The Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI and DVSI–R versions) was designed to assess the risk of repeated domestic violence in the future on the basis of information available at the time of use. The DVSI was originally created by the Division of Probation Services in Colorado. It was crafted as a short, easy criminal records review and made available to prosecutors, judges, and probation officers soon after a suspect's arrest. The original instrument included 12 items related to past criminal and social history, completed by a review of official records, with the 12 items summed to calculate risk scores ranging from 0 to 30. It was substantially revised in Connecticut between 2002 and 2003, involving modification and consolidation of the items (now 11), along with corresponding coding instructions. Besides the 11 structured items, two additional mechanisms were added for assessing the imminent risk of violence to the victim or other persons based on an assessor's subjective professional judgment.

The original DVSI was validated using two samples of subjects drawn from four pilot judicial districts of the 22 in Colorado: 1,465 male suspects arrested for domestic violence offenses committed against female partners between July 1997 and March 1998 and 125 female partners of the men arrested. These women were offered financial compensation to participate in the study, but locating them and soliciting their willingness to participate was difficult, resulting in a relatively small sample.

Concurrent validity was determined by comparing the DVSI with an alternative risk assessment instrument, the Spouse Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) guide, to determine the level of agreement in classifying cases into the high-risk and low-to-moderate-risk categories using both instruments. The greater the agreement in classification, the greater is the concurrent validity of the DVSI. Cross-classifying the high-risk and low-to-moderate-risk distributions on the DVSI and the SARA showed high levels of agreement between the two instruments. The SARA also includes two summary risk ratings in which the assessor estimates imminent risk of violence to the partner and imminent risk of violence to others. Perceived risk of violence to the partner was highly correlated with the DVSI risk classification. Discriminant validation involved comparing the DVSI with the perceived risk of violence to others on the assumption that the DVSI assesses the risk of repeated intimate partner violence, not violence toward others. An association, therefore, is not expected. The association was weak and not statistically significant.

Predictive validity was determined by estimating the association between the DVSI and repeated violence during an 18-month follow-up period, using official records to measure three behavioral outcomes: arrests for violations of domestic violence restraining orders, domestic violence re-arrests, and general criminal perpetration arrests. The perpetrators classified as high risk were re-arrested more than those classified as low to moderate risk on the DVSI. Violations of domestic violence restraining orders were higher for high-risk than lower-risk suspects, as was the case for domestic violence re-arrests. Predictive validity was also evaluated by making comparisons between DVSI risk scores and forms of controlling, intimidating, threatening, or physically violent behaviors reported by the 125 women victims during a 6-month follow-up period. No significant relations were found between the DVSI risk scores and controlling behaviors or less serious forms of intimidating, threatening, or physically violent behaviors. However, high-risk classification on the DVSI was significantly associated with more severe forms of these behaviors: destruction of property; threatening to hit, attack, or harm the victim; and the use of threats to obtain sex from the victim. The DVSI was also significantly associated with more severe forms of physically violent behavior: choked or tried to drown the victim, used physical force to obtain sex, or tried to kill the victim.
Implementing and Modifying the DVSI in Connecticut

The DVSI was adopted as a risk assessment instrument in Connecticut in May 2002 because of the promising findings of the Colorado study and the suitability of the instrument for risk assessments in this state, which must be done by family relations counselors (FRCs) within an approximately 24-hour period after arrest. After initial training sessions on the administration of the DVSI, a pilot phase was implemented that resulted in modifications of item definitions, coding rules, inclusion of professional judgment of imminent risk categories, clarification of confusing items, and consolidation of seemingly redundant items. Revisions were finalized in January 2003.

The DVSI–R includes 11 items and the two summary risk ratings. The 11 items are statistical or actuarial in nature, referring to previous involvement in nonfamily as well as family violence, prior family violence intervention or treatment, violation of protective orders or other forms of court supervision, prior or current verbal or emotional abuse, the frequency and escalation of family violence in the past 6 months, the use of objects as weapons, substance abuse, the presence of children during such incidents, and employment status. The instrument captures two primary components of risk assessment (statistical/actuarial and structured professional judgment), yet it remains brief and efficient to administer. The DVSI–R is informed by five sources of data: police reports, criminal history review, protective order registry review, perpetrator interviews, and victim interviews.

An initial validation study of the DVSI–R was conducted using 14,970 risk assessments by FRCs from September 1, 2004, through May 2, 2005, and covering Connecticut's 23 judicial geographic areas. Preliminary evidence shows that the DVSI–R has promising concurrent and predictive validity. Further validation is currently under way using 18-month recidivism data on 3,797 defendants.

- risk assessment
- domestic violence
- violence
- arrest
- risk
- assessment instruments
- violent behavior

Kirk R. Williams
http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412959537.n92

See Also:
- Forensic Assessment
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Violence Risk Assessment

Further Readings
Kropp, P. R., Hart, S. D. The Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) guide: Reliability and

Skilling, N. (2002). Validation study for the use of the Domestic Violence Screening Instrument (DVSI) and the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) for evaluating probation clients. Minneapolis, MN: Research and Systems Technology, Department of Community Corrections, Hennepin County.
