

Reading the Signs

For participants in the MNADV's Lethality Assessment Program for First Responders

New Quarterly Newsletter

This newsletter is a product of the Maryland Lethality Assessment Participants' Committee (LAPC). The Committee, which is coordinated by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, monitors the domestic violence Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) in Maryland and sets the standards for it. The Committee consists of agencies and providers participating in the LAP and others who have been involved in its development.

Lethality Participants

The following first responders are currently using the LAP:

- Kent County Sheriff's Office, Queen Anne's County Sheriff's Office, and the Cambridge Police Department working with the Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence
- Harford County Sheriff's Office and the Sexual Assault/Spouse Abuse Resource Center (SARC)
- Hagerstown PD and CASA
- Frederick PD and Heartly House
- Garrett County Sheriff's Office and the Dove Center

New Participants in 2006

In 2006 the LAP will be implemented by:

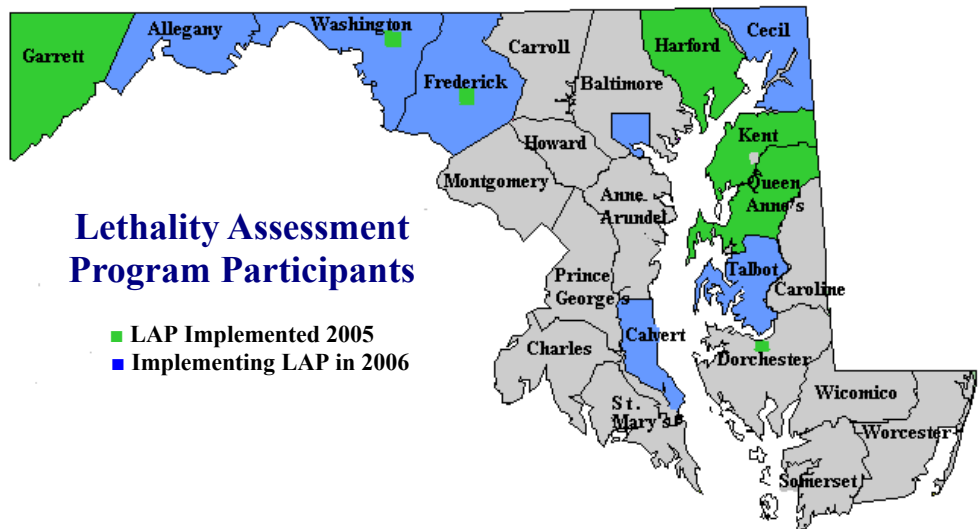
- Washington County Sheriff's Office
- Easton Police Department
- Talbot County Sheriff's Office
- Frederick County Sheriff's Office
- Baltimore City Police and the House of Ruth
- Calvert County Sheriff's Office, Calvert County State's Attorney's Office, and the Crisis Intervention Center
- Cecil County Sheriff's Office, Elkton PD, North East PD, Rising Sun PD, Perryville PD and the Family Violence Program in Cecil County
- Allegany County Sheriff's Office, Cumberland Police Department and the Family Crisis Resource Center

First Participants' Meeting Held

The Lethality Assessment Participants' Committee (LAPC) met for the first time on December 8, 2005, in Centreville. The committee heard reports from participating members, and formed a subcommittee to integrate the Lethality Screen questions into the the Domestic Violence Supplemental Report used by law enforcement. Dr. Jackie Campbell discussed an article she recently published on lethality assessment (available at www.ndvfri.org under "publications"), and Dr. Dan Webster told the committee about an article he is writing on the Maryland Lethality Screen.

The meeting included representatives from the agencies that have adopted the LAP: Lt. Dwayne Embert and Sgt. Jim Williams (QACSO), Lt. Brian Kirby (KCSO), Lt. Wayne Bromwell (CPD), Jeanne Yeager, Jodi Kennedy and Ron Russum (Mid-Shore), Cpl. Rich Miller (HCSO), Susan Fisher and Marie Mastracco (SARC), and Lt. Tom Chase (FPD). Others committee members who attended were Dr. Jackie Campbell and Dr. Dan Webster (Johns Hopkins University), Mike Cogan (Anne Arundel SAO), and Michelle Mueller and Dave Sargent (MNADV).

The second meeting will be held on April 20, 2006 in Bel Air.



The Protocol: When to Initiate a Screen



The lethality screen should be administered when a current or previous **intimate relationship** is involved and the first responder:

- believes an **assault** has occurred,
- senses the potential for **danger** is high,
- is responding to **repeat** names or location, or
- simply **believes** one should be conducted.

The Numbers Speak for Themselves

What the Numbers Say

Jackie and Dan applied the LAP screen to their national data set and reported that **87%** of those who were killed by their abusers and **92%** of those nearly killed would have screened in at high danger.

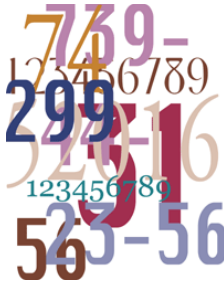
For first responders these numbers mean that

- it is vital to conduct a Lethality Screen when the danger standards are present,
- you should assume that victims who “screen in” are in extreme danger, and that their abusers are extremely dangerous and
- first responders should **take action**.

And **taking action can make a difference**.

How do we know?

- **Only 4%** of women who were killed by their abusers ever received domestic violence program services
- The risk of assault was reduced by **60%** if a victim went into shelter
- At least **50%** of victims who were killed had prior contact with law enforcement



The Most Important Number:
0
Homicides in the Participating Jurisdictions Since Implementation

Meeting Outcomes

The Tally

In Kent County, Queen Anne’s County, and Cambridge, between October 1 and December 7, 2005:

- 23 screens were administered
- 15 victims screened in (65%)
- 8 of those who screened in spoke with a counselor (53%)

Reaching Out to New Jurisdictions

The initial reports from jurisdictions that have implemented Lethality Assessment are consistent with the results from the pilot study, and indicate that law enforcement agencies can manage the number of screens they will get. However, some participants noted that implementation by additional agencies in their jurisdictions would be needed to ensure that lethality is assessed on all domestic violence calls. In that regard, we applaud the efforts of **Ron Russum of Mid-Shore** to recruit all law enforcement agencies in Mid-Shore’s five county area, and **Don Pfouts of Cecil County’s Family Violence Program**, who obtained commitments from virtually all law enforcement agencies in Cecil County.

New Items Programs Should Track

- Did victims know of domestic violence services previously?
- Did victims who did not come in for services immediately eventually come in?

New Subcommittee

Because of requests to integrate the Lethality Screen into the Domestic Violence Supplemental Report, a subcommittee was formed to attempt to do that. The subcommittee will meet at the YWCA in Arnold on February 15th.

An Effective Response

These numbers say that domestic homicides can be prevented. The Lethality Screen and Protocol offer specific ways to prevent homicides. How?

Your presence on the scene provides you with an important opportunity to encourage victims to seek assistance which has been shown to save lives.

Officers should strongly encourage—never demand—victims **to speak with a counselor**.

Counselors should strongly encourage those victims **to seek services**.

This is what Lethality Assessment is all about—getting victims in high danger access to services in order to reduce their risk. And always remember—just because a victim doesn’t screen in doesn’t mean she/he is not in danger! The numbers say that your presence, your taking action, and the victim getting services make a difference.

Make a difference!

Remember To . . .

Apply the Principles

Be committed to making Lethality Assessment work. Supervisors should:

- Remind officers that they are dealing with potential homicides and they should be ready to **“go the extra mile.”**
- Instruct officers to **go back** (at a safe time and location) to conduct a lethality screen if they did not or could not initiate one on the scene.



Keep current

Read Dr. Campbell’s article, *“Lethality Assessment Approaches: Reflections on Their Use and Ways Forward,”* at www.ndvfri.org under “Publications”. Concerning lethality assessments tools, she states that: “However much we may worry about their lack of perfection in prediction, the way forward is to continue to improve, refine, and test their accuracy.”

Let us hear...about any stories that had positive or negative outcomes and whether they resulted in improved communication.



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