Fact Sheet

Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA)

The ODARA, a procedure to identify the risk of 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. It was the first empirically developed and validated domestic violence risk assessment tool to assess risk of future intimate partner violence as well as the frequency and severity of these assaults

The ODARA is used in policing, courts, corrections, IPV treatment programming, health services, child protection services, and victim support services. It is an empirical actuarial risk assessment tool, and the information it provides about how an individual's risk compares with others enables policy-level decisions about how to assign available resources to individuals according to their level of risk.

There are no professional restrictions and no fees required for scoring the ODARA. Our evaluation shows that scoring accuracy is improved following training, which is available online at http://odara.waypointcentre.ca/. We strongly recommend use of the full scoring criteria, available in the ODARA Scoring Manual published in Chapter 6 of this book:

> Hilton, N. Z. (2021). *Domestic Violence Risk Assessment: Tools for Effective Prediction and Management, 2nd edn*. American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/domestic-violence-risk-assessment-second-edition

History

The ODARA is the result of collaboration between the Ontario Provincial Police and researchers at Waypoint. 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. 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*. Subsequent research has demonstrated the ODARA's predictive accuracy among men with a correctional record, incarcerated men, and women with a police or correctional record. Published meta-analyses indicate that the ODARA performs as well as or better than other published IPV risk assessment tools

Development

The ODARA was created from research on nearly 600 cases from OPP and municipal police forces involving men who assaulted a female domestic partner. Using multiple regression techniques, the researchers found that 13 variables were the most highly predictive of future violence against a domestic partner. The risk of assault can be identified with a large effect size using these 13 items, reducing the need for a comprehensive assessment in order to evaluate risk of re-offence in a first-response situation. The 13 items are each scored "1" if present and "0" if not, and cover the accused individual's history of violence and antisocial behaviour (pre-index domestic assault, pre-index nondomestic assault, pre-index correctional sentence, pre-index failure on conditional release, violence against nondomestic victims, assault on the victim during pregnancy, substance abuse), details of the most recent assault (physical confinement, threats of harm, victim-reported concern about future 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 individuals in terms of their 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 an 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. The ODARA interpretation table applies to men who use domestic violence; further research is needed to establish a similar interpretation table for women (see FAQ #2 below).

Validation Studies

The ODARA's predictive accuracy has now been demonstrated in validations by the original researchers and by other researchers. This work includes samples in Canada, the USA, Europe, and elsewhere. Studies have included cases of dating violence and women who use domestic violence. For updated information, see our annotated bibliography, click here to view.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can the ODARA be used for cases of dating violence?

Yes. Some of the validation studies have scored the ODARA using dating violence as the index assault and/or in the definition of reoffending. The literature on violence risks indicates that the major factors are criminal history and antisocial behaviour, and there is no evidence that risk is lower among men who are not currently in a dating relationship. For these reasons, it is acceptable to use the ODARA in cases of dating violence. The item scoring criteria remain unchanged, however, as there is no research yet that uses dating violence in the definition of prior domestic assaults.

2. Has the ODARA been validated for female offenders?

Yes. The ODARA predicted intimate partner violence recidivism by women in some studies, although these studies have been small and not all studies have found positive results. Pending more extensive research, the ODARA can be used to identify women most at risk of reoffending. However, women reoffend at a lower rate than men do. Further research is required to develop an actuarial table to identify absolute risk associated with ODARA scores among women.

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

Yes. Higher ODARA scores relate to more severe future assaults, and 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 our without police involvement, could be different from the stated recidivism rate. On the other hand, higher ODARA scores indicate that an individual is more likely than others men to commit repeated future assaults. This "rank order" is expected to be relatively stable regardless of whether there are assaults that the police don't find about.

5. 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.

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ODARA Training

ODARA 101: The Electronic Training Program: An interactive 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.

Click here for more information: https://odara.waypointcentre.ca/

Click here to register your organization: http://odara.waypointcentre.ca/Home/LicenseRequest

There is no professional restriction on the use of the ODARA, but these studies that evaluated ODARA training programs showed that training can improve scoring accuracy.

Hilton, N. Z., Harris, G. T., Rice, M. E., Eke, A. W., & Lowe-Wetmore, T. (2007). Training front-line users in the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA), a tool for police domestic investigations. *Canadian Journal of Police and Security Services, 5*, 95-98.

Hilton, N. Z., & Ham, E. (2015). Cost-effectiveness of electronic training in domestic violence risk assessment: ODARA 101. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence. 30*, 1065-1073. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0886260514539762

Ham, E., Hilton, N. Z., Giesbrecht, C. J., & Macdonald, S. (2019) ODARA 101: Look What's New! Crime Scene, Volume 26, Issue 1 (6-7). http://www.waypointcentre.ca/UserFiles/Servers/Server_9960/File/Research/ODARA_101__Evaluation_2019.pdf

The information contained in ODARA 101 is most fully described in the book:

Hilton, N. Z. (2021). *Domestic Violence Risk Assessment: Tools for Effective Prediction and Management, 2nd edn.* American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/domestic-violence-risk-assessment-second-edition

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.

Contact us: ODARA@waypointcentre.ca