



INFORMATION BULLETIN June 2018

ICAT Research Project: Summary of Results

INTRODUCTION

An Interagency Case Assessment Team (ICAT) is a partnership of local agencies that includes police, child welfare, anti-violence programs including community- and police-based victim services, Stopping the Violence counselling and outreach and/or transition houses, healthcare providers, and other agencies. Within communities, this group of service providers collectively receives referrals of suspected highest risk cases of domestic violence and collaboratively identifies risk, and develops victim safety plans and offender management plans with the goal of increasing safety for all.

The first ICAT was established in the North Okanagan in 2010. Since that time, fifty communities in British Columbia have developed an ICAT and are currently reviewing highest risk cases of domestic violence.

In 2015, a research project was undertaken by the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC), with funding from the Law Foundation of BC and Legal Services Society, in order to better understand the access to justice and increased safety related outcomes that ICATs are achieving.

This information bulletin summarizes the results of that research project.

RESEARCH TEAM AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The research was conducted and reported by Dr. Bryan Kinney and Stephanie Lau of Simon Fraser University's Criminology Department. We refer to them through this document as the "Research Team". Contributions were also made by Dr. Chris Giles and Dr. Stephanie Dawson, also in SFU's Criminology Department and Dr. Margaret Jackson of the FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children. RCMP-related support was provided by Tara Haarhoff of the RCMP "E" Division Data Analysis Unit. The Institute for Canadian Urban Research Studies (ICURS) laboratory housed the research in order to meet the stringent privacy and security requirements of the project. All other aspects of the research project were managed by a staff team at EVA BC and CCWS.

The ICAT Research Oversight Committee met regularly to provide advisory support to the Research Team. Represented on the Oversight Committee were: Ministries of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Children and Family Development, the Provincial Office on Domestic Violence, RCMP "E" Division Headquarters, and the Ending Violence Association of BC.

Please note that this document is for general information only. It is not intended to be and should not be relied upon as legal advice. (March 2018).

BACKGROUND AND SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR THE CREATION OF ICATs

In 2010, the BC Provincial Government mobilized three ministries (Public Safety and Solicitor General, Attorney General, and Children and Family Development) to update the Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) policy (Government of British Columbia, PSSG, 2010).

The overarching goal of the policy update was to focus the combined efforts of and build upon existing partnerships between government, the anti-violence and healthcare sectors, criminal justice professionals, and local service providers in order to comprehensively address the issues of intimate partner violence. More specifically, the policy update was intended to respond to the then newly struck British Columbia Provincial Domestic Violence Action Plan.

The VAWIR policy explicitly recognized “the need for integrated cross-agency policies as a key component of an effective response strategy to domestic violence” (Government of British Columbia, PSSG, 2010, p.1). This acknowledgement of the need for integration across sectors and agencies formed the impetus for creating interagency teams of persons who could collect, maintain and evaluate the most serious of domestic and intimate partner violence cases, and then together make safety planning recommendations to partner agencies such as the police, child protection, anti-violence services, and so on. The ICAT model was designed for this purpose: to accept suspected highest risk case referrals and collaboratively review risk factors, develop victim safety plans and offender-focused risk management strategies.

INTERAGENCY CASE ASSESSMENT TEAMS AND THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Each ICAT team is comprised of a consortium of agencies/sectors that play a specific role in responding to incidents of intimate partner violence that have occurred within their community. The mandate of each team is to provide coordinated and collaborative risk identification, develop or enhance safety plans and options for victims designed to increase safety, as well as create plans to ensure support and management of suspects. This is achieved through coordinated information sharing (which was, in 2010, brand new in BC justice circles) and collaboratively created interventions (also new to BC justice processes). By promoting access to justice, the primary goal is to ensure positive outcomes and increases in safety of all parties (i.e. victims, children and other “collaterals”, perpetrators, and other community members) involved in incidents of highest-risk domestic violence.

The research project was designed to capture information about how the numerous ICAT teams operate across the province, who they serve and the outcomes of their interventions. More specifically, the research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Which of the 19 risk factors outlined in the BC Summary of Domestic Violence Risk Factors are most associated with the ICAT cases studied?
2. Who is being served by the ICATs?
3. How do the ICATS handle such cases?

Guided by these questions, the primary objective of the research project was to obtain data pertaining to the ICAT teams' main processes, which include case meetings, risk identification, case management planning, as well as to measure specific outputs and outcomes for victims and offenders, including risk management.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPATING ICATS AND DATA COLLECTED

The twenty-two ICATs that existed at the beginning of the research project were approached to participate in this study. Just over half (12 teams) agreed to participate. The teams represent British Columbia's "Island", "North", and "Interior" as defined by health regions. ICATs were not solicited from the metropolitan regions surrounding Vancouver as these teams share complexities deserving of separate study.

The data covers ICAT files from 2014 through to the end of 2017. The twelve participating ICATs were asked to fill out four surveys that were developed for the research project related to:

1. Team composition
2. Case review meetings
3. Case summary
4. Closed-case follow up

The data collection process was complex, involving over 400 variables and 4 separate coding frameworks. The main instrument (the *Case Summary Information Coding Sheet*) is itself an involved data collection schematic with over 300 variables, including case, victim, offender and file/review and other processing details.

The majority of case summaries were completed by police members. These case summaries are a form of self-report, in that the research team was not permitted to see or otherwise work with the original data because of the rigorous RCMP access to data policies. As such, we are neither able to assess the accuracy nor the degree of internal consistency (e.g. between each ICAT). While this is often a limitation for research projects like this one, we feel that this risk is largely mitigated by the nature of police officers' typical workload and daily practice of professional maintenance and working with complex files.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Twelve communities in BC with ICATs provided a total of 165 comprehensive file reviews involving 165 perpetrators, approximately 225 adult victims, and an estimated 223 children. *Children and youth were identified as "at risk" in over 75% of the cases submitted.*

The most striking findings involve the consistently high rates of reporting for most or all of the 19 risk factors set out in the 2010 VAWIR Policy. This suggests that the ICATs are, indeed, handling serious, "highest risk" cases of intimate partner violence.

ICAT client demographics are consistent with current empirical data that the majority of IPV/DV victims self-identify as female, and reported perpetrators are overwhelmingly male.

Risk Factor	Prevalence
Stalking/jealousy	95%
Criminal violence history	84%
Previous DV history	93%
Substance use	95%
Employment/financial instability	80%
Mental illness	88%
Suicidal ideation/threats	76%
Access to weapons	86%
Threats	94%
Strangulation / biting	80%

A little over half of the perpetrators (55.2%) did not breach orders during life of ICAT file. That in itself is extremely promising as breaches are commonplace in high risk IPV cases. A little over half of the cases (54%, n=89) included a “Report to Crown Counsel”, a preliminary step in British Columbia for the laying of a charge and initiating court proceedings. This is another important strength that can be linked to having information collected and shared across many sectors, thereby improving police investigations and supporting the role of Crown.

Significant Findings Overview

- 165 case reviews were submitted
- Overwhelming presence of all 19 risk factors
- 90% of victims gave informed consent
- Only 6% withdrew consent
- 75%+ of cases involved children at risk
- Consistent agency/sector participation

Gaining informed consent of the victim is a key tenet of ICAT work. The victim's active participation in sharing information about the risk factors and in developing the risk management plan is believed to help increase her safety. In this study, 90% of victims gave informed consent for the ICAT to review their case and only 6% withdrew consent during the life of the ICAT file.

Consistent participation across all relevant sectors was a factor in this study. Having law enforcement, probation, anti-violence agencies, health, social assistance, and others at the table ensures that all the information needed to thoroughly assess a case is present and that the risk review is not lacking crucial pieces of information.

CONCLUSION

This study captures a 'moment in time' of the work of ICATs in the province of British Columbia. There exists a consensus that ICATs are effective in responding to highest-risk domestic violence cases. In particular, ICAT members report being actively engaged in the collaborative justice process and believe their teams provide benefits to highest-risk domestic violence victims, perpetrators and their families, including lowering incidents of repeat offending.

ICATs offer a more complete and effective response to domestic violence, as compared to the traditional, uncoordinated criminal justice and community initiatives. It is undeniable that the efforts of ICATs have contributed to a reduction in the number of IPV related deaths in BC.

Collaborative approaches are recognized by the BC Coroner's Service as the most effective "best practice" response to domestic violence. The growth in demand for interagency collaboration highlights the need for ongoing support and specialized training. In short, this research study provides a glimpse into the profound impact ICATs have on strengthening the response to IPV in BC, on increasing community confidence in public safety services (reducing risk and harm) and by extension, alleviating some of the burden on the criminal justice system (highest risk IPV/DV cases).

FUTURE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Assessing ICATs or other cross-sector community response strategies is, like the work that they do, complex. The anecdotal evidence is clear: ICATs are a positive influence for those victimized by intimate partner violence. This report tracks more quantitative measures of the outputs of ICATs and something of the complexity of the services they offer, especially through the risk management plans.

Future studies may consider reduced recidivism rates as a measure of success and tracking the instances of increased information sharing between sectors, such as within police services and across service sectors (e.g. anti-violence, child protection, health, education, and other related agencies).

REFERENCES RELIED UPON IN CREATING THIS INFORMATION BULLETIN:

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<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/death-review-panel/intimate-partner-violence2010-2015.pdf> BC Coroners Service.

Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Children and Family Development, British Columbia's Provincial Domestic Violence Plan, Second Annual Report, 2016.

Interagency Case Assessment Team Best Practices: Working Together to Reduce the Risk of Domestic Violence Second Edition 2017

LEGISLATION AND POLICIES REFERENCED

Government of British Columbia. (2010). *Violence against women in relationships policy*.

Retrieved December 19, 2016 from: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/vs-info-for-professionals/info-resources/vawir.pdf>