

Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment

Development of the ODARA

The *Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment*, or ODARA, was based on information about 589 men known to the OPP for an assault against a female domestic partner or ex-partner. The men were followed through police files for an average of 51 months. During this time, 30% of the men had another official report of domestic violence. Statistical analysis identified the best predictors of repeated domestic violence. Only information available to officers conducting a domestic violence investigation was considered for analysis. Not all characteristics of wife assaulters predicted recidivism, and not all predictors of recidivism were strong enough to add to the predictive accuracy once other predictors were taken into account. Only the characteristics that strongly and independently predicted recidivism are included in the ODARA.

What is the ODARA ?

The ODARA is an actuarial risk assessment that calculates how a man who has assaulted his female partner ranks among similar perpetrators with respect to risk. It also calculates the likelihood that he will assault a female partner again in the future. The 13 ODARA items include domestic and non-domestic criminal history, threats and confinement during the index incident, children in the relationship, substance abuse, and barriers to victim support. Each is scored 0 or 1 and the total score is simply the sum of the items.

The ODARA is known to be valid when predicting violence in marriage or common-law relationships (including any period of cohabitation), or former relationships of this nature. It has been cross-validated in studies using police, probation, and criminal record files. The most direct application of the ODARA, then, is assessing the risk of domestic violence recidivism posed by a man who has come to the attention of police for assault against his wife, common-law wife, ex-wife, or ex-common-law wife, using criminal justice documentation. Another suitable application is advising a woman about the risk her current or former husband or common-law husband faces of coming into contact with the police again for an incident of wife assault.

ODARA score = 0: 5% of such wife assaulters commit another assault against their partner (or, in some cases, a future partner) that comes to the attention of the police, within an average of about 5 years.

ODARA score = 1: 10% of such wife assaulters commit another assault against their partner (or, in some cases, a future partner) that comes to the attention of the police, within an average of about 5 years.

ODARA score = 2: 20% of such wife assaulters commit another assault against their partner (or, in some cases, a future partner) that comes to the attention of the police, within an average of about 5 years.

ODARA score = 3: 30% of such wife assaulters commit another assault against their partner (or, in some cases, a future partner) that comes to the attention of the police, within an average of about 5 years.

ODARA score = 4: 40% of such wife assaulters commit another assault against their partner (or, in some cases, a future partner) that comes to the attention of the police, within an average of about 5 years.

ODARA score = 5-6: 60% of such wife assaulters commit another assault against their partner (or, in some cases, a future partner) that comes to the attention of the police, within an average of about 5 years.

ODARA score = 7-13: 70% of such wife assaulters commit another assault against their partner (or, in some cases, a future partner) that comes to the attention of the police, within an average of about 5 years.

How is Violence Defined?

When we did the research that resulted in the ODARA, we studied cases of physical violence against a female domestic partner. Physical violence was coded using items closely based on the Conflict Tactics Scales physical violence subscale.¹ The criteria used by the researchers to code an act of violence were: (i) held her down; (ii) threw something at her that could hurt; (iii) twisted her arm or hair; (iv) pushed or shoved her; (v) grabbed her (includes pulled and dragged); (vi) slapped her (includes struck her, any hitting other than punching); (vii) other minor violence (e.g., shook her); (viii) punched her with his fist or hit her with something that could hurt; (ix) choked her (includes grabbed her by neck or throat, put her in a headlock); (x) slammed her against wall; (xi) “beat her up”; (xii) burned or scalded her on purpose; (xiii) kicked her; (xiv) used a knife or gun on her (i.e., actual or attempted contact with the victim’s body; includes discharging a gun while pointing it at the victim); (xv) other severe violence (e.g., picked her up and threw her, head-butted her, pushed her down the stairs, bit her). In addition, we included as violence any use of force (by any means) to coerce the victim into having hands-on sexual contact when she did not want to.

ODARA Item Summary

**Do not use without full scoring instructions as published by the
MHCP Research Department, Penetanguishene, ON Canada,
in collaboration with the Ontario Provincial Police**

Score each item 1 or 0

? if missing (*available documentation indicates that an item might be present but the information is unclear or incomplete*)

- _____ 1. Prior domestic assault (against a partner or the children) in police records
- _____ 2. Prior nondomestic assault (against any person other than a partner or the children) in police records
- _____ 3. Prior sentence for a term of 30 days or more
- _____ 4. Failure on prior conditional release; bail, parole, probation, no-contact order
- _____ 5. Threat to harm or kill anyone during index incident
- _____ 6. Confinement of victim during index incident
- _____ 7. Victim fears (is concerned about) future assault
- _____ 8. More than one child altogether
- _____ 9. Victim has a biological child from a previous partner
- _____ 10. Violence against others (to any person other than a partner or the children)
- _____ 11. More than one indicator of substance abuse problem:
alcohol at index, drugs at index, prior drugs or alcohol, increased drugs or alcohol, more angry or violent, prior offence, alcohol problem, drug problem
- _____ 12. Assault on the victim when she was pregnant
- _____ 13. Victim faces at least one barrier to support: children, no phone, no access to transportation, geographical isolation, alcohol/drug consumption or problem
- _____ Raw total (sum of items scored 1)
- _____ **Adjusted Score** (see Table *Adjusted scores for assessments with missing information*)

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