



Research Department Fact Sheet

The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA)

The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA), a procedure to predict future assaults against intimate partners, was developed by the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care in response to the May/Iles and Hadley inquest recommendations. It was also a result of recommendations by The Joint Committee on Domestic Violence to the Attorney General of Ontario in 1999. The ODARA is a single assessment that is available for use by police, victim services, health care, and correctional agencies. It is the first empirically tested and validated domestic violence risk assessment tool to assess risk of future wife assault, as well as the frequency and severity of these assaults.

History

The ODARA is the result of a collaboration between the Ontario Provincial Police and our Research Department. The OPP's Behavioural Sciences and Analysis Section is mandated to provide criminal investigation support services and training of a behavioural nature to OPP and other criminal justice agencies within the Province of Ontario. The Waypoint Research Department is internationally known for scientific research on crime, violence, mental disorder, and risk appraisal. In 2001, this research team was awarded a quarter-million-dollar grant by the federal government to develop risk assessments for wife assault recidivism. The funds also supported research on the mental health issues of women assaulted by their partners. In 2003, the team was recognized through an award for Team Endeavours from the Ontario Women in Law Enforcement. In 2004, the first article on the ODARA, its development, and its first cross-validation, was published in the journal *Psychological Assessment*.

Development

The ODARA was created from research on nearly 600 cases from OPP and municipal police forces. Using multiple regression techniques, the researchers found that 13 questions were the most highly predictive of future violence. The risk of assault can be predicted with high accuracy using these questions alone, reducing the need for a comprehensive assessment in order to evaluate risk of reoffence. The 13 yes/no questions cover the accused man's history of violence and antisocial behaviour (police record for domestic assault, police record for nondomestic assault, prior correctional sentence, prior failure on conditional release, violence outside the home, domestic assault during pregnancy, substance abuse), details of the most recent assault (physical confinement, threats of harm, victim reported fearing future assaults at time of the assault), and the victim's personal circumstances (number of children, children from a prior relationship, barriers to support).

Interpretation

The ODARA is an actuarial risk assessment such that its scores rank wife assaulters on risk for repeated domestic violence. Thus, a male domestic offender can be placed into one of seven categories of risk. For example, a score of 0 places a man in the lowest risk category; 9% of men in the ODARA research studies fell into this category, and 7% of these men met the criteria for domestic recidivism within a follow up of about 5 years. A score of 7 or more places a man in the highest risk category; 6% of men fell into this category, and 74% of these men met the criteria for domestic recidivism.

Higher scores on the ODARA also indicate that an accused assaulter will commit more assaults, commit them sooner, and cause more injury (in a range of injury from none to lethality) than an accused with a lower score.

Validation Studies

The ODARA's predictive accuracy has now been demonstrated in 6 validations by the Waypoint Research Department and 5 studies by other researchers. This work includes samples in Canada, the USA, and Europe, as well as female perpetrators and cases of dating violence. These studies are listed below.

Buchanan, K. (2009). *Risk assessment and spousal violence: Predictive validity and cultural applicability*. Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering, Vol 71(1-B), 2010. pp. 651. [University of Regina]

Gray, A. L. (2012). *Assessing risk for intimate partner violence: A cross-validation of the ODARA and DVRAG within a sample of incarcerated offenders*. Unpublished MA thesis. [Carleton University]

Hilton, N.Z. & Harris, G.T. (2009). How nonrecidivism affects predictive accuracy: Evidence from a cross-validation of the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 24*, 326-337. DOI:10.1177/0886260508316478

Hilton, N.Z., Harris, G.T., Popham, S., & Lang, C. (2010). Risk assessment among incarcerated domestic offenders across follow-up times and case criteria. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 37*, 815-832. DOI:10.1177/0093854810368937

Hilton, N.Z., Harris, G.T., Rice, M.E., Houghton, R., & Eke, A.W. (2008). An indepth actuarial risk assessment for wife assault recidivism: The Domestic Violence Risk Appraisal Guide. *Law and Human Behavior, 32*, 150-163. DOI: 10.1007/s10979-007-9088-6

Hilton, N.Z., Harris, G.T., Rice, M.E, Lang, C., Cormier, C.A., & Lines, K.J. (2004). A Brief Actuarial Assessment for the Prediction of Wife Assault Recidivism: The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment. *Psychological Assessment, 16*, 267-275. [Erratum 17, 131.] 10.1037/1040-3590.16.3.267

Hilton, N.Z., Popham, S., Lang, C., & Harris, G.T. (in press). Preliminary validation of the ODARA for female intimate partner violence offenders. *Partner Abuse*.

Moser, A.E. (2012). *Validation and expansion of the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) instrument: An early warning system*. (Master's dissertation, University of New Brunswick, 2012).

Rettenberger, M. & Eher, R. (2012). Actuarial risk assessment in sexually motivated intimate-partner violence. *Law and Human Behavior*. In press, e-publication ahead of print. DOI:10.1037/b0000001

Stewart, G., & Henning, K. R. (2010, September). *Risk assessment for intimate partner violence*. Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Domestic Violence Symposium, Seattle, WA.

Trinh, B. V. (2010). A Replication Study of the Domestic Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (DVRAG). (Doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I draw a conclusion about risk using only the ODARA score?

Yes, the ODARA can be used validly as the only assessment to measure risk of domestic violence. More information is not required in order to score the ODARA. Adjusting the score by adding other information could result in lower accuracy.

2. Can the ODARA be used if the man was not found guilty of assault?

Yes. The ODARA significantly predicts domestic violence recidivism whether the offender is charged or convicted or not. Incidents were included in the ODARA research if the researchers agreed, based on the police report, that an assault had occurred – there was a high level of reliability.

3. Can the ODARA when there is a risk of lethality?

Yes. Higher ODARA scores indicate more severe future assaults, and our current research has found that men who subsequently committed domestic murder ranked in the highest risk category. So, although the ODARA does not specifically predict the occurrence of lethal domestic violence, it can be used in cases where severe and potentially lethal assault is a concern.

4. Does the ODARA predict assaults that are not known to the police?

Yes and no. The ODARA calculates the likelihood of assaults known to police, so the likelihood of any assault, with or without police involvement, could be different from the stated recidivism rate. However, higher ODARA scores indicate that a man is more likely than other domestically violent men to commit future assaults. This “rank order” is expected to be stable over time and regardless of whether there are assaults that the police don't find about.

5. Why aren't jealousy or threats of suicide included in the ODARA?

The ODARA's 13 items are the strongest predictors of domestic violence recidivism. Other information was not predictive in our research (e.g., suicide threats) or did not improve the accuracy of the risk assessment (e.g., jealousy). Extra information should not be used to adjust the ODARA score or its interpretation of risk, but details such as jealousy and suicidal behaviour can be taken into account when devising a victim safety plan or interventions for the perpetrator.

ODARA Training

ODARA 101: The Electronic Training Program: An interactive online e-learning program for assessors to learn to use the ODARA any day of the year and at any time that fits their schedule. This project has been made possible by a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. For more information, click ODARA 101 on the Domestic and Relationship Violence page. (<http://odara.waypointcentre.ca>)

For More Information

There is no professional restriction on the use of the ODARA, but training has been shown to improve scoring accuracy. For more information, click ODARA 101: The Electronic Training Program, or the link to the book (both on the Domestic and Relationship Violence page):

Hilton, N.Z., Harris, G.T., & Rice, M.E. (2010). *Risk assessment for domestically violent men: Tools for criminal justice, offender intervention, and victim services*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. (<http://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4318055.aspx>)

This book contains all the information needed to score and interpret the ODARA and DVRAG in any setting. Practice materials and more extensive Frequently Asked Questions are included.