Domestic violence typologies: What value to practice?

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Foreword | *Over the last few decades, understandings of the nature and causes of domestic violence have increased in sophistication. This has been influenced by, and led to, an influx of domestic violence typologies that have attempted to identify differences between groups of offenders and victims based on factors ranging from physiological reactions to specific stimuli through to historical experiences of violence and abuse. While this research has been of undeniable conceptual and theoretical value, its applicability to the day-to-day work of domestic violence practitioners is less clear. This study represents one of the first attempts to speak directly to professionals about how domestic violence typologies inform their everyday decision making and case practice.*

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When domestic violence was first recognised as an issue of societal significance in the 1970s, it was conceptualised and described as a quite homogenous offence perpetrated by a homogenous group of offenders (Capaldi & Kim 2007; Dixon & Browne 2003). In the traditional scenario, a male offender victimised their female partner in order to control and dominate her, perpetrating a series of violent and abusive acts that escalated in severity and frequency over the course of the relationship (Cavanaugh & Gelles 2005). Traditional understandings of domestic and family violence have also focused on relationship 'dysfunction' and understanding why women 'choose' to stay in relationships with their violent partners.

However, over the last 25 years, understanding of domestic violence has changed significantly. People experience and are affected by domestic violence in different ways and the reasons underpinning domestic violence also differs between individuals and across relationships (Capaldi & Kim 2007; Huss & Langhinrichsen-Roling 2000; Johnston & Campbell 1993; Kelly & Johnson 2008; Lohr et al. 2005). Consequently, some commentators suggest that it is 'plausible that offender's behaviour is best described by categories' rather than at an overall, aggregate level (Dixon & Browne 2003: 109).

The re-conceptualisation of domestic violence as a more heterogeneous phenomenon has been in part influenced by the growing number of theoretical and empirical domestic violence typologies such as those outlined in Table 1 (Johnson & Ferraro 2000). Typologies are a means of classifying or categorising subject matter into groups and aim to simplify 'social reality by identifying homogenous groups of crime behaviour that are different from other clusters of crime behaviours' (Miethe, McCorkle & Listwan 2006: 1).

Generally speaking, the domestic violence typologies that have been developed to date have attempted to identify groupings of domestic violence offences, or of domestic violence perpetrators (male or female; Wangmann 2011). As demonstrated in Table 1, domestic violence typologies have typically differentiated between groups of offenders and incidents on a number of factors, including:

- the gender of the offender;
- frequency and severity of the violence;
- type of violence (physical, emotional, sexual etc);
- motivations/underlying causes of the violence;
- physiological responses of offenders to different stimuli;
- presence of personality/psychopathic/antisocial disorders and symptoms; and
- whether the violence is confined to intimates or includes non-intimates.

While domestic violence typologies have been important for the development of more in-depth and sophisticated conceptualisations of domestic violence, their relevance and implications for practice is unclear. The purpose of this study is to explore the practical utility of domestic violence typologies for professionals who are directly responsible for responding to and managing domestic violence matters (eg police officers, legal representatives, domestic violence service providers and treatment practitioners).

At this point, it is necessary to differentiate between domestic violence typologies and domestic violence risk assessment processes. The purpose of risk assessment processes is to assist practitioners to 'predict' or assess the likelihood of a domestic violence offender perpetrating similar abuse and violence in the future, or the severity of the offending escalating (Campbell, Webster & Glass 2009, Laing 2004). Domestic violence typologies are broader in scope than risk assessment processes, although as highlighted in later sections of this paper, they could potentially be used to inform the development of risk assessment processes. Domestic violence typologies involve the differentiation between

groups of domestic violence offenders and offences on the basis of a set of evidence-based (either theoretical or empirical) criteria. These criteria inform the assessment of not only the individual's likelihood of offending in the future, but also the reasons underpinning their violent and abusive behaviours, the nature of their offending and (potentially) their responsiveness to certain types of treatment.

Potential benefits associated with using domestic violence typologies for practice

While a relatively new area of research, interest in domestic violence typologies has increased over the last 20 years, primarily because by identifying groups of offending and offenders, and the distinctions between them, typologies 'may lead to more accurate identification, assessment, and interventions, thereby better protecting victims of domestic violence' (Cavanaugh & Gelles 2005: 165). For example, it has been suggested that domestic violence typologies may be used to develop more nuanced risk assessment tools, which could in turn lead to more accurate determinations of the risk associated with individual offenders and offences (Kelly & Johnson 2008; Wangmann 2011). Jaffe and colleagues (2008) also noted that more sensitive assessment tools would enable professionals to identify matters that are beyond their level of expertise and should be referred to other practitioners.

It has also been suggested that the consideration of domestic violence typologies may lead to more sophisticated legal decision-making processes and outcomes, particularly in relation to custody disputes (Altobelli 2009; Jaffe et al. 2008; Johnston & Campbell 1993; Wangmann 2011). Johnston and Campbell (1993: 199) argue that 'parent–child relationships are likely to vary with the different patterns of [domestic] violence, and children of different ages and gender are affected differently'. Potentially, court personnel may use domestic violence typologies to first identify the type of violence occurring within the parents' relationship and then use this information to develop parenting and

custody plans that minimise the risk of harm to the children and the victimised parent (Jaffe et al. 2008; Kelly & Johnson 2008). However, it is currently unclear whether domestic violence typologies are being used in legal contexts, particularly in Australia, and for what purpose.

Similarly, the consideration of domestic violence typologies may also be useful in determining whether or not specific couples and families are suitable for alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes, such as mediation and family group conferencing. Traditionally, matters involving domestic violence have been perceived as inappropriate for ADR processes because of concerns that offenders may use the forum to intimidate and terrorise the victim further and the potentially significant power imbalances between the parties involved (Boxall, Morgan & Terer 2012; Kelly & Johnson 2008; Morgan et al. 2012). However, a small number of commentators have suggested that while some offender groups (eg offenders with psychopathic disorders and symptoms) may not be suitable for ADR processes, others (eg offenders who engage in situational couple violence) may benefit from such processes, as long as mechanisms are put in place that 'ensure physical safety…rebuild trust and guarantee a balance of power between… parties' (Johnston & Campbell 1993: 199; Kelly & Johnson 2008). By differentiating between domestic violence offenders, ADR processes may become a viable option for resolving a range of matters involving domestic violence-affected families.

However, the main potential benefit of domestic violence typologies identified in the literature is that they may be used to 'match' offenders with treatment services that target the underlying causes of their violent behaviour (Altobelli 2009; Capaldi & Kim 2007; Cavanaugh & Gelles 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart 1994; Johnston & Campbell 1993; Kelly & Johnson 2008; Langhinrichsen-Roling, Huss & Ramsey 2000; Wangmann 2011). Some evidence suggests that program effectiveness is, in part, dependent on the extent to which the provided treatment and services are tailored to the individual client (Holtzworth-

Munroe & Stuart 1994; Jewell & Wormith 2010; Murphy & Meis 2008; Richards et al. 2004; Sartin, Hansen & Huss 2006; Saunders 2008, 1996). For example, a US-based study undertaken by Saunders (1996) found that male domestic violence offenders with antisocial personality traits were less likely to reoffend when referred to programs focusing on skills training rather than trauma-based programs (36% *cf* 53%). By differentiating between domestic violence offenders using criteria identified in domestic violence typologies, practitioners may be better placed to identify the treatment that is most appropriate for them. More appropriate treatment referrals may also reduce program attrition rates (ie the benefit and applicability of the program to the client will be more obvious and they will be more engaged and likely to complete the program as a result) and recidivism rates (ie the program will address the underlying causes of the violent behaviour, which in turn means that the client will be less likely to reoffend).

Table 1 Examples of domestic violence typologies)	
Typology	**Groupings**
Johnson (2000, 1995)	• Coercive controlling—most severe type of abuse, involves a 'pattern or emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control coupled with physical violence' (Kelly & Johnson 2008: 476). • Violent resistance—the offender, usually a woman, uses violence to resist or avoid coercive controlling violence being used against them. • Situational couple violence—the most common type of violence occurring among married/cohabiting partners. This behaviour is not about control but particular situations and stressors. • Separation instigated violence—violence that occurs in the context of a separation. Does not continue afterwards. • Mutual violent control—both partners engage in coercive controlling violence.
Johnston and Campbell (1993)	• Ongoing or episodic battering by males—chronic form of violence used to control the partner. The offender is jealous, needy, controlling, frustrated and reacts violently to any perceived threat to his masculinity. • Female-initiated violence—female offender reacts violently to the perceived passivity or failure of the victim. Male victim may become aggressive if provoked. • Male-controlled interactive violence—arises out of a specific conflict or argument. Physical violence may be initiated by either party but typically the man responds with physical aggression in an effort to control the female. • Separation or post-divorce violence—uncharacteristic acts of violence that occur in the context of a separation.
Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart[a] (1994)	• Family only offenders (male)—only violent towards their family and are the least likely to engage in psychological/sexual abuse. Demonstrate minimal antisocial/psychopathological behaviours and personality disorders. • Dysphoric/borderline offenders (male)—engage in moderate to severe physical/psychological/sexual abuse, exhibit some extra-familial/criminal behaviour, as well as borderline and schizoid traits. Are more psychologically distressed and emotionally volatile, and tend to have a history of substance use. • Generally violent/antisocial offenders (male)—violent outside the family. Most likely to engage in moderate to severe physical/psychological/sexual abuse and have antisocial personality disorder/psychopathy traits and abuse substances.
Jacobson and Gottman (1998)	• Cobra offenders—heart rate decreases during violent episodes. Severely antisocial, they demonstrate criminal traits and are more emotionally abusive. Female partners are less likely to leave. Motivated by desire for immediate gratification. • Pit-bull offenders—heart rate increases during violent episodes. Women appear to be less intimidated by these types of offender. Motivated by fear of losing their partner and are emotionally dependent on them.
Fowler and Westen (2011)	• Psychopathic offenders (male)—use violence instrumentally/for domination purposes. Tend to be violent outside the home and have a history of substance abuse, unemployment, animal torture and an overall high level of childhood adversity. • Hostile/controlling offenders (male)—angry and controlling, externalise blame and believe they are misunderstood. • Borderline/dependent offenders (male)—unhappy, depressed and overemotional, they experience deeps fears of abandonment so become very dependent on their partners.
Miller and Meloy (2006)	• Generalised violent behaviour (female offenders)—violence not confined to the family setting. • Frustration response (female offenders)—demonstrate 'end of her rope' behaviours. • Defensive behaviour (female offenders)—use violence to get away from a violent incident, or to leave the individual.
Swan and Snow (2002)	• Victims (female offenders)—both partners use violence against one another, but men more so. • Abused aggressors (female offenders)—female partner uses more physical violence and coercive control against their partner. Motivated by retribution and control • Mixed relationships (female offenders)—comprised of two types (1) mixed male coercive relationships—male partner used more coercive control and (2) mixed female coercive—female used equal or more coercive violence.

a: Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart went on to add another category of offender that was located between the family only and generally violent group—low-level antisocial offenders (Wangmann 2011)

Potential barriers/issues associated with using domestic violence typologies for practice

While the literature identifies a number of potential benefits associated with the use of domestic violence typologies, it is currently unclear how they can be integrated into the everyday work practices of criminal justice agencies and practitioners. As Capaldi and Kim (2007: 254) argue, the 'clinical implications and advantages of typological approaches have yet to be well specified and tested'.

There appear to be a number of barriers to the integration of domestic violence typologies into practice decision-making processes. For example, it has been suggested that the classification systems proposed by domestic violence typologies are too rigid and do not provide enough guidance around how to categorise offenders and offences that meet the criteria for multiple groupings or do not meet the criteria for any grouping (Dixon & Browne 2003; Langhinrichsen-Roling, Huss & Ramsey 2000). Further, while researchers typically analysed a wide range of information for the purpose of developing domestic violence typologies (see Table 1), it is unrealistic to assume that practitioners have the same level of access to similar information and would be willing or have the time and resources to undertake the level of analysis necessary to categorise clients (Kelly & Johnson 2008; Lohr et al. 2005).

Another issue for consideration is whether practitioners have the necessary skills to analyse this information and can differentiate between offenders and incidents accurately (Altobelli 2009; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart 1994; Wangmann 2011). Lohr and colleagues (2005) asked seven PhD-level clinicians with expertise in domestic violence to sort 36 domestic violence profiles into

the offender categories identified through an empirically based domestic violence typology. While sorting accuracy among the cohort was quite high overall, there were numerous inconsistencies between respondents in terms of how they categorised specific offenders (Lohr et al. 2005). Further, Langhinrichsen-Roling, Huss and Ramsey (2000) found that sorting accuracy was very low among a sample of PhD clinical psychology students (approximately 64%). These findings are particularly noteworthy considering the qualifications of those involved in the assessment.

Finally, as identified in Table 1, many of the domestic violence typologies that have been developed to date have identified groupings of offenders and matters that do not align with one another and in some cases are contradictory. This raises questions around the selection of typologies for use among practitioners.

Study aims and method

While a number of commentators have identified potential benefits and challenges associated with translating domestic violence typologies into practice, there has been very little research that has canvassed the views of stakeholders responsible for responding to and managing domestic violence matters in various capacities (hereafter referred to as *domestic violence professionals*) on this issue. As a result, the perceived benefits and challenges associated with the use of domestic violence typologies remains largely theoretical in nature.

To address this gap in the knowledge base, the aim of the current study was to answer the following research questions.

- To what extent are domestic violence typologies informing the decisions that

domestic violence professionals make on a day-to-day basis?

- If they are not referring to domestic violence typologies, what information and factors do domestic violence professionals use to inform their everyday work practices?

- How can domestic violence typologies be adapted/amended etc so that they are more relevant and useful to domestic violence professionals?

To answer these research questions, the Australian Institute of Criminology conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with domestic violence professionals from various agencies located in Tasmania. This study was part of a broader body of research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Criminology in Tasmania, using data extracted from the Safe at Home program (Boxall, Rosevear & Payne forthcoming a; forthcoming [b]).

Stakeholders invited to participate in the consultation process included practitioners involved in the delivery of services to domestic violence offenders and/or victims, police officers, legal representatives and Community Corrections staff. See Table 2 for a more detailed breakdown of study participants.

Thirty-four stakeholders were interviewed across eight participating agencies. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of domestic violence typologies, how they used domestic violence typologies in their everyday work practices—if they did use them at all—and if they were not using domestic violence typologies, what factors and information sources they were using to influence their decision-making processes. The views of stakeholders were analysed using thematic and data display techniques to identify a number of key themes, which are discussed throughout the remainder of this paper.

Table 2 Breakdown of study participants		
Respondent category	**Respondents (n)**	**Were any of the respondents in a family violence specific role?**
Probation officers	3	None of the respondents were in a family violence-specific role
Legal	6	Five of the respondents were in a family violence-specific role
Practitioners (victim focused)	12	Eight respondents were in a family violence-specific role
Practitioners (offender focused)	2	Both respondents were from family violence-specific services
Police	11	Eight respondents were in a family violence-specific role

Source: AIC FVMS 2010–11

The respondents included in this study were selected on the basis that they were directly responsible for making decisions about and responding to domestic violence offences and offenders. These professionals would, therefore, be responsible for integrating domestic violence typologies into their decision-making processes and so are best placed to identify the potential benefits and challenges identified in relation to these processes.

It is important to note that this study was conducted with a non-random purposive sample of domestic violence professionals who were all working in Tasmania in accordance with statewide and organisation-level guidelines and frameworks. For these reasons, the findings should not be seen as necessarily representative of the views of domestic violence professionals working in Tasmania more broadly, or in other jurisdictions.

Perceptions of domestic violence typologies and their relevance to practice

Overall, none of the stakeholders said they were using domestic violence typologies to guide their day-to-day work practices and the majority (n=28) identified numerous potential barriers and issues with their use. First, it was the view of many professionals (n=17) that each domestic violence matter is unique and complex and in turn, requires an individualised response, which is not facilitated through the process of allocating matters to domestic violence classifications. One stakeholder also suggested that domestic violence typologies should be taken with a 'grain of salt' because they could not account for every domestic violence offence or offender, meaning that the categorisation processes 'miss a lot of people out'.

Twenty-eight professionals identified a series of risks associated with using standardised classification systems such as domestic violence typologies to inform their decision-making processes. This included under or overestimating the risk associated with specific offenders or situations, which could in turn lead to various parties being

harmed (n=7). Further, some practitioners (n=9) suggested that the consideration of domestic violence typologies may make some practitioners 'lazy' or complacent, leading to less rigorous information gathering and clients being 'pigeonholed'.

There was also a perception among some professionals (n=7), particularly police and legal representatives, that domestic violence typologies were inconsistent with their roles more generally. In particular, a number of respondents (n=7), particularly legal professionals, said that their practices were dictated by legislation and procedural guidelines, and their adherence to these frameworks ensured that responses to domestic violence offenders and victims were unbiased and therefore defensible. Domestic violence typologies were viewed as potentially introducing a level of bias into the decision-making process, leading one police officer to suggest that decisions informed by domestic violence typologies may not be viewed as justifiable by the court. The accuracy of this respondent's concerns is unclear and there may be benefit in exploring these issues further in future research.

A small number of respondents (n=3) also noted that domestic violence offending is a dynamic behaviour that changes constantly over an offender's life course. As such, these professionals questioned the usefulness of applying static domestic violence classifications to offenders at particular stages in their lives when they may not be relevant or applicable in the future.

However, some respondents (n=9) believed that domestic violence typologies could help guide decision-making processes by assisting different parties to more accurately identify the risk associated with individual offenders and incidents. In particular, two (one of which was from the offender treatment space) stakeholders representing offender programs said that thinking about offenders as fitting into categories may provide them with valuable information about why some offenders appear to have more insight into their behaviour than others and which offenders may reoffend. Further, some representatives (n=7), predominantly from victim support services, noted that domestic

violence typologies would be useful insofar as they educated and informed their clients about the behaviour of offenders.

Finally, a small number of professionals (n=3) suggested that while domestic violence typologies may not inform their day-to-day practices, they may be used to validate or confirm their approach and provide them with an evidence base upon which they could justify their decisions.

It is important to note however that many of the stakeholders who were principally supportive of using domestic violence typologies also argued that they should not be used in isolation (n=9) They suggested that while domestic violence typologies could be used as a guide to encourage practitioners to 'think twice about offenders', that professionals should always seek additional information because there will always be anomalies or outliers who do not fit into a category.

What do practitioners use instead of domestic violence typologies?

Instead of using domestic violence typologies, respondents stated that their decision-making processes were informed by the consideration of:

- the domestic violence history of offenders (n=26);
- information extracted from organisation-specific risk assessment tools and databases (n=16);
- information extracted from interagency databases and records (eg Safe at Home database, child protection, community corrections and police records; n=11);
- agency and profession-specific 'best practice' guidelines and legislation (n=7); and
- speaking with colleagues (n=7).

Respondents also noted the importance of speaking to the victim and offender directly to identify how they themselves understand and interpret the domestic violence (n=15). In particular, the victim was seen as the 'most honest player' by respondents, or the 'prime information provider and indicator of their immediate safety concerns'.

However, while acknowledging the importance of the above factors, almost all of the stakeholders indicated that when responding to domestic violence matters, they often used their professional judgement, referred to at various stages as 'gut feelings, 'instinct', 'radar system' and 'sixth sense'. Practitioners indicated that their knowledge and prior experiences in the field assisted them to make decisions about risk, identify how ready the victim/offender was to receive treatment and then how to take the first steps in responding to the client. While information obtained through risk assessment tools and research were seen as useful, they were perceived as conceptual and theoretical, while their professional judgement was seen as being based in reality.

How could domestic violence typologies be integrated into practice?

While most stakeholders had no plans to integrate domestic violence typologies into their day-to-day work practices in the immediate future, many (n=16) had suggestions for how these conceptual frameworks could be amended so they were of more relevance and use to the sector. First, it was argued by some professionals (n=8) that information concerning intervention and treatment should be integrated into domestic violence typologies. In other words, once it has been determined where an offender 'fits' in a typology, there should be guidance about effective approaches for responding to their needs, as well as recommendations about appropriate follow-up work or checks.

Another suggestion put forward by professionals, particularly those in the victim support space, was that domestic violence typologies could be more holistic in scope and in particular, include information about victims (n=9) and to a lesser extent, their children (n=2). It was suggested that integrating victim information into domestic violence typologies would facilitate a proactive rather than reactive response to domestic violence matters, with less focus on crisis intervention and management, and

more on prevention (ie responding to low-risk cases for the purpose of reducing high-risk cases). Factors that may inform the development of a victim typology include:

- dependency on the offender;
- level of fear by victim towards offender;
- the role of children as a reason for remaining in the violent situation; and
- dual victim and offender roles.

Conversely, one stakeholder (also a victim support worker) believed that including information about victims in domestic violence typologies could be detrimental because it may present opportunities for 'victim-blaming'.

Professionals also suggested that translating domestic violence typologies into simple screening tools may assist practitioners to identify how specific offenders and incidents should be categorised (n=3). They noted that their ability to apply the labels identified through domestic violence typologies were potentially limited, as they did not have the necessary skills or tools to undertake this process. Information regarding the nature and level of training and education that the professionals who were interviewed as part of this study had received throughout their careers was not available as part of this analysis and so it is unclear whether this had any impact on these identified concerns. Future research may benefit from analysing the impact of prior training and education on the use of domestic violence typologies to inform decision-making processes and practitioner's feelings of comfort applying labels identified in these frameworks.

Discussion

While a small number of stakeholders believed that domestic violence typologies could help guide decision-making processes by assisting different parties to identify the risk associated with individual offenders and incidents, generally speaking, the majority were either dismissive of the potential benefits associated with using domestic violence typologies in the field or thought the potential consequences associated with their use outweighed the benefits. The

analysis did not show that the perceptions of professionals differed depending on their disciplinary background.

The concerns raised by stakeholders in relation to using domestic violence typologies were largely consistent with those raised by commentators reporting elsewhere and research more generally. For example, professionals' concerns regarding whether they had the necessary skills to apply labels identified through domestic violence typologies appear to be validated by research, which has found that some practitioners do have difficulty categorising domestic violence offenders consistently and accurately (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Huss & Ramsey 2000; Lohr et al. 2005).

Stakeholders identified a number of negative consequences associated with the use of domestic violence typologies, including the underestimation of risk associated with a particular offender and the 'pigeonholing' of their clients. Another possible consequence of using domestic violence typologies in the field, which was not raised by stakeholders, is that the applied labels could have a stigmatising effect for the offender and victim. This is particularly likely to occur if the label suggests that the offender has a mental illness such as psychopathy (Huss & Langhinrichsen-Roling 2000).

None of the professionals who participated in the interviews and focus groups said they were currently using domestic violence typologies to inform their work practices. Instead, consistent with other research that has examined the factors that influence professional decision-making processes (Cert & Wilcockson 1996), most of the stakeholders said they used other information to decide how they should respond to individual domestic violence matters, including their intuition, clinical judgement and practice experience.

While professional decision-making processes have previously been conceptualised as less rational than strategic or structural risk assessment processes, Cert and Wilcockson (1996: 672) argued that intuition involves the use of a

sound, rational, relevant knowledge base in situations that, through

experience, are so familiar the person has learned how to recognize and act on appropriate patterns.

Consequently, a professional's intuition should not be undervalued and seen as simply 'guesswork'.

However, there are many benefits associated with evidence-based models of decision making, which involve 'combining the knowledge arising from one's clinical expertise…and research evidence within the context of available resources' (Thompson et al. 2004: 68). The more evidence-based approaches include domestic violence typologies such as those described in Table 1 and it should be noted that theorists have themselves argued that such measures should not be taken at face value or viewed uncritically by professionals.

Alternatively, as suggested by a small number of professionals interviewed as part of this study, information provided through domestic violence typologies may be used not to change professional practice, but to *confirm* existing knowledge and processes (Thompson et al. 2004). In other words, practitioners may use domestic violence typologies as an evidence base for their existing decision-making processes and to confirm that their approaches are appropriate and justifiable.

Generally speaking, the findings from this study suggest that practitioners working in real-world contexts perceive domestic violence typologies as too abstract, risky and unwieldy to inform their everyday practice. However, professionals were able to make suggestions for the translation of typological research into everyday practice (the 'know-to-do' dilemma).

The suggestions put forward by stakeholders about how domestic violence typologies could be amended to maximise their relevance and usefulness were also consistent with other research in this space. For example, the idea that domestic violence typologies should be translated into simple and easy to use screening tools has been raised by other commentators (Capaldi & Kim 2007; Holtzworth-Munroe & Meehan 2004). One such tool, which was developed by Jaffe and colleagues (2008; the PPP Screening tool),

requires professionals to answer a series of questions grouped around the concepts of:

• *potency*—the 'degree of severity, dangerousness and potential risk of serious injury and lethality' (Jaffe et al. 2008: 504);

• *pattern*—the extent to which the violence is part of a pattern of control and domination; and

• *primary perpetrator*—if the violence is perpetrated by one person more so than the other.

The authors argue that the scores (referred to as low, medium and high) an individual offender achieves against these three dimensions should inform the professional's subsequent response. However, the guidelines around what low, moderate and high scores actually constitute are not provided and so it is unclear how this tool may be used in practice. Further, it has been suggested that 'cut-off' scores provided for tools like the PPP Screening tool may not be replicable across samples, meaning that each new context may require different scores and/or criteria (Holtzworth-Munroe & Meehan 2004).

Considering that most of the domestic violence typologies that have been developed so far have used US-based samples and data, the ability of practitioners to replicate domestic violence typologies and any related tools across a range of different contexts is of particular relevance to Australia. The generalisability of these international studies to the Australian (particularly Indigenous Australian) context may be limited given the significant differences between criminal justice systems, their related data collection and recording practices, as well as the local, contextual and cultural issues that shape understandings of domestic violence in Australia (McPhedran & Baker 2012; Wangmann 2011). For these reasons, using domestic violence typologies developed in non-Australian contexts to inform professional decision-making processes may be problematic and underpinned by a series of erroneous assumptions about the offender, offence and victim.

While some attempts have been made to develop specifically Australian domestic

violence typologies, they have typically been unable to identify a series of factors that differentiate between groups of offenders or incidents on a consistent basis (Richards et al. 2004). If domestic violence typologies were to be integrated into the everyday work of Australian domestic violence professionals, there could be some benefit in validating existing domestic violence typologies using Australian samples and data and adapting them where necessary.

Another point of similarity between the views of professionals interviewed as part of this study and of commentators more broadly concerns the inclusion of additional information into domestic violence typologies to provide a more holistic picture of domestic violence. Information that may be integrated into these models includes:

• details about the victim (ie matching groups of offenders with types of victims);

• details about other family members (in particular the children);

• situational factors that increase the likelihood of violence occurring; and

• developmental information about how the behaviours of different groups of offenders may change over time (Capaldi & Kim 2007; Dixon & Browne 2003; Jaffe et al. 2008).

An additional factor that may be integrated into domestic violence typologies and therefore increase their relevance and utility, is treatment and rehabilitation information. However, while this information could be of potential use to domestic violence professionals, particularly treatment practitioners, the dearth of research exploring the effect of differentiating between offenders on treatment outcomes means there is currently very little evidence to support its inclusion (Capaldi & Kim 2007; Richards et al. 2004; Saunders 1996). Further, information regarding the types of programs that are most appropriate for different offender groupings is only useful if these services are actually available and accessible. If the programs identified in domestic violence typologies are not available to professionals, an unintentional effect of integrating domestic violence typologies into everyday practice may be that practitioners manipulate the

criteria for differentiating between offenders so they may justify their referral decisions. Again, additional research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Although there is consistent support—both among the professionals interviewed as part of this study and commentators and researchers reporting elsewhere—for the inclusion of victim information in domestic violence typologies, it is unclear how this may be facilitated in practice. Potentially, victims themselves should be asked to provide this information, although this raises a number of issues particularly relating to the further traumatisation of victims.

Some guidance may be taken from domestic violence-specific risk assessment tools, some of which require the practitioner to elicit information directly from the victim. The Danger Assessment requires the victim to complete a calendar documenting their partner's abusive and violent behaviour over the preceding 12 month period and a 20 item assessment. The victim's responses to these two components are then used by practitioners to determine risk of intimate partner homicide. Other risk assessment tools/processes and guidelines (eg the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment guide) require the practitioner to interview the victim directly to elicit information about the offender's future of violence.

While these risk assessment tools may provide some guidance around how the views and perceptions of victims may be included in typological assessments, they do not provide any information about how practitioners should interpret this information and how to reconcile potentially conflicting information provided by the victim and offender and other related parties. As highlighted previously, the interpretation of information for the purpose of differentiating between domestic violence offender types is a broader concern identified in relation to domestic violence typologies that is not easily reconciled and requires further research and consultation with practitioners.

Conclusion

While theoretical and empirical domestic violence typologies have facilitated the development of more nuanced and sophisticated understandings of domestic violence as a heterogeneous phenomenon, their relevance and implications for practice are relatively unclear. The potential benefits for practice include the development of more sophisticated risk assessment tools, better screening of families to enable the referral of a subset of domestic violence affected families to ADR processes and services—where it is safe to do so—and the potential to better match offenders with treatment services that address the underlying causes of their behaviour. Potential issues include the underestimation of risk and pigeonholing offenders.

Regardless of whether it would or would not prove beneficial to integrate domestic violence typologies into the day-to-day work of domestic violence professionals, it is unclear how this process may be implemented in practice. There are a number of potential barriers to the integration of domestic violence typologies into the decision-making processes of domestic violence professionals. For example, there is a perception by professionals interviewed for this study that domestic violence typology groupings and criteria are inflexible and do not satisfactorily account for outliers and anomalies. This is of course a common problem for actuarial measures across fields—they are designed to encapsulate a population and there will always be outliers that do not fit the standard profile. There is also a question about the transferability of domestic violence typologies into different contexts and whether practitioners have access to the information necessary to appropriately classify offenders and when they do, if they have the skills to do so accurately and consistently. While the latter issue may be addressed through additional training and education, some evidence has found that even highly trained practitioners (advanced clinical psychology PhD graduate students) have experienced difficulty applying labels consistently (Langhinrichsen-Roling, Huss & Ramsey 2000).

While there may be some benefit in communicating the benefits of domestic violence typologies to professionals more effectively and the provision of actual training in using domestic violence typologies in practice, there would also be some benefit in conducting additional research to understand how domestic violence typologies may be integrated effectively into practice. Research might usefully assess the impact of differentiating between offenders for criminal justice and treatment outcomes, and for the victim, offender and their families, and validating domestic violence typologies using Australian data and samples. Perhaps then the purpose and promise of domestic violence typologies, beyond their conceptual importance, may be realised in everyday responses to prevent violence and to work more effectively with families and offenders.

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