

APPENDIX 6: RECOGNISING SUICIDE RISK IN THE CONTEXT OF ADULT PEOPLE USING VIOLENCE

The table below describes risk factors that are ‘in common’ to both family violence and suicide risk for adults who use family violence.

It also emphasises the importance of understanding suicide risk in the context of family violence and coercive control.

Refer to the MARAM Risk Factors in [Section 9](#) of the Foundation Knowledge Guide and the victim survivor–focused Practice Guide [Appendices 2 and 8](#).

Professionals with [Responsibilities 7 and 8](#) should also refer to [Appendix 12 Comprehensive assessment interview guide](#) for additional guidance related to homicide–suicide risk.

Serious family violence risk factors — those that may indicate an increased risk of the victim being killed or almost killed — are highlighted with **bold/shading**. ‘In common’ **suicide risk factors** are described under the practice guidance with the correlating family violence risk factors.

Family violence risk factor

Practice guidance on ‘in common’ suicide and family violence risk factors

The following risk factors refer to the **circumstances** relevant to the victim survivor

Physical assault while pregnant/ following new birth

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Sexual assault of victim survivor

Suicide risk factor:

In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk. However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk requiring immediate response**.

Family violence risk factor

Planning to leave or recent separation

Practice guidance on 'in common' suicide and family violence risk factors

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Escalation — increase in severity and/or frequency of violence

Imminence

Suicide risk factor:

Recent separation

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

People experiencing 'relationship breakdown', family conflict or conflict with their partner are at higher risk of death by suicide.

'Disruption of family by separation and divorce', 'problems in relationship with spouse or partner', 'problems related to primary support group', 'other stressful life events affecting family and household', and 'problems in relationship with parents and in-laws' are indicated in the most frequently occurring psychosocial risk factors in coroner-certified suicide deaths in Australia.¹

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 'problems in relationship with spouse or partner' is the number one psychosocial risk factor identified in coroner-certified suicide deaths in 2017.²

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

When people who use violence feel they are losing control of the victim survivor, or their relationship with them, they may increase the frequency and severity of their abusive behaviours in an attempt to regain control. They may also become distressed, despondent, desperate or anxious about the prospect of separation or current situation.

You may hear narratives from the person using violence that link separation to their life 'being over', or feelings of 'giving up'. Narratives that appear to catastrophise outcomes, including that they will never have contact with their children again, or express feelings of shame or hopelessness, are key indicators of concern.

1 Government of Australia 2019, *Psychosocial risk factors as they relate to coroner-referred deaths in Australia, 2017*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

2 Ibid.; World Health Organization 2014, *Preventing suicide: a global imperative*, WHO, Geneva.

Family violence risk factor

Escalation — increase in severity and/or frequency of violence

Practice guidance on 'in common' suicide and family violence risk factors

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Imminence
Physical harm

Controlling behaviours

Emotional abuse

Threats

Stalking of victim

Common suicide risk factors:

Imminence

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

If the behaviour of the person using violence increases in severity and/or frequency, they may be more likely to have contact with authorities.

Their escalated use of violence may also relate to increased involvement with systems or because they feel they have lost control over their life situation and/or victim survivors.

Suicide risk is likely higher at the time of, or directly after, situational stressors occur, and/or if a change within the person's life involves a loss of control or power.

Situations include: removal from the home, when paperwork is served (following a family violence notification – either a 'caution' or a family violence intervention order), when a court report is handed down, leading up to court appearance, family court and parenting orders (that result in loss of/reduced access to children).

People in contact with the legal system, including with police, courts and corrections, are at higher suicide risk. This risk has been found to increase with 'recency' and 'frequency' of contact.³

'Problems related to other legal circumstances' is a frequently occurring psychosocial risk factor in coroner-certified suicide deaths in Australia in 2017 – particularly for males aged 25 to 64 years.⁴

When there are Family Court matters in the context of family violence, the perpetrator may feel disempowered and may experience a loss of control, which can increase risk.

Times when the Family Court denies the person using violence access to their children present particularly serious risk to the adult and child victim survivors. Consider if there are other decision points pending such as Child Protection proceedings.

3 Webb RT, Qin P, Stevens H, Mortensen PB, Appleby L and Shaw J 2011, National study of suicide in all people with a criminal justice history. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 68, no. 6, pp. 591-599. doi:10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2011.7

4 Government of Australia 2019, *Psychosocial risk factors as they relate to coroner-referred deaths in Australia*, 2017. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

A person's use of violence and pattern of behaviour occurring more often or becoming worse is associated with increased risk of serious injury or death. This includes when a victim survivor reports that physical violence has increased in severity or frequency.

An increase in severity may not be just about physical violence. The person using violence may increasingly make threats to victim survivors, damage property, monitor or stalk (including through technology), or use other family violence behaviours more regularly or to more serious extents than in the past.

An example may include if the person using violence has previously made threats to kill and has recently escalated to threats involving specific actions of how they will kill the victim survivor.

The person using violence may describe feeling out of control or overwhelmed about their life, the involvement of authorities, or other situational stressors. Escalation of family violence and increased contact with policing and legal systems should be considered alongside any presentation of threats to suicide or self-harm to identify both suicide and homicide–suicide risk.

If a perpetrator feels like a court case is not going to go their way, their level of violence can escalate.

Some perpetrators use the court process as a means of abuse. This can include purposefully prolonging proceedings, attacking the victim survivor's character and negatively impacting on their circumstances (whether it be housing, finances, contact with children etc.) where possible. They will attempt to manipulate children to side with them, feel sorry for them and blame the other parent/carer.

Imminence

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Planning to leave or recent separation

Escalation — increase in severity and/or frequency of violence

History of violent behaviour (not family violence)

History of family violence

Common suicide risk factors:

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Refer to guidance on **Escalation – increase in severity and/or frequency of violence.**

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

Where you have identified imminence in the context of family violence risk assessment, you should consider both the presence and likelihood of suicide and homicide–suicide risk.

You may hear statements from the person using violence that indicate an imminence of self-harm or suicide, empathy with others who have suicided or homicide-suicided, greater specificity in terms of the nature of threats to victim survivors and self, increasing hostile rumination about the victim survivor, or intense hopelessness about their situation.

For children and young people, take into account factors such as parenting arrangements and hand over when considering imminence.

Family violence risk factor

Practice guidance on 'in common' suicide and family violence risk factors

Financial abuse/
difficulties

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Unemployed / disengaged from education

Common suicide risk factor:

Financial difficulties

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

People experiencing unemployment and financial difficulties are at higher risk of death by suicide. 'Unemployment', 'problems related to economic circumstances', 'threatened or actual job loss', 'other physical and mental strain related to work' and 'gambling and betting' are indicated in the commonly occurring psychosocial risk factors in coroner-certified suicide deaths in Australia.⁵

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

Asking questions about income and employment may be standard within your organisation's intake and assessment processes.

You should explore financial difficulties to identify issues related to gambling, debts, recent changes to income (including through loss of employment), and other ways the person feels financial pressure.

Financial pressure may include responsibilities for financial support to extended families or others in their life.

You should assess for the impact of financial difficulties and abuse on victim survivors and observe and identify intensity of despondency, stress, or powerlessness associated with gambling, financial pressures and/or debt.

The following risk factors refer to the behaviour and/or circumstances of a person using violence against adult **or** child victim survivors

Controlling
behaviours

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Obsession/jealous behaviour toward victim survivor (as a driver of controlling behaviour)

Emotional abuse

Stalking of victim

Escalation — increase in severity and/or frequency of violence (refer to associated risk factors)

Imminence

Has ever threatened or attempted self-harm or suicide

Common suicide risk factor:

In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**. This may include homicide-suicide risk.

5 Government of Australia 2019, *Psychosocial risk factors as they relate to coroner-referred deaths in Australia*, 2017, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

Access to weapons

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Use of weapon in the most recent event

Controlling behaviours

Emotional abuse

Threats to kill

Common suicide risk factor:

Access to weapons

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Access to weapons is associated with increased risk of suicide.

Restricting access to the means of suicide is one of the most effective suicide prevention strategies.

Significant declines in 'general suicide rates have been reported after restricting access to firearms, toxic domestic gas, pesticides, barbiturates, erecting safety barriers and introducing "safe rooms" (which eliminate suspension points for hanging) in prisons and hospitals'.⁶

People living in rural communities may have increased access to means/ weapons.

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

You may identify that the person using violence has access to weapons through direct disclosure or orders requiring the removal or surrender of firearms/ weapons.

Access to weapons may be related to occupation (for example farming or law enforcement), involvement in sports or recreational activities (for example shooting/pistol club), or involvement in criminal activities.

Where the person has previously made attempts to suicide, you may explore the presence of any weapons in the home, or ideation and/or plans involving use of weapons.

⁶ Black Dog Institute 2016, *An evidence-based systems approach to suicide prevention: guidance on planning, commissioning and monitoring*.

Family violence risk factor

Practice guidance on 'in common' suicide and family violence risk factors

Use of weapon in the most recent event

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Access to weapons

Emotional abuse
Property damage

Threats to kill

Physical harm

Common suicide risk factor:

Access to weapons

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

In isolation, the use of a weapon in the most recent event is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**.

This may include homicide–suicide risk.

Has ever harmed or threatened to harm victim survivor or family members

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Emotional abuse
Imminence

Has ever threatened or attempted self-harm or suicide

Common suicide risk factor:

Has ever threatened or tried to self-harm or suicide

In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**. This may include homicide–suicide risk.

Refer to 'imminence' and 'escalation' related to change or escalation in recency or frequency of violence.

Has ever tried to strangle or choke the victim

In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**. This may include homicide–suicide risk.

Has ever threatened to kill victim survivor

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Emotional abuse

Common suicide risk factor:

Has ever threatened or tried to self-harm or die by suicide

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

People using violence often use threats to kill in combination with threats to self-harm or suicide.

Refer to 'Has ever threatened or attempted self-harm or suicide' for more information.

Has ever harmed or threatened to harm or kill pets or other animals

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Controlling behaviours

Emotional abuse

In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**. This may include homicide–suicide risk.

Has ever threatened or attempted self-harm or suicide⁷

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Has ever threatened or tried to self-harm or commit suicide

Controlling behaviours

Emotional abuse

Mental illness/depression

Common suicide risk factors:

Has ever threatened or tried to self-harm or suicide

Mental illness/depression

Chronic suicidality

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Personal history of self-harm is the most frequently occurring psychosocial risk factor in coroner-certified suicide deaths in Australia for 2017.⁸

Within the family violence context, 'threats of self-harm or suicide' are considered to be a risk factor for homicide-suicide and an extreme extension of controlling behaviours by a person using violence.

Suicide prevention practice considers 'threats of self-harm or suicide' as a key warning sign to be taken seriously.

A significant number of men who commit suicide each year have a history of using family violence.

Risk is heightened for people who have a plan to take their life, who have had a previous suicide attempt and where suicidal ideation is present.

Suicidal ideation is not uncommon, and only some people who have thoughts of suicide will attempt to take their lives. However, it is important to treat all suicidality seriously.

Leading practitioners in suicide prevention have determined that people with chronic repetitive suicidality are a distinctly different cohort to those with episodic suicidal behaviour – that is, suicidal behaviour that manifests over a shorter time.⁹

A history of chronic, repetitive suicidal behaviour is considered a significant risk factor for suicide, with one study placing young men who had a history of previous attempts at 30 times the risk of suicide.¹⁰ Furthermore, suicidality including suicidal ideation and attempts are a core feature of borderline personality disorder, with individuals diagnosed indicated as having a high risk of suicide.¹¹

Threatening to self-harm or suicide as a means of controlling a victim survivor is not always linked to the presence of mental illness. However, in some instances they may be co-occurring.

7 Note practice advice on language has changed since MARAM Framework was published in 2018, and the term 'commit' suicide is no longer used.

8 Government of Australia 2019, *Psychosocial risk factors as they relate to coroner-referred deaths in Australia, 2017*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

9 Paris J 2007, *Half in love with death: Managing the chronically suicidal patient*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.

10 May AM, Klonsky ED and Klein DN 2012, 'Predicting future suicide attempts among depressed suicide ideators: a 10-year longitudinal study', *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, vol. 46, no. 7, pp. 946-952, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2012.04.009>; Gould MS, Greenberg TED, Velting DM and Shaffer D 2003, 'Youth suicide risk and preventive interventions: a review of the past 10 years', *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 386-405. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1097/01.CHI.0000046821.95464.CF>

11 Broadbear JH, Dwyer J, Bugeja L and Rao S 2020, 'Coroners' investigations of suicide in Australia: the hidden toll of borderline personality disorder', *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, vol. 129, pp. 241-249. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2020.07.007>

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

Understanding the presence, context and characteristics of this risk factor provides insight into the state of mind of the person using violence.

The use of threats or attempts to suicide or self-harm to control another person is the key aspect of this risk factor, not the genuine threat or attempt in isolation.

All threats should be taken seriously, both in terms of genuine intent to suicide or self-harm, as well as a means to control the victim survivor.

Where there is escalation in threats or attempts, or greater specificity of threats, consider steps for immediate intervention and risk management.

The combination of threats to suicide or self-harm with other controlling behaviours and threats to kill or harm adults, children or pets indicates serious risk.

At times it may be challenging to differentiate between suicidal ideation linked to desperation/distress as opposed to acts of control.

In your engagement, you may hear narratives of hopelessness and shame, statements about depression or anxiety, and observe changes in the person using violence's mood or presentation.

You may also observe narratives placing blame on victim survivor/s for the mental health or current situation of the person using violence (refer to situational stressors above). The person may make threats to harm themselves to punish victim survivor/s.

Any risk of suicide and threat to self-harm must be taken seriously and you must respond appropriately.

Refer to guidance on safety planning in [Appendix 9 Safety planning conversation model](#) and [Responsibilities 5 and 6](#) for information about secondary consultation, referral and information sharing.

Stalking of victim survivor

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Controlling behaviours

Obsession/jealous behaviours towards victim

Isolation

Emotional abuse

Threats to kill

Common suicide risk factor:

In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**.

Sexual assault of victim survivor

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

Emotional abuse

Physical harm

Physical assault while pregnant/following new birth

Controlling behaviours

Obsession/jealous behaviours towards victim

Has ever tried to strangle or choke victim

Stalking of victim

In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**.

Family violence risk factor

Practice guidance on 'in common' suicide and family violence risk factors

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|--|--|
| Previous or current breach of court orders/intervention orders | <p>Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Controlling behaviours (also refer to Escalation) Stalking of victim Threats Emotional abuse <p>Common suicide risk factor:</p> <p>In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk. However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a serious risk and/or requiring immediate response. This may include homicide-suicide risk.</p> <p>Contravention is highly linked to repeat offending, including frequent use or escalation of family violence. This is a strong indicator of future violence.</p> <p>In addition, breaches of other orders, particularly relating to family law matters involving children, is a strong indicator of controlling behaviours and increased risk.</p> <p>Contravention of an orders is also linked to family violence homicide risk.</p> |
| History of family violence | <p>History of family violence of any person is a suicide risk factor.</p> |
| History of violent behaviour (not family violence) | <p>In isolation, history of violent behaviour (not family violence) is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk.</p> <p>However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a serious risk and/or requiring immediate response.</p> |
| Obsession/jealous behaviour toward victim survivor | <p>In isolation, this is not a known common risk factor for suicide or self-harm risk. However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors it may indicate a serious risk and/or requiring immediate response.</p> <p>Refer to guidance on Controlling behaviours.</p> |
| Unemployed/disengaged from education | <p>Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial abuse / difficulties <p>Common suicide risk factor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial difficulties <p>Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?</p> <p>Refer to guidance on Financial abuse/difficulties, unemployment and job insecurity has been found to be associated with an increased risk of suicidal ideation and behaviour.¹²</p> <p>Disengagement from education also increases an individual's suicide risk.</p> <p>What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?</p> <p>You can discuss changes to employment or education status, how the person views issues with employment or education, and the impact of unemployment, underemployment and disengagement from education on victim survivors and other family members.</p> <p>If the person is despondent or stressed about unemployment, or reports a sense of powerlessness over their situation, you should screen for both suicide risk and increasing control over victim survivors.</p> <p>The person may blame the victim survivor for their situation and use this as justification for retaliation and intensified coercive controlling behaviours.</p> <p>Aboriginal people and people from diverse communities may experience discrimination and barriers to employment opportunities, which may result in lower financial security.</p> <p>This is not in itself an indicator of increased risk for these communities, as systemic issues of access to employment increase the prevalence of unemployment for some communities as a whole.</p> |

¹² Milner A, Witt K, LaMontagne AD and Niedhammer I 2018, 'Psychosocial job stressors and suicidality: a meta-analysis and systematic review', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol. 75, no. 4, pp. 245-253. doi:10.1136/oemed-2017-104531

Drug and/or alcohol misuse/abuse (by perpetrator)

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when identifying this risk factor include:

- Mental illness/depression
- Financial abuse/difficulties

Common suicide risk factor:

- Drug and/or alcohol misuse (specify substances)

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Problematic substance use has a strong correlation with suicide risk, particularly as those who use substances can be characterised as having mood disorders, stressful life events, interpersonal problems, poor social support, lonely lives and feelings of hopelessness.¹³

In particular, **problematic alcohol use** may lead to suicidality through disinhibition, impulsiveness and impaired judgement – and it may also be used as a means to ease the distress associated with the act of suicide.¹⁴

Acute alcohol intoxication should be viewed as an important risk factor directly affecting suicidal behaviour.

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

Information about the person using violence's use of alcohol and other drugs provides insight into their current state of mind and level of stability.

You should explore the person's use of alcohol and/or drugs, including the contexts in which they use and any increases or changes to patterns of use.

Where increased alcohol and drug use is present, you should also explore risk taking behaviours, concerns about changing mood or impulsivity to identify increased suicide risk.

You should be aware of the impact of the person's use of alcohol and/or drugs on victim survivors, including whether they 'encourage' or force the victim survivor to use, force victim survivors to watch any risk taking, self-harm or attempts to suicide, or use more severe or physically harmful forms of family violence at times of intoxication.

If you observe narratives that externalise responsibility for the person's use of family violence on alcohol or drug use, do not engage in discussions that minimise their behaviours or justify their actions based on their use of alcohol or drugs.

Refer to guidance in **Responsibility 3** for information on maintaining a balanced approach and non-collusive practice.

13 Pompili M, Serafini G, Innamorati M, Biondi M, Siracusano A, Di Giannantonio M ... Möller-Leimkühler AM 2012, 'Substance abuse and suicide risk among adolescents', *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, vol. 262, no. 6, pp. 469-485. doi:10.1007/s00406-012-0292-0

14 mpili M, Serafini G, Innamorati M, Dominici G, Ferracuti S, Kotzalidis GD ... Lester D 2010, 'Suicidal behavior and alcohol abuse', *International journal of environmental research and public health*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 1392-1431. doi:10.3390/ijerph7041392

Mental illness /
depression

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when asking identifying this risk factor include:

Obsession / jealous behaviour towards victim survivor

Drug and/or alcohol misuse/abuse by perpetrator

Common suicide risk factors:

Mental illness / depression

Chronic suicidality

Hopelessness

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Research indicates that mental illnesses such as depression, psychosis and substance use are associated with an increased risk of suicide.¹⁵

Schizophrenia is associated with 13 times higher risk of suicide than the general population, depression 20 times higher, and borderline personality disorder (BPD) 40 times higher.¹⁶ A history of chronic suicidal ideation and intentional self-harm are core features of a BPD diagnosis.¹⁷

Mental health issues are more common in some communities (for example, LGBTIQ people) than in the general population. Mental health linked to threats or attempts to self-harm and suicide may be more prevalent due to systemic barriers or discrimination experienced by some communities.

Suicide is also more common in LGBTIQ communities. However, there is no current evidence examining an association between suicide threats/attempts and controlling family violence behaviours of people who use family violence in these communities.

For people who use family violence, homicide–suicide is associated with mental illness, particularly depression.

Depression, despair and hopelessness among people who use violence are key indicators of escalated risk and associated with homicide–suicide in the context of family violence.¹⁸

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- 15 Brådvik L 2018, 'Suicide risk and mental disorders', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 15, no. 9, 2028, doi:10.3390/ijerph15092028
- 16 Chesney E, Goodwin GM and Fazel S 2014, 'Risks of all-cause and suicide mortality in mental disorders: a meta-review'. *World Psychiatry*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 153-160, doi:10.1002/wps.20128
- 17 Broadbear JH, Dwyer J, Bugeja L and Rao S 2020, 'Coroners' investigations of suicide in Australia: the hidden toll of borderline personality disorder', *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, vol. 129, pp. 241-249, doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2020.07.007
- 18 Cheng P and Jaffe P 2019, 'Examining depression among perpetrators of intimate partner homicide', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519867151

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

When exploring the person using violence's mental health and wellbeing, including contact with services, it is critical to understand their current mental health status. A person using violence may have an ongoing or undiagnosed mental illness.

Family violence risk is increased by **the presence of major mental illness combined with the co-occurrence of other behaviours and/or escalation**. For example, problematic use of alcohol or other drugs, changed or escalating behaviours, or delusions/psychosis, including those that are focused on a particular adult or child.

A history of mental illness spanning a range of diagnoses may be observed as contributing to suicide risk. Chronic suicidal behaviour and/or ideation and intentional self-harm are common presentations.

When considering suicide risk, you should identify and understand the person using violence's experiences of depression any narratives about hopelessness (refer to additional risk factors below).

When people who use violence present to acute mental health services (either voluntarily or accompanied by police), they are generally observed to be in significant crisis and at heightened risk.

Isolation

Social isolation by the person using violence of the victim survivor is not a suicide risk factor for the person using violence.

Physical harm

In isolation, these are not known common risk factors for suicide or self-harm risk. However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**.

Emotional abuse

Property damage

The following risk factors refer to the behaviour of a person using violence against children victim survivors

Exposure to family violence

In isolation, these are not known common risk factors for **adult**¹⁹ suicide or self-harm risk.

Sexualised behaviours towards a child by the perpetrator

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**.

Child intervention in violence

¹⁹ Suicide risk for adolescents using family violence and child victim survivors is addressed separately.

Family violence risk factor

Practice guidance on 'in common' suicide and family violence risk factors

Behaviour indicating non-return of child

Other family violence risk factors to keep in mind when ask identifying this risk factor include:

Risk of harm to child/young person

Planning to leave or recent separation

Escalation — increase in severity and/or frequency of violence

Common suicide risk factor:

Recent separation

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Refer to guidance on 'planning to leave or recent separation', outlined above. Suicide risk related to this risk factor should be considered in the context of homicide–suicide risk.

There is no conclusive research on child homicide in the context of family violence.

However, the research indicates that there may be some specific warning signs for the risks of retaliatory filicide, including:²⁰

... a history of intimate partner violence

... controlling behaviour towards family members

... extreme anger towards the other parent in relation to separation

... threats or indication of an intention to harm the children to punish an ex-partner

... threats to suicide or attempts to suicide.

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

This factor also relates to parenting arrangements after separation and should also be considered in relation to pending/recent separation with escalation related to court matters.

Exploring how the person using violence engages with the process of shared parenting arrangements with co-parent/s may provide some insight into narratives indicating entitlement to children and hostility towards the other parent/s, particularly where they believe their 'right' to contact with their children has been removed.

This includes risk to both the child/ren or young person and adult/carer victim survivors.

The person using violence can use arrangements to control the parent/carer victim survivor, particularly as unsupervised arrangements can open opportunities for the person using violence to undermine the other parent/carer's relationship with the child/ren.

The intensity of hostility towards the other parent/s, alongside other family violence and suicide risk factors, may indicate risk of homicide–suicide, in particular retaliatory filicide.

If you identify children to be at serious risk and/or requiring immediate response, you must act immediately, including calling police on Triple Zero (000).

Undermining the child/parent relationship

In isolation, these are not known common risk factors for **adult** suicide or self-harm risk. However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**.

Professional and statutory intervention

²⁰ Kirkwood D 2012, 'Just say goodbye' *Parents who kill their children in the context of separation*. Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, discussion paper (no. 8).

The following risk factors refer to the circumstances relevant to children

History of professional involvement and/or statutory intervention

In isolation, these are not known common risk factors for adult suicide or self-harm risk.

However, in combination with suicide or self-harm risk factors, it may indicate a **serious risk and/or requiring immediate response**.

Change in behaviour not explained by other causes

Child is a victim of other forms of harm

Additional suicide-only risk factors for adult perpetrators

Practice guidance on correlation of suicide and family violence risk²¹

Exposure to someone who has died – particularly by suicide

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

'Death of a family member' and 'family history of suicide' are indicated in frequently occurring psychosocial risk factor in coroner-certified suicide deaths in Australia in 2017.²²

Being bereaved by the suicide of a close family member or peer is a risk factor for both suicidal distress (ideation and behaviour) and suicide.

History of childhood trauma – sexual, emotional, physical abuse/family violence or neglect

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

'While highlighted as a risk factor for adolescents, a history of interpersonal violence in childhood is also a significant risk factor for suicidality in adults, both for men and women'.²³

This includes a history of family violence and lack of early modelling of positive patterns of behaviour and dealing with stress.

This is a co-occurring factor as individuals who engage in intimate partner violence are known to have significant rates of exposure to historical trauma, particularly to violence in childhood.²⁴

21 You may identify these suicide risk factors when exploring the persons needs and circumstances.

22 Government of Australia 2019, *Psychosocial risk factors as they relate to coroner-referred deaths in Australia, 2017*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

23 MacIsaac MB, Bugeja L, Weiland T, Dwyer J, Selvakumar K and Jelinek GA 2018, 'Prevalence and characteristics of interpersonal violence in people dying from suicide in Victoria, Australia', *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 36-44, doi:10.1177/1010539517743615; MacIsaac MB, Bugeja LC and Jelinek GA 2017, 'The association between exposure to interpersonal violence and suicide among women: a systematic review', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp.61-69, doi:10.1111/1753-6405.12594; Rajalin M, Hirvikoski T and Jokinen J 2013, 'Family history of suicide and exposure to interpersonal violence in childhood predict suicide in male suicide attempters', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 148, no. 1, pp. 92-97, doi:10.1016/j.jad.2012.11.055

24 Taft CT, Murphy CM and Creech SK 2016, *Trauma-informed treatment and prevention of intimate partner violence*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Shame

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Shame has been found to be associated with self-harm.²⁵

While shame can be a powerful motivator for change, an intense sense of shame can create heightened suicide risk.

Risk may increase when there is a change in or loss of recognition of an individual's previous status in the community, when the person perceives a change in the community's judgement of them, and/or where there is a loss of social standing or 'face', that is, when their use of family violence or offending becomes public.

This can manifest itself as family and friends distancing themselves and the person becoming isolated.

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

Shame in the context of someone's use of violence can be a useful motivator for change.

However, where shame becomes internalised and toxic, it is known to impair decisions for help-seeking.

When combined with hopelessness, it may be a significant indicator for suicide and homicide-suicide risk. **Section 12.1.14** in Foundation Knowledge Guide provides further information on shame and externalised violence.

You may observe:

- ... reduced self-esteem and worth, depression
- ... increased use of aggression and anger towards victim survivors
- ... narratives of blame directed towards victim survivors for 'ruining their life', 'taking their children', bringing shame on them, their family or community
- ... narratives indicating community, cultural, faith and identity-specific examples of expectations or shame, including narratives of how separation has impacted the person using violence's standing or reputation.

Homelessness

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Suicide is recognised as a substantial public health issue in homeless populations, with suicidal ideation and attempts significantly higher in this group than in the general population.²⁶

25 Sheehy K, Noureen A, Khaliq A, Dhingra K, Husain N, Pontin EE ... Taylor PJ 2019, 'An examination of the relationship between shame, guilt and self-harm: a systematic review and meta-analysis', *Clinical Psychology Review*, vol. 73, 101779, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2019.101779>

26 Ayano G, Tsegay L, Abraha M and Yohannes K 2019, 'Suicidal ideation and attempt among homeless people: a systematic review and meta-analysis', *Psychiatric Quarterly*, vol. 90, no. 4, pp. 829-842, doi:10.1007/s11126-019-09667-8

Hopelessness

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Hopelessness is a recognised risk factor for self-harm and suicidality.²⁷

A sense of hopelessness/expression of a loss of hope was acknowledged to be a contributory factor to suicidal risk.

This can manifest as: an attitude that 'there's nothing left to live for'; a lack of forward thinking or planning, a sense of 'feeling stuck'; or 'feeling completely overwhelmed and incapacitated'.

A cluster of negative life experiences and/or prolonged exposure to stressors are also observed to contribute to a sense of hopelessness.

Such an increase in the number and magnitude of individual and situational risk factors over time appears to heighten suicidal risk.

In addition, this cumulative stress can result in a relatively minor stressor triggering significant suicidal distress.

What should you keep in mind to identify suicide risk when observing or exploring this family violence risk factor?

Intense hopelessness has been identified among specialist family violence practitioners as indicating both risk of suicide and homicide-suicide.

You should observe signs indicating the degree of hopelessness a person expresses to you, which may include:

- ... believing there is little reason to adopt non-violent and respectful ways of relating as part of making a better life for themselves or others, with narratives that others would be 'better off without them' or 'nothing works'
- ... deterioration of circumstances and life situation, particularly in relation to court outcomes and restricted or suspended access to their children
- ... increasing sense of desperation, with narratives indicating there is 'nothing left to lose', particularly where children are involved
- ... resentment and bitterness towards victim survivors, with narratives of them having 'won' while their life is 'over'.

Social isolation

Why is this important to consider for suicide risk?

Social isolation of any person is a suicide risk factor.

'Social isolation, exclusion and rejection', 'bullying' and 'discord with boss and workmates' are all identified as psychosocial risk factors in coroner-certified suicide deaths in Australia in 2017.²⁸

A loss of connection to significant others, including family and social networks can indicate an increase in suicide risk. This may be further exacerbated when connected to a change in the individual's sense of identity such as when there is a loss of 'social face' (refer to 'shame' above).

27 Steeg S, Haigh M, Webb RT, Kapur N, Awenat Y, Gooding P ... Cooper J 2016, 'The exacerbating influence of hopelessness on other known risk factors for repeat self-harm and suicide', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 190, 522-528, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2015.09.050>

28 Government of Australia 2019, *Psychosocial risk factors as they relate to coroner-referred deaths in Australia, 2017*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.