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**VIOLENCE TRIAGE – IDENTIFYING  
OBVIOUS WARNING SIGNS OF  
VIOLENCE RISK**

Questions

When am I legally entitled (or required) to conduct a violence risk assessment?

Questions

When am I legally entitled (or required) to take extraordinary steps to manage violence risk?

Questions

Who should I conduct a violence risk assessment of first, and who can wait?

Concerns

Too many cases	Too few resources
Not enough information	Competing legal concerns

Professional Responsibility

- Required under statutory law, common law, and professional codes of ethics to identify and respond to obvious signs of violence risk
- Failure to do so may result in legal liability if actions failed to meet professional standards and resulted in harm to others

### Professional Implications

- At a minimum service providers are required to identify obvious signs of violence risk
- When there are reasonable grounds to believe that a violence risk exists and is significant a comprehensive violence risk assessment is required

### Violence Triage

### Violence Triage

- When someone or something triggers potential concern, it may be necessary to search for obvious warning signs of violence
  - Are there reasonable grounds to believe there is a risk for violence?
- Triaging helps to:
  - Prioritize cases in which comprehensive assessment is needed
  - Prioritize immediate management steps (including documentation)

### General Warning Signs

- General Population
  - 1% Schizophrenia
  - 1% Bipolar Disorder
  - 5-10% Major Depression
  - 5-10% Suicidal Ideation/Attempts
  - 15-25% Substance Abuse
- At least 10% will have general warning signs

### Primary Warning Signs

- Documented, reported, or suspected history of
  - Violent acts
  - Violent threats
  - Violent ideation
- Especially if
  - Recent
  - Serious
  - Escalating

### Secondary Warning Signs

- Documented, reported, or suspected history of
  - Personal crisis
  - Interpersonal conflict
  - Acute mental distress
- Especially if
  - Recent
  - Serious
  - Escalating

**Need to Know: Act/Threat**

- When – Time
- Where – Location, context
- Who – Perpetrator(s), victim(s), relationships
- What – Acts, attempts, consequences
- Why – Motivations, precipitants, goals
- Personal reaction – remorse, empathy

**Need to Know: Acts/Threats**

- Chronicity – Ages, frequency
- Diversity – Types
- Severity – Consequences
- Escalation – Trajectory

**Need to Know: Ideation**

- Thoughts
- Harm
- Realistic,
- Explicit,
- Acute,
- Targeted,     and
- Studied

**Thoughts**

- Involves preoccupation with violent ideas, fantasies, images, urges, or plans
  - Especially if frequent, persistent, or intrusive

**Harm**

- Involves serious injury to others
  - Especially life-threatening injury

**Realistic**

- Is feasible or possible
  - Especially if it demonstrates the capacity to carry out violence
    - Knowledge
    - Skills
    - Experience

### Explicit

- Is detailed and specific
  - Especially if it demonstrates planning or forethought

### Acute

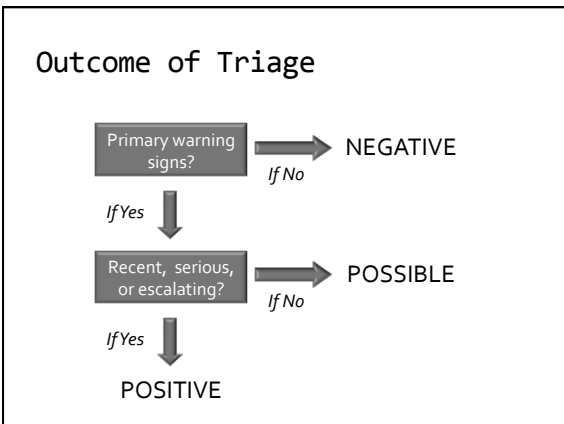
- Involves imminent harm
  - Especially if unconditional

### Targeted

- Threats involve identified victims
  - Especially if they demonstrate access to or personal knowledge of victims

### Studied

- Involves planned or progressive action
  - Especially if preliminary steps have already been taken



### Outcome: Negative

- The absence of primary warning signs that are recent, physical/serious, or escalating

**Action: Negative**

- Follow Up
  - No action is required
  - Monitor warning signs
- Document
  - Warning signs and triage outcome

**Outcome: Negative**

*"I conducted a triage for violence due to concerns about verbally aggressive behaviour (shouting and swearing) by a employee to another employee. There was no evidence of primary or secondary warning signs for violence to suggest that the person poses a risk for imminent or serious violence."*

**Outcome: Possible**

- The presence of primary warning signs that are not recent, serious, or escalating
- Uncertainty whether primary warning signs are present or whether they are recent, serious, or escalating

**Action: Possible**

- Follow up
  - Monitor of warning signs
  - Gather additional information
  - Obtain second opinion
  - Referral for comprehensive violence risk assessment, if time and resources permit
- Document
  - Warning signs, triage outcome, risks posed, and responses planned and taken

**Example: Possible**

*"I conducted a triage for violence due to concerns about recent vaguely intimidating behaviours towards an employee by her former intimate partner. There was evidence of recent vaguely threatening statements and recent interpersonal conflict (separation), which suggests that former intimate partner may pose a risk for imminent and serious violence towards the employee. The victim has been provided information about support services, the situation will be monitored by human resources over time, and a second opinion will be obtained from a threat assessment professional."*

**Outcome: Positive**

- The presence of primary warnings signs that are recent, serious, or escalating

**Action: Positive**

- Follow Up
  - Respond to emergencies
  - Gather additional information
  - Referral for comprehensive violence risk assessment, if time and resources permit
- Document
  - Warning signs, triage outcome, risks posed, and responses planned and taken

**Example: Positive**

*"I conducted a triage for violence due to concerns about recent fear inducing behaviour by a student to their professor. There was evidence of a history of stalking and recent threats of death, which suggests that the student poses a risk for imminent and serious violence towards their professor. The police have been informed of the risks posed and the victim has been provided information about support services. The case has been referred to external consultants for a comprehensive violence risk assessment."*

**Sample Cases**

**Sample Case 1**

- Student engaged in past physical assault against a stranger which resulted in a custodial sentence, with no past violent ideation

**Sample Case 2**

- Employee engaged in recent stalking of his ex-girlfriend, another employee, resulting in a restraining (protection) order with no past violent acts or ideation

**Sample Case 3**

- Community member has current violent ideation and a history of serious mental illness, but no past violent acts

### Sample Case 4

- Supervisor engaged in recent "aggressive behaviour" (angry, impulsive, reactive) with no past violent acts or ideation

### Sample Case 5

- Community member has current and serious suicidal ideation, with no past violent acts or ideation

### Implementation Issues

### Define Primary Warning Signs

- Define primary warning signs
  - Violence acts – Actual or attempted physical harm of another person that is deliberate and nonconsenting
- Specify type of violence
  - General violence, intimate partner violence, stalking, sexual violence, honor based violence, elder abuse, group violence

### Define Secondary Warning Signs

- Define secondary warning signs
  - Acute mental distress – symptoms of major mental disorder including psychosis, mania, depression
- Expand secondary warning signs
  - Verbal aggression – shouting at, cursing at, or insulting people
  - Property aggression – throwing, vandalizing, or destroying property

### Determine Thresholds

- Recent
  - Appears to have been present in the past few days, weeks, or months
- Serious
  - Appears to have involved risk of severe or life-threatening physical harm
  - Appears to have involved risk of physical harm to a person who is vulnerable
- Escalating
  - Appears to be more frequent, serious or diverse over time

### Determine Process

- Who needs to be trained to triage?
  - Train the trainer workshops
- Who needs to conduct the triage?
  - Triage referral form
- How should the triage be implemented and documented?
  - Paper Worksheets or Electronic Applications
- What immediate actions should be considered?
  - Responding to emergencies, monitoring warning signs, gathering additional information, obtain second opinion, refer for violence risk assessment

### Differentiate Among Tools

- Tracking
  - Monitoring warning signs of those who have been or may be referred for comprehensive risk assessment
- Screening
  - Abbreviated risk assessment to determine who should be referred for comprehensive risk assessment
- Triage
  - Sorting of cases into small number of categories based on warning signs to determine who should be referred for comprehensive risk assessment

### Comprehensive Approach

- Supervisors and employees
  - Warning signs
  - Violence triage
  - Policies and procedures
- Threat assessment teams
  - Violence risk assessment
  - Violence risk management
  - Multidisciplinary approach

### Contact Information

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