

Centre for Research & Education on Violence
Against Women and Children

Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario

**Training needs of community
professionals involved in
threat assessment and risk
management in domestic
violence cases:**

**Feedback from an Ontario
Multidisciplinary Forum**

Training needs of community professionals involved in threat assessment and risk management in domestic violence cases:

Feedback from an Ontario Multidisciplinary Forum

The Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children hosted a forum at the Hamilton Convention Centre in Hamilton, ON, February 7-9, 2010. The forum was titled “Reducing the risk of lethal violence: Collaboration in threat assessment & risk management: From theory to practice. Funding was provided by the Ontario Women’s Directorate, Government of Ontario.

The forum was held with the understanding that “an effective response to domestic violence requires not only well-informed individual interventions, but also coordination of services by different professionals involved with family members” (Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2005).

Each Domestic Violence Community Coordinating Committee (DVCCC) in Ontario was invited to send four representatives to the forum including: two community representatives and two justice representatives. Representatives from select provincial organizations were also invited to attend. Of the 49 coordinating committees in Ontario, 48 committees and 9 provincial organizations were represented at the forum. In total, 270 people registered for the forum.

A follow-up survey was conducted to determine whether the information received at the forum was helpful in changing practices in communities regarding threat assessment and risk management. The survey was sent via email to all forum participants in September 2010. The survey was available to be completed online through Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) or attached to the email message as a Word document. Follow-up emails were sent out to all participants reminding them to complete the survey. As well, when participants registered for a follow-up forum held in London, ON from October 26-27, 2010, they were reminded to complete the survey. In total, 58 people responded to the survey in whole or in part representing 36 DVCC committees from the province of Ontario.

Survey participants all attended the forum. Of those who responded to the question about their profession, 23 (40%) indicated that they represent the justice sector, 28 (50%) represent the community sector and 4 represented government agencies (55 responses in total).

Survey responses

Question # 1

As a result of the forum, are you better equipped to support women and children and reduce the risk of lethal violence?

Almost all of the people who responded to this question (84%) responded "yes".

Reasons for this response included the following comments:

- Better informed of other services and programs in the region/province
- Information sharing issues (perceived restrictions) were a significant barrier
- Obtained background from other professions, how we are all linked and want the same goals
- As a result of the forum I was able to organize a community information session to begin discussion regarding gaps in our community
- I have a better understanding of the issues of collaboration among community and justice partners
- Gained information and insight

Question # 2

As a result of the forum, do you plan to make changes to your on-the job practices?

Almost all of the people who responded to this question answered "yes" (78%).

Reasons for this response included the following comments:

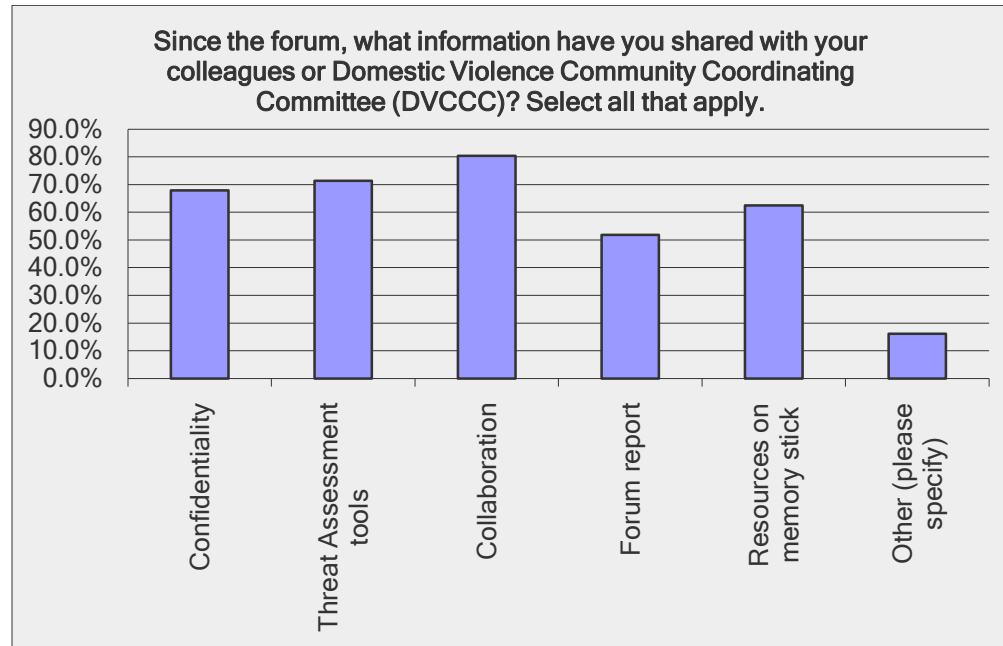
- Increase communication with community partners
- Enhance risk assessment training for all staff
- Development/modification of high-risk team
- Develop/implement consistent intake/assessment questions regarding domestic violence

Question # 3

Since the forum, what information have you shared with your colleagues or Domestic Violence Community Coordinating committee (DVCCC)?

Almost everyone who completed the survey had shared information with their colleagues in a variety of ways. More than half of the respondents had shared information regarding confidentiality, threat assessment tools, collaboration, resources on the memory stick and the forum report. Responses to other information shared

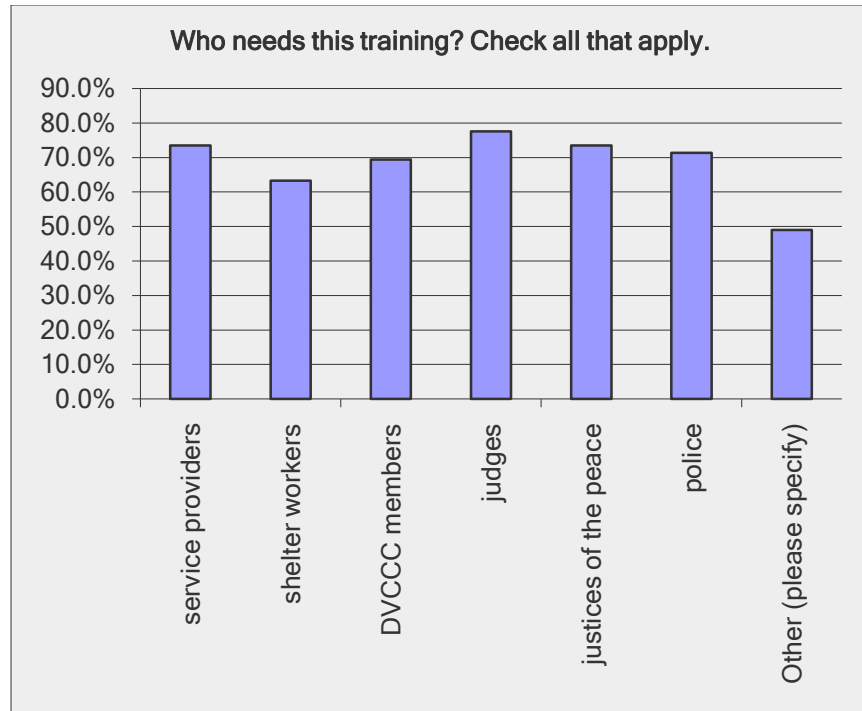
included information regarding the Memorandum of Understanding, DVD, Sisters in Spirit campaign. Some have informally shared information they gained from the forum. The majority of respondents (80%) indicated they shared the information resources at a meeting. Some presented the DVD at the meeting, shared a verbal presentation or discussion and shared resources from the memory stick with other committee members.



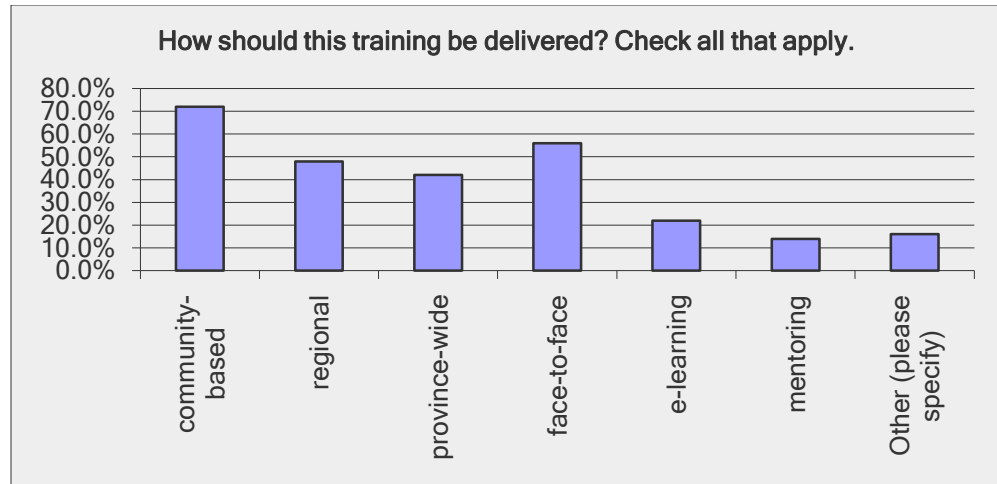
Identifying Threat Assessment/ Risk management training gaps

Survey respondents were asked to identify what threat assessment/risk management training gaps still exist? They were also asked who needs this training and how should it be delivered.

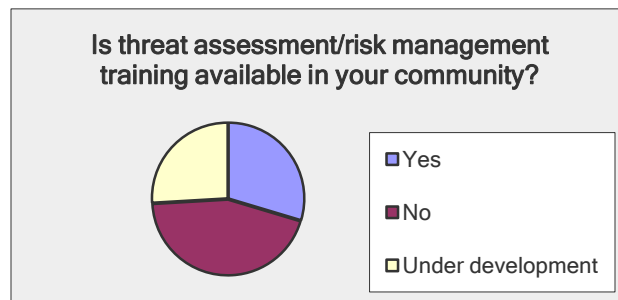
More than half of those who answered this question identified privacy and confidentiality; and how to improve collaboration as training gaps that need to be addressed. Legislative requirements were identified by about 40% of the respondents. Other responses included addressing the needs of aboriginal women: on/off-reserve, Status/Non Status Indians; privacy and confidentiality; training for judges and justices of the peace; removing barriers to information sharing. When asked to identify who needs this training, respondents identified a number of groups that require training including service providers, shelter workers, DVCCC members, judges, justices of the peace, police and others. The health sector was most commonly identified in the "other" response.



When asked what the format for training should be, there were many suggestions offered. Most people felt that the training should be community-based. Almost half of the respondents felt that the training could be delivered regionally or province-wide. More than half of the respondents indicated they would prefer face-to-face training, while others indicated that e-learning or mentoring would be appropriate.



Respondents were asked if threat assessment/risk management training was available in their community. Almost half of the respondents indicated that there were no training opportunities in their community, while two thirds indicated that training opportunities were available or under development. Some training opportunities had come through grants that had been obtained through victim service agencies (VCARS programs). Some training was also available through OPP Behavioural Sciences Services.



Use of Threat Assessment/Risk Management tools in agencies

Respondents were asked about the use of threat assessment/risk management tools in their agencies. More than two-thirds of the respondents (70%) indicated that threat assessment/risk management tools were being used. One quarter of the respondents answered "no" and the remaining 5% "did not know."

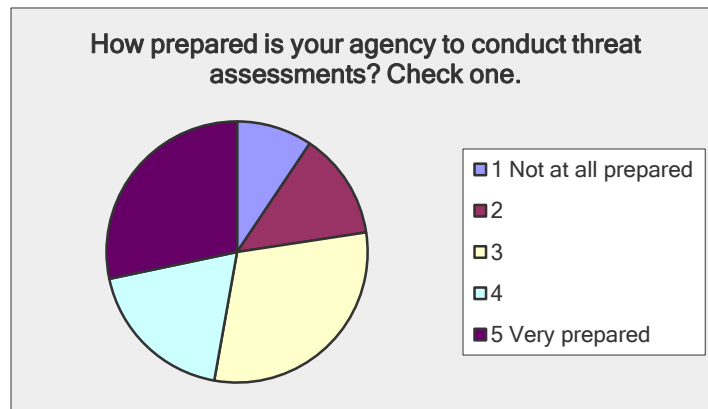
A number of formal and informal Threat assessment/risk management tools were identified by respondents including the following:

- Level of Service Inventory (Probation & Parole)
- SARA (Spousal Assault Risk Assessment)
- ODARA (Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment)
- DVSR (Domestic Violence Supplementary Report)
- B-SAFER

- SAM
- DA (Danger Assessment)
- Local Checklist
- Checklist based on Domestic Violence Death Review Committee report findings
- Red flag protocols, safe bail programs and domestic violence policies
- Power & control wheel

The tools reported most commonly used are the ODARA and the Danger Assessment.

Respondents were asked to rate how prepared their agency is to conduct threat assessments on a scale of one to five where one = not at all prepared and five = very prepared. Just over one quarter of the respondents indicated that their community was very prepared to conduct threat assessments while 10% indicated that their community was not at all prepared.



Use of Threat Assessment/Risk Management tools at the DVCCC level

Respondents were asked if threat assessment/risk management tools were being used by their local DVCCC. Respondents were invited to answer "yes" "no" or "don't know." About one third answered "yes", one third answered "no" and the remaining third answered "don't know." Respondents were asked to identify the tools that their local DVCCC is currently using. Many responded that there is not a standard tool being used, that each member agency of the coordinating committee uses its own tool. Some indicated that the committee refers high risk cases to the OPP Behavioral Sciences and Analysis Services.

One-half of respondents indicated that members of their local DVCCC had received training on threat assessment/risk management tools, 15% reported "no" and more than one-third "did not know." When asked to identify which tools the committee had been trained on however, most did not know who had been trained or on what tools. One community had undergone extensive training with 60 community members on three Threat assessment tools: ODARA, Danger Assessment and B-SAFER. Other groups indicated that each agency took on the role of training their employees for the tool they are currently using.

Communicating the results of Threat Assessments

It appears that most DVCCC do not have a communication strategy in place to communicate the results of a Threat Assessment to committee members or service providers. About one-third of those who responded to the question indicated that a communication strategy was under development. About one-third of the survey participants did not answer this question.

Challenges facing local Domestic violence Community Coordinating Committees

Survey participants were asked to identify from the following choices the most difficult issue their local DVCCC faces regarding threat assessments:

- Information sharing
- Training on threat assessment tools
- Collaboration
- High-risk committee membership
- Other

Information sharing and high-risk committee membership were each reported by about one quarter of the respondents as the most challenging issue facing their committee. Training on threat assessment tools and collaboration represented another one quarter of the responses. About one quarter of the respondents were unsure of the most difficult issue facing their community.

Other Comments

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to leave comments or suggestions at the end of the survey. About one-third of the survey participants chose to leave comments. The comments centered around the following themes:

- Need to distinguish between High-Risk committees and DVCCCs. High-risk committees meet regularly to discuss high-risk cases where charges are laid. Community members are often not welcome/invited to high-risk committees; concern regarding lack of collaboration.
- Conference – comments indicated appreciation for the opportunity to meet with/network with members of own DVCCC as well as other DVCCCs, meet people from various sectors.
- Universality – some comments regarding the need for universality regarding provincial protocols, policies, threat assessment tools, training, etc.
- Training opportunities – need to have a varied approach, community, regional and provincial training; mentoring among established and newly establishing committees.
- Meeting the needs of underserved – aboriginal women, people living in remote areas; concern regarding availability of training of service providers, accessibility of services for clients.