contacting the victim was commonly issued.

General Recidivism

Violation of No Contact Orders

Nearly one-third (31 per cent) of the 115 offenders with a no contact order as a result of their initial 2007 domestic violence offence breached the order. There were a number of important factors predicting which offenders were most likely to breach their orders. One of the most important factors was whether the offender was already under a previous order at the time of the previous domestic violence incident; these offenders were nearly three times as likely to breach their current order (67 per cent versus 24 per cent).¹⁸ This finding was not surprising given that these offenders had already demonstrated an inability to comply with court and/or police conditions.

Criminal history was another important predictor of no contact violations. Generally speaking, nearly half of the offenders with a history of relationship violence (45 per cent)¹⁹, a general history of violence (50 per cent)²⁰, and/or a previous offence against the current victim (46 per cent)²¹ violated their no contact order compared to one-fifth or less of offenders without these histories. Thus, a criminal history including violence and relationship violence as well as a pattern of failing to abide by conditional orders were predictive of offenders who violated their current no contact order. Although it should be noted that these conclusions are not necessarily generalisable given that this subsample comprised only 31 cases, the results suggest that the criminal justice system should take criminal history into consideration when deciding whether a no contact order would be a useful and/or appropriate response to incidents of domestic violence.²²

Domestic Violence Recidivism

Domestic violence recidivism was defined as a re-appearance of the offender as a subject of complaint against the same victim, whether due to a new charge or a new complaint from the same victim. Offences included non-compliance, threats, and physical violence.²³ To be included in this analysis, the recidivism

¹⁷ $\chi^2(1) = 5.3, p = .022$

¹⁸ $\chi^2(1) = 7.5, p = .006$

¹⁹ $\chi^2(1) = 9.4, p = .002$

²⁰ $\chi^2(1) = 14.8, p = .000$

²¹ $\chi^2(1) = 6.6, p = .010$

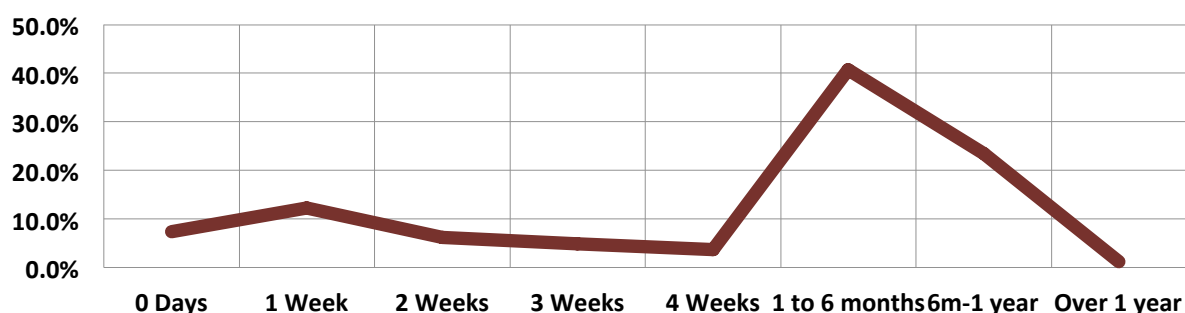
²² Some of the analyses involved fewer than the 31 offenders who breached their no contact order because the required information to assess a specific factor was missing from the offender's data.

²³ Generally, violating a no-contact order is viewed as a form of non-compliance. In the current study, efforts were made to distinguish violating the no contact order from non-compliant recidivism and, in fact, 55% of offenders who violated their no-contact order were *not* recorded as having any non-compliant recidivism. However, it is possible that in some cases, a no-contact

had to have been recorded in PRIME prior to 2009. This allowed for a period of 12 to 24 months for the offender to recidivate.²⁴

With the definition of recidivism and the timeframe used, a total of one-third (34 per cent; n = 80) of the offenders recidivated. On average, offenders recidivated within 108 days of their initial domestic violence incident, with a range of less than one day (7 per cent) to 530 days (0.4 per cent). Of note, one-third (35 per cent) of offenders who recidivated did so within the first month after the initial domestic violence incident, and three-quarters recidivated within six months (see Figure 3). Thus, consistent with previous research, domestic violence offenders who recidivated against the same victim tended to do so fairly quickly following the initial incident suggesting that the immediate weeks after the call for police assistance are a particularly important time for police and victim's services to work with victims of domestic violence.

FIGURE 3: TIME TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RECIDIVISM (N = 179)



In order to put this recidivism data in context, it is necessary to understand the type of offences associated with recidivism. Encouragingly, there were very few offenders (2.5 per cent) who committed a subsequent serious violent offence against the victim. Again, if an offender killed the victim, this data would not necessarily be reflected in the current study given the private nature of those serious files.²⁵ Although the most common form of recidivism was non-compliance (e.g. committing a breach offence, 29 per cent), some of the recidivism was violent in nature, as the next most common form of recidivism was an assault (20 per cent), followed by threats (18 per cent). Still, the overwhelming majority of offenders who recidivated did so in a non-violent manner.

A series of analyses were performed to determine which factors were most relevant in predicting an incident of domestic violence recidivism. First, the offender's demographics were analysed, including offender gender, age, ethnicity, history of mental illness, and relationship to the victim. Only one of these factors significantly predicted the likelihood the offender would recidivate. When the offender was

order violation was also coded as a non-compliant form of recidivism; therefore, it is important that the data on no-contact order violations and domestic violence recidivism be treated distinctly in future research.

²⁴ In some cases, the offender did recidivate against the original victim, but the recidivism occurred after the cut-off date for this study. Those cases were not included in this analysis.

²⁵ It should be noted that in one case the offender killed the victim through what has been classified as an "assisted suicide".

suspected/confirmed to have a mental illness, their risk of recidivating increased nearly eight-fold (OR = 7.7).

The next set of factors examined the offender's criminal history, including the number of prior convictions, number of prior violent convictions, and whether or not they had a history of violence in relationships, a history of violence in general, and/or a history of prior complaints with the victim prior to the original 2007 offence. When measuring the effect of all these factors simultaneously, the only significant factor predicting the likelihood of recidivism was the offender having a history of complaints with the victim, which increased the risk of recidivism by 2 ½ (OR = 2.5).

The third set of factors looked at the police response to the current domestic violence and the offender's reaction to the intervention. Specifically, whether the offender was arrested and/or charged and whether they violated a no contact order were examined as predictors of recidivism. Violating a no contact order was a substantial predictor of domestic violence recidivism, raising the odds over 15 times (OR = 15.4). However, arresting or charging the offender were not significant factors in predicting recidivism.

The last set of predictors examined the victim's response to the current offence. The factors compared in this analysis included whether the victim wanted charges laid, whether they wanted to go to court, whether they provided a Victim Impact Statement, and whether they continued to see the offender. Of these factors, only the victim having continued contact with the offender significantly predicted recidivism, raising the odds the offender would recidivate three-fold (OR = 3.0).

These results suggest that when police assess the risk of recidivism in domestic violence cases, particular attention should be paid to whether the offender violated a no contact order, whether the offender has a mental illness, if the victim is continuing to see the offender, and whether the offender and victim have a history of lodging complaints against each other. Using all four of these factors to predict recidivism will help police correctly classify 83% of offenders who are likely to recidivate. Moreover, when examining the relevance of these four factors simultaneously, the two factors that stand out as the most relevant predictors are the offender violating a no contact order (OR = 18.8) and the victim continuing to see the offender (OR = 4.9).

Although only 15 offenders committed a new violent domestic offence against the same victim, the characteristics of violent recidivists was compared to the non-recidivists and non-violent recidivists to determine how they differed. Although the group sizes were too small to conduct statistical significance tests, some interesting trends were still identified. Violent recidivists, compared to non-violent and non-recidivists, were more likely to have a prior criminal history (35 per cent versus 17 per cent), to have a history of violence in relationships (47 per cent versus 29 per cent), to have a history of violence (47 per cent versus 35 per cent), to show signs of mental illness (40 per cent versus 22 per cent), to violate their no contact order (56 per cent versus 28 per cent), and to continue contact with the victim (93 per cent versus 59 per cent). They were slightly less likely than non-violent and non-recidivists to have a history of complaints with the victim (20 per cent versus 25 per cent).

Violent recidivists, compared to non-violent recidivists, were much more likely to have a prior criminal history (35 per cent versus 22 per cent), to have a history of violence in relationships (47 per cent versus 37 per cent), and to continue seeing the victim (93 per cent versus 69 per cent). In contrast, violent recidivists were less likely than non-violent recidivists to have a history of previous complaints with the victim (20 per cent versus 39 per cent). Interestingly, violent recidivists and non-violent recidivists were essentially equally likely to show signs of mental illness (40 per cent each), have a history of violence (47

per cent versus 49 per cent), and to violate their no contact order (56 per cent each). Again, while the results of this comparison should not be used to change policies or practices in identifying potential violent recidivists as it is based on only 15 violent recidivists, it does suggest that future research with this subgroup may be able to identify risk factors typically associated with violent recidivism against the same victim. Further, given that only 15 offenders in the current study of over 800 domestic violence occurrences committed a new violent act against the same victim means that this subgroup represents a manageable size for targeted enforcement by police. Generally, until further research can support these findings, police may consider offenders who have a criminal history and a history of violence in relationships (though not necessarily with the current victim) and who continue their contact with the victim as at an inflated risk for violent recidivism; however, given the small size of the current sample, they should not necessarily lose their focus on other domestic violence offenders at this time until further research can support these findings.

Discussion

The current study identified that one-third of offenders involved in a domestic violence incident in 2007 recidivated within a 24-month period, with one-third of those recidivating in the first month following the original incident. While the nature of recidivism did not tend to be extremely severe, a small proportion of offenders did engage in assault or threatened the victim. Some of the most important findings in this study were the negligible effect of arrest and charge on the offender, as these police responses were not related to whether the offender recidivated.

It is important for police to identify those offenders most likely to recidivate in order to better protect victims. In the current study, the most important factors associated to predicting recidivism were a prior history of complaints between offender and victim, offender mental illness, and, in particular, continued contact between offender and victim, and offender violation of a no contact order. The fact that an offender violating a no contact order was the most substantial predictor of recidivism was not altogether surprising, as these offenders have demonstrated an inability to abide by legal conditions. Moreover, these offenders generally had an established a pattern of victimization against intimate partners, which itself is also predictive of future re-victimisation. Therefore, police should pay particular attention to offenders who have a history of violating conditions, particularly no contact orders, when determining which of their domestic violence offenders should receive priority attention.

This report briefly reviewed some of the risk assessment tools available to police, including the ODARA and B-SAFER. These tools are used to identify offenders at high risk of reoffending against their spouse. Importantly, the B-SAFER also assists the police in prioritizing the case relative to others in terms of the likelihood for future violence and also includes general guidelines regarding case management options, including monitoring, treating, and supervising the offender, as well as victim safety planning decisions.

Two additional potential practices for case management of domestic violence offenders include MARACs and Targeted Responding. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) were introduced in Wales to promote agency coordination among police, probation, social services, health services, and others involved in responding to domestic violence. MARACs promote information sharing between criminal justice professionals, which results in more effective victims' services given the greater accuracy and currency of information accessed by each agency. In fact, Robinson (2006) stressed that over half (60

per cent) of victims were not re-victimized up to six months following the initial event as a result of the information sharing between agencies that promoted effective victim services.

Targeted responding, as implemented by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, involves the specific tailoring of police responses for each domestic violence incident. Using this policy, domestic violence calls for service were reduced by 99% and recidivism between the same offender and victim occurred in only 11% of cases. The tailored responses included referrals to community agencies to provide skill development and help deal with relationship issues, and zero tolerance policies used against those offenders who escalated their behaviour. This latter policy involved arresting the offender even for minor domestic offences and monitoring their behaviour very closely, including conducting surveillance and enforcing other minor crimes, such as traffic-related offences, to emphasize that the police were watching them closely (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, 2002). They also utilized a Police Watch Program in which the victim would regularly be visited by police, neighbours, and/or family members to ensure their safety at home and in their workplace. Furthermore, this policy was utilized early in the development of domestic offending, as an analysis of their files revealed that certain indicator crimes signified potential future violence against a spouse, including threats, harassment, and vandalism offences (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, 2002). Similarly, they also changed their department policy from considering the problem to be serious once they received five calls for service in a month to three calls for service. This change prevented the escalation of the domestic issue and allowed for some form of intervention to occur sooner increasing the chances to be more successful (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, 2002). Thus, the police utilized a hot spot type policy to identify potentially chronic domestic violence offenders. The successful results of this practice highlighted the importance of police agencies empirically analyzing their domestic violence calls to identify early risk factors for increasing violence that signaled the need for intervention.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this report was to summarize the factors increasing the risk of domestic violence recidivism. In effect, one factor from each of four groups appeared relevant in predicting recidivism; offender mental illness, history of complaints between offender and victim, violation of a no contact order, and continued offender-victim contact. Other factors typically found to be relevant, including substance use, criminal history, and arrest of the offender were not statistically relevant to recidivism. However, it should be noted that recidivism was only tracked for approximately one year and was based on official data; therefore, other factors may still be relevant but were not identified in the current study.

As there are currently several tools available for police-based risk assessment, a recommendation for domestic violence units is that they adopt a tool like the ODARA or B-SAFER, which does not require knowledge of statistics to use (Hilton et al., 2004). In fact, after one day of training on an instrument, such as the B-SAFER, officers can be certified and can reliably assess risk of recidivism among their domestic violence offenders, as well as rank them in terms of priority for resources and intervention.

Short of adopting one of these risk assessment tools, police working with domestic violence offenders must pay particular attention to the risk factors of violating a no contact order and the victim continuing to have contact with the offender, as they were the most relevant predictors in the current study of domestic

violence recidivism. If the victim and offender continue their contact following the initial offence, regardless of whether the victim wants that contact, the risk for re-victimisation is increased substantially. Therefore, in addition to assessing risk among domestic violence offenders, police should be especially attentive to connecting victims with services that will support their successfully leaving the abusive relationship. By introducing practices that focus on identifying offenders most at risk of re-victimizing their partners, police can more effectively manage their limited resources and coordinate meaningful interventions to prevent future occurrences of domestic violence.

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