The VIGOR: Safety Planning with Victims of IPV

Sherry Hamby, Ph.D.
Life Paths Appalachian Research Center &
University of the South

National Conference for America’s Children
October 20, 2016; Cincinnati, OH
sherry.hamby@lifepathsresearch.org or sherry.hamby@sewanee.edu
Topics We Will Cover Today

• The limitations of the deficit-focused paradigm and an alternative strengths-based framework.
• How understanding the full spectrum of risks is important to recognizing the full spectrums of strengths
• Battered women’s protective strategies
• A new approach to risk assessment and safety planning
Insights of the Akwesasne Mohawks

From Arquette et al., 2002
No toxin exposure, no adverse health effects???

• What about….
  – Loss of traditional hunting & fishing practices, loss of traditional medicines
  – Alternative diets that are high in fat and calories and low in vitamins and nutrients, leading to
    • Diabetes
    • Heart disease
    • Stroke
    • High blood pressure
    • Obesity (Arquette et al., 2002)
“intentional game players”

“compliant zombies”

“masochistic self states”
Oxford University Press asked me to write a blog to promote my latest book. This is the photo they chose to accompany my blog entitled “The Many Strengths of Battered Women”
Pros & Cons of Current Dangerousness Assessment & Safety Planning

**Pros:**
- Comprehensive lists of risks of perpetrator danger
- Many safety planning suggestions accumulated from advocates’ experiences (National Domestic Violence Hotline website is representative).
- Easy to use

**Cons:**
- Overly narrow definition of risk, focused on batterer (for example: batterer’s drug & alcohol problems; batterer’s threats to kill the victim or her children; batterer’s suicidal ideation)
- Little guidance on dealing with the financial, legal, and social risks faced by virtually all battered women.
- Generic lists—not personalized
- Doesn’t reflect the complexities that providers see every day.

*Leaves providers to figure out how to do this on their own, one at a time, over and over again.*
A Typical Safety Plan—
Nat’l Coalition Against Domestic Violence

- **If you are still in the relationship:**
- Think of a safe place to go if an argument occurs - avoid rooms with no exits (bathroom), or rooms with weapons (kitchen).
- Think about and make a list of safe people to contact.
- Keep change with you at all times.
- Memorize all important numbers.
- Establish a "code word" or "sign" so that family, friends, teachers or co-workers know when to call for help.
- Think about what you will say to your partner if he/she becomes violent.
- Remember, you have the right to live without fear and violence.
Focuses on leaving & physical safety

- **If you have left the relationship:**
- Change your phone number.
- Screen calls.
- Save and document all contacts, messages, injuries or other incidents involving the batterer.
- Change locks, if the batterer has a key.
- Avoid staying alone.
- Plan how to get away if confronted by an abusive partner.
- If you have to meet your partner, do it in a public place.
- Vary your routine.
- Notify school and work contacts.
- Call a shelter for battered women.
- If you leave the relationship or are thinking of leaving, you should take important papers and documents with you to enable you to apply for benefits or take legal action.
Need a Family-Centered Approach

• Programs for battered women, in shelters and elsewhere, still do not pay enough attention to the needs of children, despite the fact that many shelters actually house more children than they do adults (because many women have multiple children).

• Child protection programs can likewise do more to recognize that there are multiple victims in many families and can benefit from a more family-centered, collaborative approach.
Formal Helpseeking

- Contrary to stereotypes of passivity:
- Helpseeking for DV is similar to helpseeking for psychological problems:
  - 28% in Canadian survey (Bland et al, 1997)
  - 26% in Europe (ESEMeD MHEDEA, 2004)
  - 41% in U.S. (Wang et al, 2005), but most of this not specialized help
    - Psychiatrists 12%
    - Other mental health providers 16%
- 66% of DV victims had sought formal services in one Canadian survey (Barrett & Lapierre, 2010)
Other More Holistic & Family-Centered Approaches

• Woman-Defined Advocacy (Jill Davies)
• Strategic Safety Planning (Lindhorst, Macy, & Nurius)
• Relationship-centered Advocacy (Goodman & Epstein)
  – All of these are good at holistic approach but more informally than VIGOR (for ex, as interview)
• Computerized Safety Decision Aid (Glass et al)
  – Goes beyond generic list, less comprehensive
A Holistic Understanding of Risk Assessment & Risk Management: Multiple Criteria Decision Making
Types of Problems Addressed with MCDM

• Selecting routes for nuclear waste transport (Chen, Wang, & Lin, 2008).
• Promoting recycling (Gomes et al., 2008)
• Understanding stock trading (Albadvi et al., 2007)
• Deciding best locations for emergency vehicles (Araz et al., 2007)
• Understanding “medical tourism”—when people will decide to have surgery abroad (Bies & Zacharia, 2007)
• …and dozens of other applications in environmental sciences, engineering, agriculture, and finance (Hajkowicz, 2008).
• MCDM is evidence-based with research support in many fields. This is its first application to domestic violence.
What Do These Problems Have in Common with Battering?

• Complex problems with multiple facets
• “Success” can be evaluated on multiple criteria
• Not all criteria easily evaluated with dollars or some other uniform metric—involve value judgements (originally developed as an alternative to cost-benefit analysis).
• Multiple options to choose from, and these options vary in how well they meet different criteria.
A number of models exist—here is one representative flow chart.

OK, engineers can be fond of complexity, but can simplify this considerably.
How to Apply MCDM to Battering:
The VIGOR (Victim Inventory of Goals, Options, & Risks)
Creating the VIGOR: Content Validity

• Used a mixed methods, multi-stage approach that is consistent with NIH PROMIS recommendations for assessment development.

• 6 other experienced advocates reviewed the VIGOR and provided extensive feedback, paid $100 honorarium.

• 2 feasibility studies, each with approx. 100 individuals who have been victims of battering.

• Psychology majors helped further streamline and simplify the wording.

• Available for free at thevigor.org.
VIGOR Step 1: Identify Women’s Risks & Priorities
Identify Goals

Where would you like to be 6 months from now? What is your ideal living situation? Are you hoping to go back to work or school, or change your work or school situation? List your goals.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

Identify Risks

First, think about the different problems you are currently dealing with. Most people who have been hurt by a partner face the risk of future physical danger. Other life areas need to be considered, too. They may not all apply to you; for example, not everyone has pets. The idea is to make a list that is unique to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Category</th>
<th>Your Actual &amp; Possible Risks (describe)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Safety</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical, verbal, sexual safety &amp; well-being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others’ Safety/Well-being</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends, others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial risks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money issues related to work, school, moving, legal fees, bills, insurance, debt, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal risks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about police, divorce, child protection, immigration, other legal actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social risks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways that your relationships with family, friends, co-workers, etc., might be affected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological risks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings you might have about your situation, emotional risks like stress or sadness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other risks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything not covered by above categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List your biggest or most important risks:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

**Note:** If you tell about a child in danger from abuse, advocates must contact child protective services in most areas.
A. Personal Physical Risks

- 56% of attempted IP homicides are precipitated by victim leaving or saying she would leave (Farr, 2002).
- NVAWS data also show violence persists after leaving.
- Longitudinal studies suggest some violence stops even if victim stays (e.g., Aldarondo & Sugarman, 1996; Jasinski, 2001).
Leaving is not always safer!
Custodial Interference & WPV

72% of family abductions occurred in WPV homes!
From Hamby et al., 2010
B. Physical Risks Posed to Others

• Concern for others can constrain coping:
  – Children
  – Family members
  – Friends—especially those who offer shelter
  – Pets
  – Others, such as coworkers, advocates, etc.

• Ex: Across 6 studies, 48% of women in shelters reported their pets had been harmed, 45% said they had been threatened, and 26% said the welfare of their pets delayed their decision to leave (Hamby, in preparation).
C. Financial Risks

• Financial dependence is often the most commonly mentioned reason for staying (e.g., Cruz, 2003).

• Many areas of potential loss:
  – Lower standard of living
  – Loss of savings
  – Cannot afford neighborhoods with low crime or good schools
  – Would have to drop out of own schooling
  – Job loss
  – Loss of health insurance
  – Loss of car/transportation
  – Doesn’t have security deposit, rent, furniture for even a terrible apartment in a terrible neighborhood.
D. Legal Risks

• Dual arrests are on the rise (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002)
• Arrest of batterer unlikely to lead to jail time—will be back home & madder than ever
• If disclose abuse to authorities, may be reported to CPS for “exposing” children to dv
• D-I-V-O-R-C-E risks
• Risks losing custody of children
• Risks unfair divorce settlement
E. Social Risks

- Stigma—Almost all of the social statuses associated with leaving a violent relationship are stigmatized:
  - “victim”
  - “divorced”
  - “single mother”

- Loss of friendships, extended family, support of minister/congregants

- Children’s loss of friends, schools, sports

- May stigmatize entire family in many communities
F. Other risks

• Personal & psychological risks
  – Loneliness
  – Sense of failure
  – Perceived loss of fealty to religious values

• Deportation

• Victims with disabilities and elderly victims may lose needed assistance with self-care, health care

• Members of oppressed minority groups may not receive equal treatment by law enforcement or human service providers.
Step 1: Identify Risks

- Fear of physical harm to self: 47.6
- Fear partner will murder them: 16.5
- Financially insecure: 53.4
- Concern for children*: 46.6
- Lack Social Support: 44.7
- Lose custody: 27.2
- Family rejection: 27.2

*Concern for children includes concern for their physical, emotional, and social well-being
Step 2: Identify Strengths
Identify Strengths and Resources
You may have more resources than you thought, or you may get some ideas about what you need in order to meet your goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Category</th>
<th>Your Actual or Possible Resources (describe)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal &amp; Psychological</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways in which you are strong and can keep safe. Include all kinds of strength, such as courage &amp; faith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing resources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to safe place to live (own a home, name on a lease, affordable housing, etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial resources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of income or other financial support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal resources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents, legal help, or other things that can help you deal with courts &amp; agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social &amp; community resources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People you can rely on in times of trouble. Include family, friends, AA or other 12-step programs, religious groups, or other organizations too.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Privacy &amp; protection</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to increase privacy settings on computer, phone, or make home more secure.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other resources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things that can help you that are not included above.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stronger Than You Know

*Personal strength refers to a sense of being capable and having the ability to persevere.
If you only remember one thing: Assess strengths!

• “This was a great help to me just in writing these things down, “seeing” it on paper aided me in recognizing my accomplishments and what I yet need to do!”
• “Helped me see different options I may have.”
• “I liked thinking about my strengths.”
• “I liked having to think and acknowledge my strengths and options—made me hopeful.”
Step 3: Identify Women’s Options

- “Traditional” advocacy services: shelters, OPs, support groups, physical safety planning
- Need to expand our toolkit. A better appreciation of risks will help focus on other needs—financial planning, job training, dealing with a stigmatized identity, talking with family members, clergy
- Also need to re-think our time frame—many options cannot realistically be implemented in the 30 or 60 or 90 days allowed to stay in shelter.
- In the VIGOR studies, women identified 147 different options! (*Battered Women’s Protective Strategies: Stronger Than You Know*).
**Identify Options**

Thinking about your resources, start to identify your options. Many options can be used together. At this point, just put down all of the possibilities you might be willing to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option Category</th>
<th>Existing &amp; Potential Options (describe)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing options</strong></td>
<td>Stay with family or friends, rent apartment or other new housing, go to shelter, stay with partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial options</strong></td>
<td>Open bank account, get job training, apply for job, start saving money, borrow money, sell items to raise money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal options</strong></td>
<td>Apply for order of protection/restraining order, file for divorce, seek full custody of children, crime victims compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social options</strong></td>
<td>Join community group, talk to supportive friends/family, speak to clergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological options</strong></td>
<td>Join support group, individual or couples counseling, exercise, journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community options</strong></td>
<td>Work with advocate, job training, employment agency, apply for public assistance (TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, state health insurance for children, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Privacy &amp; protection</strong></td>
<td>Change privacy settings on social networking sites, change locks, change phone numbers &amp; passwords, get prepaid phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other options</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Battered Women’s Protective Strategies

Immediate situational strategies

Protecting children, family, and pets

Invisible strategies (under-recognized actions women take)

Formal helpseeking to police, shelters, and other services

Turning to religious and spiritual resources

Reaching out for social support

Protective Strategies
Immediate Situational Strategies

- **Escaping the scene**: Leave the house, Run to another room, Lock oneself in a room, Get into (or out of) a car, Walk away calmly

- **Luring away from dangerous parts of the house**: Keep perpetrator away from gun cabinets, kitchens, etc.

- **Calling for help**: Signal a neighbor or child, Teach children who to get help, Get a pay-as-you-go phone, Keep a landline telephone, Scream, Pass a note or leave a message in a public place

- **Defusing strategies**: Distract with other activities such as making tea, Hold hand/cuddle with perpetrator, even if do not feel affectionate, Keep things quiet, Talk batterer out of abuse

- **Protecting children or others from the attacker**

- **Self-defensive actions**: Use force to stop perpetrator’s assault, Protect one’s body, Stop perpetrator from destroying objects around house
Protecting Children, Family & Pets

• **Immediate protective strategies focused on children and loved ones:** Physically insert themselves between batterer and others, Try to get batterer to focus on them, Create code words and safety plans with children or others, Send children to their rooms or other safer location, Turn up stereo so children cannot hear violence

• ** Longer term strategies for protecting children:** Send children to stay with relatives, Seek full legal custody, Help children process experience, Volunteer at school, Delay leaving to protect children

• **Protecting pets:** Delay leaving to protect pets from batterer’s threats, Enroll pets in “doggy day care” or place in kennel

• **Protecting other family members, friends, and co-workers:** Quit job, Stay away from family and friends, Create separate email account that batterer does not know
Reaching Out for Social Support

- Obtain emotional support
- Stay with family or friends
- Get financial or practical help with moving
- Ask family or friend to accompany women to court or agencies
- Ask for help filling out legal forms and other paperwork
- Get help with child care
- Get help with transportation
- Ask family or friends to store belongings or extra keys
- Ask family or friends to hold bank accounts or other assets in their name
- Ask family to help negotiate a plan for reconciliation
- Ask boss or co-workers to re-arrange schedules
- Ask for security plan at the workplace
Turning to Religious & Spiritual Resources

• Strength and perseverance from prayer & faith in God/higher power
• Comfort from inspirational stories in religious texts
• Hope for the future
• Social support from clergy, other members of the congregation
• Pastoral counseling from clergy
• Free social activities
• Help paying utility bills, home repair, transportation
• Support during illness or following birth of child
• Donations of food, clothing, furniture, and other necessities
• Help with immigration status
• Literacy and English as a second language classes
• School supplies, winter coats, and free activities for children
Types of Formal Helpseeking

- Going to a Domestic Violence Shelter
- Other Domestic Violence Program Services
  - Info, referral, transportation, court accompaniment, etc
- Calling the Police
- Seeking Help from Victim Assistance Programs
- Obtaining a Restraining Order/Order of Protection
- Mental Health Services
- Health Care
- 12-step programs such as Al-Anon
- Other Social Services
- Support groups

Formal helpseeking can be problematic in many communities but it is still common.
Invisible Strategies

• Money, money, money
• Arranging affairs
• Wellness
• Returning to batterer—yes, sometimes this is safest, best option from a range of really rotten choices
• Activism
People in the pilot study identified more than 140 options!
Step 4: Make Choices Based on Risk Priorities & Options

• In MCDM, an option has “strict dominance” if it is better than others on some criteria, and at least as good on all others.

• The result: NOT a generic checklist of safety precautions, BUT a personalized plan that links coping responses to specific risks.

• Fleeing on an emergency basis with few belongings and possibly not even with your children, will not minimize many risks faced by typical battered women.
Reflecting on Your Choices
You have identified your goals, risks, and options. Now, consider what you think are your best options to create the best plan for you. **Remember, you can change your choices later if you want.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List your biggest or most important risks (from p.2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write one option here:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>This option helps with the following risks (describe):</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Write another option:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>This option helps with the following risks (describe):</em></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write another option:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>This option helps with the following risks (describe):</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What steps do I need to take to choose this option? Do I need anything I don’t have right now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

You can add more options on the back if you want.
Pilot Study 1: Risks, Strengths, Options as Perceived by Victims of Battering

• 102 people (98% female) with histories of intimate partner victimization were recruited from 2 domestic violence programs (1 shelter, 1 support group) in 2 Southern states.
• Wide age range: 28% 18-25, 25% 26-30, 27% 31-40, 20% 41+
• Ethnically and racially diverse: African-American (54%), White/Caucasian (26%), Hispanic (11%), Native American (9%), and other (1%).
• 58% reported income < $12,000 per year.
• Most had children (91%), mean 2.14 children per participant.
• They provided their perceptions of their risks and resources in a semi-structured format. Responses were coded using a boot-strapping method and analyzed. Participants were given a $25 gift card to thank them for their participation. DV agencies were paid $25 per interview to compensate them for staff time.
Client perceptions from feasibility & acceptability studies

PILOT 1

Helpful to most: 80%
More helpful than past safety planning: 70%

PILOT 2

Helpful to most: 90%
More helpful than past safety planning: 90%
Translations

• Recently translated into U.S. Latin Spanish and Spain Spanish
• Also available in Catalan (Translated by Anna Segura Montagut) and French (translated by Kaki Nix)
• These are also on the website and available for free on an open-access basis (with appropriate citation to the source).

• A visiting graduate student from the University of Barcelona, Anna Segura Montagut, made the first translation into Spanish.
• Martha Hernandez-Martinez and Heidi Notario from the National Latino Network reviewed the translation and helped adopt it for U.S. Latin dialect.
Conclusions

• We can honor the achievements of early work by advocates and others to raise awareness and dramatically change the institutional response to family violence.

• However, like medicine, computers, even your phone, there’s also always the opportunity to improve our services and do more to help families so that no family sustains lasting harm from abuse.
Free resources:
Narrative and strengths-based resources at http://lifepathsresearch.org
Resilience Portfolio Interview can be found there, under tab for Educators and Therapists
The VIGOR, a new strengths-based safety plan for domestic violence: http://thevigor.org
Psychology Today blog: http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-web-violence (includes blogs on communication skills)
Letter to My Teenage Daughter About Sexual Assault
Letter to My Teenage Son About Sexual Assault
ResilienceCon 2017:
April 17-19 in Nashville

• Learn more about resilience in a beautiful retreat setting, with a new “disruptive” approach to conferences with fast-paced and interactive formats.

• See http://lifepathsresearch.org