



Development of the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP)

Part of Improvement Plan

In 2001, the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) instituted a plan to introduce advanced practices in domestic violence response and homicide reduction to the Maryland domestic violence community and allied partners, particularly law enforcement. After addressing two areas—strangulation and stalking—MNADV proceeded simultaneously on the planned subjects of domestic violence fatality review and lethality assessment to directly address the problem of intimate partner homicide with retrospective and proactive approaches.

Two-Year Development by a Committee

The Lethality Assessment Program-Maryland Model (LAP) was developed during a two-year period from October 2003 to September 2005. MNADV assembled a multi-disciplinary Lethality Assessment Committee, made of 17 people, eventually 23, from across the state. Three committee members were researchers, notably among them Dr. Jacquelyn C. Campbell (*see the committee membership*).

Goals

- The goals of the two-year project were (1) to develop, by applying the research of Dr. Campbell, a user-friendly field instrument to identify those victims of domestic violence in the greatest danger of being killed, and (2) to create an accompanying proactive protocol to directly connect those victims to services. The instrument and protocol were intended to be used by first responders at the scene of a police call for service, or by other field practitioners who may come into contact with a victim of domestic violence during the course of their workday. The committee decided focus its application on law enforcement as the first user.
- The ultimate goal of the program that the committee created was to reduce intimate partner homicides.
- The Committee believed firmly that the effectiveness of the LAP hinged largely on the instrument being *evidence-based*, to instill confidence and reliability among practitioners in the product.

Development during the First Year

During development the full committee met nine times, there were several subcommittee meetings, and numerous emails and phone communications. The evidence-based instrument, named the

“Lethality Screen,” at the suggestion of several committee members who were medical professionals, was developed by a subcommittee of 10 practitioners and researchers. The corresponding protocol was a creation of the full committee.

Field Test—Goals

After 10 months of developing the instrument and protocol, the committee wanted to them in various types of jurisdictions and with enough scope to determine whether it was user-friendly and manageable for the law enforcement and domestic violence service programs (DVSPs).

Field Test—Parameters and Outcomes

The following three jurisdictions were finally selected: Anne Arundel County with a county police department that served about 450,000 people; Harford County with a sheriff's office that served about 208,000 people; and Frederick City with a municipal police department that served about 60,000 people. The field test lasted 31 days between July 29 and August 28, 2004. MNADV had trained the three agencies and their partner DVSPs. Eighty-four percent of officers surveyed said the LAP was either "very easy" (45%) or "fairly easy" (39%); 95% of the advocates surveyed concluded the same.

Second Year of Development

The committee spent the following year:

- Conducting written surveys of 72 officers and 26 advocates who had participated in the LAP pilot, and facilitating 29 personal interviews with officers, advocates, and field-test coordinators;
- Producing a final report on the field test (*see the final report*);
- Making slight modifications to the Lethality Screen based on practitioner comments;
- Assembling a draft packet of the documents the committee had developed for the LAP, and sending the packet out to every law enforcement agency and DVSP in the state (100+ agencies and 20 DVSPs) for comment.
- Supplementing the above with four regional workshops for law enforcement and DVSPs so that committee members could explain in-person to potential participants what the program entailed; the results of the field test; and MNADV's plans for implementation; and
- Finalizing the packet of training and implementation materials, including the in-service training video.

Start of LAP Implementation

On October 1, 2005, one law enforcement agency, Kent County Sheriff's Office, and their partner DVSP, Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence, became the first agencies to implement LAP.

Today, nearly all Maryland's law enforcement agencies and DVSPs practice the LAP, including all

Maryland State Police barracks. As one of our sheriffs said several years after initial implementation: "It's what we do!"

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