

## DASH - Asking the Questions

It is very important to ask ALL of the questions on the checklist at EVERY incident. You will need to consider:

- WHO is at risk;
- The CONTEXT of the BEHAVIOUR;
- HOW the risk factors interact with each other;
- The victim's perception of risk.

### DASH - Asking about types of abuse and risk factors

#### **Physical abuse**

Questions 1, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 23.

- You should try and establish if the abuse is getting worse, or happening more often, or the incidents themselves are more serious
- Try and get a picture of the range of physical abuse that has taken place. The incident that is currently being disclosed may not be the worst thing to have happened.
- The abuse might also be happening to other people in their household, such as their children or siblings or elderly relatives.
- Sometimes violence will be used against a family pet.

#### **Sexual abuse**

Question 16.

- Sexual abuse can include the use of threats, force or intimidation to obtain sex, deliberately inflicting pain during sex, or combining sex and violence and using weapons.

#### **Coercion, threats and intimidation**

Questions 2, 3, 6, 8, 14, 17, 18, 19, 23 and 24.

- It is important to understand and establish: the fears of the victim/victims in relation to what the perpetrator/s may do; who they are frightened of and who they are frightened for (e.g. children/siblings). Victims usually know the abuser's behaviour better than anyone else which is why this question is significant.
- In cases of 'honour' based violence there may be more than one abuser living in the home or belonging to the wider family and community. This could also include female relatives.
- Stalking and harassment becomes more significant when the abuser is also making threats to harm themselves, the victim or others. They might use phrases such as "If I can't have you no one else can..."
- Other examples of behaviour that can indicate future harm include obsessive phone calls, texts or emails, uninvited visits to the victim's home or workplace, loitering and destroying/vandalising property.
- Separation is a dangerous time: establish if the victim has tried to separate from the abuser or has been threatened about the consequences of leaving. Being pursued after separation can be particularly dangerous.
- Victims of domestic abuse sometimes tell us that the perpetrators harm pets, damage furniture and this alone makes them frightened without the perpetrator needing to physically hurt them. This kind of intimidation is common and often used as a way to control and frighten.

- Some perpetrators of domestic abuse do not follow court orders or contact arrangements with children. Previous violations may be associated with an increase in risk of future violence.
- Some victims feel frightened and intimidated by the criminal history of their partner/ex-partner. It is important to remember that offenders with a history of violence are at increased risk of harming their partner, even if the past violence was not directed towards intimate partners or family members, except for 'honour'-based violence, where the perpetrator(s) will commonly have no other recorded criminal history.

### **Emotional abuse and isolation**

Questions 4, 5 and 12.

This can be experienced at the same time as the other types of abuse. It may be present on its own or it may have started long before any physical violence began. The result of this abuse is that victims can blame themselves and, in order to live with what is happening, minimise and deny how serious it is. As a professional you can assist the victim in beginning to consider the risks the victim and any children may be facing.

- The victim may be being prevented from seeing family or friends, from creating any support networks or prevented from having access to any money.
- Victims of 'honour' based violence talk about extreme levels of isolation and being 'policed' in the home. This is a significant indicator of future harm and should be taken seriously.
- Due to the abuse and isolation being suffered victims feel like they have no choice but to continue living with the abuser and fear what may happen if they try and leave. This can often have an impact on the victim's mental health and they might feel depressed or even suicidal.
- Equally the risk to the victim is greater if their partner/ex-partner has mental health problems such as depression and if they abuse drugs or alcohol. This can increase the level of isolation as victims can feel like agencies won't understand and will judge them. They may feel frightened that revealing this information will get them and their partner into trouble and, if they have children, they may worry that they will be removed. These risks are addressed in questions 21 & 22.

### **Children and pregnancy**

Questions 7, 9 and 18 refer to being pregnant and children and whether there is conflict over child contact.

- The presence of children including stepchildren can increase the risk of domestic abuse for the mother. They too can get caught up in the violence and suffer directly.
- Physical violence can occur for the first time or get worse during pregnancy or for the first few years of the child's life. There are usually lots of professionals involved during this time, such as health visitors or midwives, who need to be aware of the risks to the victim and children, including an unborn child.
- The perpetrator may use the children to have access to the victim, abusive incidents may occur during child contact visits or there may be a lot of fear and anxiety that the children may be harmed.

### **Economic abuse**

Economic abuse is covered in question 20.

- Victims of domestic abuse often tell us that they are financially controlled by their partners/ex-partners. Consider how the financial control impacts on the safety options available to them. For example, they may rely on their partner/ex-partner for an income or do not have access to benefits in their own right. The victim might feel like the situation has become worse since their partner/ex-partner lost their job.
- The Citizens Advice Bureau or the local specialist domestic abuse support service will be able to outline to the victim the options relating to their current financial situation and how they might be able to access funds in their own right.

## Risk Assessment Categorisation

- **Standard** Current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.
- **Medium** There are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender has the potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances, for example, failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse.
- **High** There are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.

14 or more 'Yes' answers on the DASH risk assessment is believed to be a rational starting point for case referral to MARAC. **However, if you believe a case to be high risk and there are less than 14, please rely upon professional judgement and mark it as high risk.**

### What is professional judgement?

You may have serious concerns about a victim's situation even if they are not 'visibly high risk'. Where the particular context of a case gives rise to serious concerns, even if the victim has been unable to disclose the information that might highlight their risk more clearly, you may still categorise the case as high risk and/or refer to MARAC based on your professional judgement. Such situations may occur when (this list is not exhaustive)

- there are extreme levels of fear;
- there are cultural barriers to disclose such information ie: HBV;
- there are extreme levels of control and/or isolation;
- there is obsessive stalking behaviour;
- where the perpetrator is abusing more than one partner;
- you feel, using experience and instinct that something is very wrong and the risk is high.

There are 27 Q's that are asked in the DASH risk assessment. The questions highlighted in **bold** are **high risk indicators**. Positive responses to these questions should attract thorough scrutiny and will require positive action from the attending officers in order to mitigate the risks and safeguard the victim and/or child(ren) and should be highlighted to a supervisor.

1. Has the current incident resulted in injury? (Please state what and whether this is the first injury)
- 2. Are you very frightened?**
3. What are you afraid of? Is it further injury or violence? (Please give an indication of what you think (name of abuser(s) ..... might do and to whom))
- 4. Do you feel isolated from family/friends ie: does (name of abuser(s) ....) try to stop you from seeing friends/family/Dr or others?**
5. Are you feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts?
- 6. Have you separated or tried to separate from (name of abuser(s).....) within the past year?**
- 7. Is there conflict over child contact?**

- 8. Does (.....) constantly text, call, contact, follow, stalk or harass you?**
- 9. Is anyone in the household pregnant? (Y/N) If no, has anyone in the household had a child in the last 18 months? (Y?N)**
10. Are there any children, step-children or dependents either in the household or elsewhere?
- 11. Has (.....) ever hurt the children/dependents?**
12. Has (.....) ever threatened to hurt or kill the children/dependents?
- 13. Is the abuse happening more often?**
- 14. Is the abuse getting worse?**
- 15. Does (.....) try to control everything you do and/or are they excessively jealous?**
- 16. Has (.....) ever used weapons or objects to hurt you?**
- 17. Has (.....) ever threatened to kill you or someone else and you believed them?**
- 18. Has (.....) ever attempted to strangle/choke/suffocate/drown you?**
- 19. Does (.....) do or say things of a sexual nature that makes you feel bad or that physically you or someone else?**
- 20. Is there any other person that has threatened you or that you are afraid of?**
21. Do you know if (.....) has hurt anyone else? (inside or outside of the family)
- 22. Has (.....) ever mistreated an animal or the family pet?**
23. Are there any financial issues? For example, are you dependent on (...) for money/have they recently lost their job/other financial issues?
- 24. Has (.....) had problems in the past year with drugs (prescription or other), alcohol or mental health leading to problems in leading a normal life?**
- 25. Has (.....) ever threatened or attempted suicide?**
26. Has (.....) ever breached bail/an injunction and/or any agreement for when they can see you and/or the children?
27. Do you know if (.....) has ever been in trouble with the police or has a criminal history?