Factsheet 3: Structured Professional Judgement

This fact sheet has been adapted using the Victorian Government's *MARAM Foundation Knowledge Guide*.

Structured professional judgement (SPJ) is a practice model that enables workers to assess information and determine the level or seriousness of risk. It requires workers to bring their professional knowledge, skills and experience to the risk assessment process.

Structured professional judgement involves the consideration and interpretation of three different sources of information:

- evidence-based risk factors
- the victim-survivor's own assessment of their level of risk
- the practitioner's professional judgement.

Risk is dynamic

Risk assessment is a point-in-time assessment of the level of risk. Risk is dynamic and can change over time, which means that risk should be regularly reviewed, and any changes should inform future assessment.

Assessment of the level or seriousness of risk, as well as appropriate risk management strategies must be informed by adopting an intersectional approach.

Information sharing is essential

Workers should seek relevant information from other organisations and services that will help them assess risk, using the model of structured professional judgement.

Information to inform SPJ can, and should, be gathered from a variety of sources, including:

- engaging with and assessing the victim-survivor directly
- requesting, sharing or receiving information from other organisations about the identified risk factors or other information relevant to DFV risk about a victim-survivor or person using violence.

Remember

In the ACT, there is a dedicated law that authorises information sharing to help identify, assess and manage DFV risk. See www.act.gov.com.au/dfv-info-sharing for more information.

Victim-survivor centred risk assessment

Best-practice approaches to risk assessment are victim-survivor centred and enables them to share their experiences. This includes recognising and believing victim-survivors accounts of:

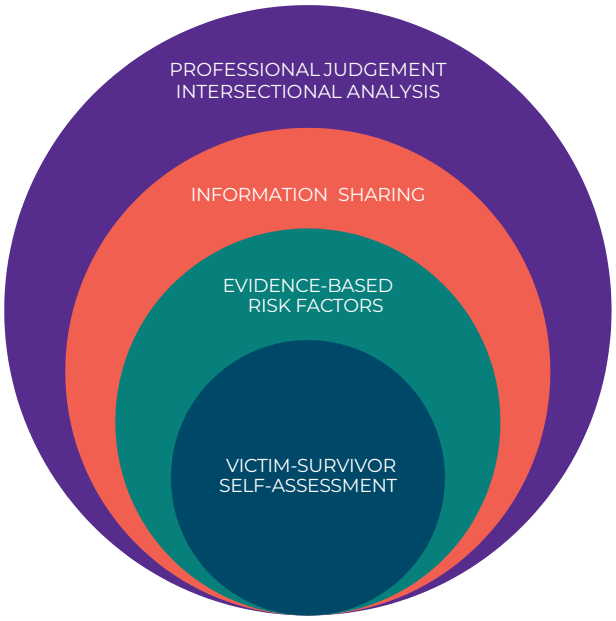
- their experience of violence and abuse
- the nature and circumstances of the relationship
- the impact of violence on any children in the family, including understanding risk experienced by children as victim-survivors in their own right, which may be informed by undertaking direct risk assessment with any children and young people involved
- the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the person using violence.

The important of the victim-survivor perspective

Evidence shows that adult victim-survivors are good predictors of their own level of safety and risk. A person-centred or victim-centred approach to risk assessment and management recognises the victim-survivor as an expert in their own safety, with intimate knowledge of their lived experience of violence and abuse. Listening to and believing the victim-survivor supports a more accurate understanding of risk and informs effective safety planning and intervention

Each element of the assessment should be considered collectively. Professional judgement is used to analyse and interpret the information gathered to determine the level of risk.

Figure 1. Model of Structured Professional Judgement



References

Victorian Government. (2021). *MARAM foundation knowledge guide: guidance for professionals working with child or adult victim-survivors, and adults using family violence*.