



Dash: The multi-agency risk assessment tool for domestic abuse

Overview

We understand that on the advice of the College of Policing some police forces across England and Wales have begun to use Dara (Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment), for their first responders.

We have had queries as to whether this is something that will be recommended for multi-agency partners (other than the Police) instead of the [Dash risk checklist](#) (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and 'Honour'-based violence Risk Checklist).

SafeLives continues to recommend the use of Dash for multi-agency partners and police forces will still be using Dash for secondary risk assessment.

The College of Policing and NPCC explain “Dara is designed only for first responder police officers and works seamlessly with the domestic abuse, stalking and honour-based violence (DASH) tool, which remains in use for secondary assessment by specialist investigators, independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and victim support organisations”¹.

SafeLives is committed to offering our support, expertise and guidance to ensure the best response for victims of domestic abuse and their families, building on the partnership working we have supported for many years.

This briefing sets out the background to the Dara and the Dash and key information that you may find useful.

Background

How Dash was developed

In 2008 SafeLives worked with ACPO (now the National Police Chiefs' Council) and Criminal Behavioural Analyst, Laura Richards to bring together the various risk assessments in use to form a single multi-agency tool to assess the risk posed by perpetrators to victims and any relevant additional risk indicators identified by international research. The Dash was built on the existing good practice of the evidence-based SPECSS+ Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model as well as the evidence based risk indicator tool FSU9 used by South Wales Police. The SPECSS+ was previously ACPO compliant and had been evaluated numerous times. Victim and practitioner focus groups were held to ensure the language and format worked as effectively as possible.

The Dash was developed to assess adult victims disclosing domestic abuse, so-called 'Honour'-Based Violence and/or stalking. It is based on evidence of risk indicators from extensive research and analysis by leading academics, including reviews of over 500 domestic homicides and near misses, exploring specific factors and patterns that might indicate a victim is at risk of serious harm (details of the research can be found from page 8 of this [practice guidance](#)).

The SafeLives Dash risk checklist was tested with Idvas, specialist domestic abuse services and partner agencies involved in Marac to ensure it took into account the needs of the victim. Victims working with specialist agencies ensured that the wording and ordering of questions worked for them. Respect, Cafcass, Karma Nirvana and other experts contributed their expertise and endorsed the final tool which was launched nationally in 2009.

What is the function of Dash?

The SafeLives Dash has been designed so that non-specialist practitioners could use it and signpost to specialist support where needed. Domestic Abuse experts (such as Idvas) will use the Dash alongside

¹ <https://cdn.prgloo.com/media/e5d54f6baa4e45698e2ef4c2bf830f14.pdf>

a whole host of skills, expertise and additional tools to understand, manage and mitigate risks. This includes the severity of abuse grid (SOAG) and Individualised Safety & Support Plans (ISSP).

The use of Dash has allowed the development of a common language and understanding of risk, which created a nationally consistent approach to risk assessment for statutory and non-statutory services. Referral thresholds have been established alongside referral routes for adult victims at high risk of homicide or serious harm to Idva and Marac. [Referrals to Marac](#) and Idvas by non-police practitioners are based on three criteria - professional judgement, actuarial assessment (usually around 14 ticks), and escalation.

Police using the ACPO Dash have always been asked to refer to Marac and Idvas based on two criteria, professional judgement and escalation, with the Dash as a tool to help them assess risk.

There are two versions of the Dash risk checklist. The SafeLives Dash, which has 24 questions (the form can be accessed [with full](#) guidance or [without](#) guidance) and the Dash which was used by the Police, which had 27 questions. The additional 3 questions on the police checklist relate specifically to children/dependents.

Dara

The Police Dash Risk checklist was accredited by ACPO in 2009. However, in 2014 HMIC found that the extent to which the Dash form was used by officers varied “significantly from force to force”. The report stated that there were also significant problems with how officers were being supported and trained in their use of Dash. Since then, the College of Policing conducted research in 3 force areas with Cardiff University and UCL, and designed [Dara for use by police first responders](#).

Questions

How does the Dara differ from Dash?

The Dara contains around ten fewer questions than Dash and is focused on helping officers identify coercive and controlling behaviour. It does not contain the additional questions regarding children/dependents that were in the police Dash risk checklist. It also omits a question on sexual victimization, on the basis that frontline police officers are not best placed to get (full) disclosure and may therefore better be asked during a secondary assessment by trained specialists, who will use the Dash. We understand that materials relating to the Dara are accessible for Police forces on College Learn, please see Dara FAQ's [here](#).

Does the Dash Identify Coercive and controlling behaviour?

Yes. The Dash helps practitioners to identifying a pattern of behaviour that is used to control and exploit victims. Around half of the questions on the Dash focus on coercive control through identifying a range of actions and behaviours. [The full practice guidance](#) and Dash training support practitioners in this identification.

Who will be using the Dara?

The College of Policing are recommending that the Dara is adopted by Police forces in England and Wales for primary risk assessment by first responders. They recommend the Dash is continued to be used by specialist officers, for secondary risk assessment.

Will multi-agency partners also move over to Dara in line with the police first responders?

No. The Dara was evaluated in the context of frontline policing only and has not been written for or piloted with non-police agencies.

The Dara is not intended as a replacement for the Dash for specialist or safeguarding officers, or for specialist support services². We therefore do not recommend agencies other than police first responders to adopt it. The College's own research suggests the Dash is better suited to specialist support services who have more comprehensive training and achieve better disclosure from victims. This was reiterated in the September 2022 [report](#) by the College of Policing and National Police Chief's Council which stated **“The domestic abuse risk assessment (DARA) is being trialled in three forces (Kent, Bedfordshire and West Midlands). It is designed only for first responders and works seamlessly with the domestic abuse, stalking and honour-based violence (DASH) tool, which remains in use for secondary assessment by specialist investigators, independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and victim support organisations.”**

² <https://library.college.police.uk/docs/college-of-policing/Domestic-Abuse-Risk-Assessment-2022.pdf>

Will the Dara disrupt partnership working and the 'common language of risk'?

There remains commonality in the key areas of risk assessment between the Dash and the Dara: The College of Policing has stated that the Dara will continue to assess risk based on 'high, medium and standard.' SafeLives is aware of the definitions of risk that accompany the use of the Dara assessment tool and we believe these are consistent with the definition of risk set out with Dash.

The College of Policing do not believe the introduction of the Dara will have negative consequences for partnership working where partners continue to use Dash.

The roll out is in its early phases and we will welcome feedback from services and forces on its implementation as well as tracking Marac data relating to police referrals, ensuring we are sharing any findings with the College.

How will this affect referrals to Marac?

The police will continue to refer to Marac based on professional judgement and we continue to recommend referrals based on escalation. Multi agency professionals will refer to Marac based on their professional judgement, Visible High Risk (the number of ticks) and escalation.

We know you may have further queries and we'd be happy to provide any information to assist you. Please send any additional questions to the SafeLives Practice team by emailing info@safelives.org.uk