

The Adolescent Domestic Battery Typology Tool

Executive Summary

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Models for Change

All young people should have the opportunity to grow up with a good education, get a job and participate in their communities. Creating more fair and effective juvenile justice systems that support learning and growth and promote accountability can ensure that every young person grows up to be a healthy, productive member of society.

Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice, a MacArthur Foundation initiative, began by working comprehensively on juvenile justice reform in four states, and then by concentrating on issues of mental health, juvenile indigent defense, and racial and ethnic disparities in 16 states. Through collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Models for Change expanded its reach and its work of replicating and disseminating successful models for juvenile justice reform to 40 states.

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There has been an increase in the number of youth referred to the juvenile justice system for charges related to abusing their parents. The Adolescent Domestic Battery Typologies Tool (ADBTT) was developed over the span of five years to provide a greater understanding of these youth. It was designed using a combination of the available research literature, a multi-site validation study, and clinical experience to fill a niche in the assessment of a population that has not been well understood. This assessment tool provides a structured framework to help inform case processing, dispositional, and treatment decisions based on an assessment of youths' risk for future Adolescent Domestic Battery (ADB). Implementation of the ADBTT early in the juvenile justice process should lead to diverting the "right" youths away from formal processing with minimum intervention.

Significance and Benefits

The increasing prevalence of ADB has prompted more research and thinking around this issue in order to understand the underlying dynamics and identify the most effective services and supports to help both youth and their families. Typical responses to ADB rely on the adult intimate partner violence model, which typically favors separation of the parties and sole blame on the perpetrator. These responses fail to treat ADB as a family systems issue by focusing only on the youth and often place unnecessary strain on detention facilities and out of home placements.

Indeed, there are many aspects of an adolescent's abuse on a parent that differ from domestic violence directed towards an intimate partner on which many of our policies were based. In many families, ADB involves a pattern of aggression between the same parties (family members) in which there is not always a clear delineation between the victim and perpetrator, even within the same incident. The violence can appear reciprocal. Frequently it is the family that defines ADB and determines if it has occurred. Family expectations around acceptable behavior and the current situation may impact how behavior is identified and reported. Similarly, the *dynamics* of ADB differ from other forms of youth aggression (e.g., fighting, bullying, gang violence) because the youth has an emotional connection between himself and his victim, creating ambivalence over his or her feelings and his or her behavior. This connection, as well as the family's living arrangements, makes it difficult for the parties to separate, both emotionally and physically. In sum, ADB is a unique form of aggression and requires a specialized assessment that can guide the appropriate course of action.

With generous support from the MacArthur *Models for Change* (MfC) Initiative, three Illinois counties (Cook, DuPage, Peoria) set forth to develop and implement improved system responses to youth involved in domestic conflict and their families. Juvenile justice stakeholders in each of these counties found that the traditional approach of utilizing detention and formal court involvement was an ineffective means of achieving safety and holding youth accountable and did not adequately address the unique characteristics of ADB. In Illinois, for example, stakeholders found that despite 99% of these incidents resulting in either no injury or only minor injury, these youth were being placed into detention at nearly twice the rate of other offenders and were formally processed by the court at higher rates (Hartnett et al., 2012).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The development of this tool was guided by a number of important principles:

- ADB youth are different than adults engaged in intimate partner violence;
- Not all youth who enter the system for ADB are the same;
- ADB is predominantly a family problem rather than a youth-specific problem;
- Many of these youth suffer from mental health issues or are entangled in ongoing family cycles of violence and neglect, substance abuse, and criminal involvement;
- There are too few alternatives to formal system involvement or secure detention; and

- Based on actual risk of harm to others, some of these youth and families do not belong in the “delinquency” system at all.

BENEFITS

It is our hope that implementation of the Adolescent Domestic Battery Typologies Tool will result in:

- Increased use of diversion for youth who are charged with ADB with the “right” youth being diverted away from formal processing;
- Decreased use of detention as a means for separating youth from their parents; and
- Matching youth to appropriate interventions based on their characteristics (or ‘typology’) as opposed to ‘one size fits all’ treatment.

Purpose and Use of the ADBTT

The ADBTT allows for increased understanding of the differences among youth in this population along a risk continuum. The ADBTT is a reliable and valid tool that was designed to aid in dispositional and treatment planning by identifying youth at risk of committing another act of domestic battery. This innovative tool assigns youth to one of four distinct typologies, providing a framework to match dispositional responses with a youth’s risk level and characteristics in order to achieve better outcomes. The typologies are as follows:

- **Defensive** – *any* violence (not just the current incident) directed toward the parent has been in response to a physical threat by the parent.
- **Isolated incident** – violence was an isolated event of aggression born out of atypical family or individual stress. Without such stress youth may have chosen a more appropriate conflict resolution.

- **Family Chaos** – a pattern of events in which the youth’s behavior predictably spirals to the point of aggression in order to obtain his or her purposes and is characterized by inconsistent and unclear parental authority.

- **Escalating** – a pattern of behavior designed to intimidate, control and coerce the parent into giving into the youth’s demands and ultimately to shift parental authority to the youth, effectively establishing the youth in a position of control over the parent.

By assigning youth to the typologies, the ADBTT provides the basis for recognizing that all youth who commit domestic battery do not have the same risk level to reoffend and should be given different responses and interventions. For example, the continuum of classification categories identifies youth who could be effectively handled through system diversion. The assessment of risk may also be used to address level of supervision requirements for probation as well as potential out of home placement needs, including level of safety/security that is necessary.

Where Should It Be Implemented?

The ADBTT is designed as a pre-dispositional assessment instrument for use in juvenile justice settings. As such, it can be used at the time of arrest, upon admission to detention, in alternative domestic violence or crisis center settings, or as part of the court or probation intake process. Although the ADBTT can be used post-adjudication, it is recommended that the ADBTT be used pre-adjudication in order to assist in making diversion decisions prior to adjudication, as well as later dispositional decisions where applicable.

In some situations, the tool can also be used post-disposition, via a referral from the Court, when family violence has been identified as an issue in the dispositional or probation process. Although the tool was developed and validated for use in juvenile justice settings, it has the potential to be used in other related clinical and social service settings that deal with family violence, such as crisis centers, community mental health/family counseling agencies, and child welfare settings.

Who Is Eligible for Use?

The tool is appropriate for use with youth being charged with an act of family violence against a parent or caregiver. There may be occasions, however, when the nature of the situation (e.g., a mental health crisis, traumatic emotional or physical injury, or alcohol/drug impairment) may render an immediate assessment of this type impractical.

How Is It Completed and What Are the Resource Requirements?

The ADBTT is comprised of 30 items falling within eight domains. Items are rated based on a short interview with the youth, an interview with the parent, and collateral information (e.g., police reports, criminal and social histories, child welfare system records). The ADBTT may be supplemented with mental health screening, drug and alcohol screening, and screening of trauma-related symptoms as resources permit. The tool was designed to be administered by a wide variety of professionals, regardless of licensure; however, assessors should demonstrate competencies in adolescent development and family systems, motivation interviewing and basic trauma principles. The tool developers recommend assessors complete a specialized training workshop for the ADBTT but this is not required. Training can be requested through the NYSAP website at www.NYSAP.com.

The ADBTT manual is available for download free from www.NYSAP.com or <http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/index.html>. It summarizes the research on adolescents who abuse their parents, describes the development and validation of the ADBTT, explains how to administer and score the tool, and can be used to guide the implementation of the ADBTT in a juvenile justice or other child and family service setting.

How Was It Developed?

The development of the Adolescent Domestic Battery Typologies Tool was a product of the MfC Initiative, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Grant #13-103826-000-USP). The tool was created by the authors (a group of individuals working with youth charged with adolescent domestic battery), with the assistance of the National Youth Screening & Assessment Project (NYSAP), a technical assistance and research group dedicated to helping juvenile justice programs implement screening and assessment tools to identify youths' needs for behavioral health intervention and risk management.

The items of the ADBTT were originally written based on years of clinical observation and experience with these families as well as small scale pilot research study. The final version of the ADBTT was based on findings from the ADBTT Validation Study conducted in six jurisdictions across the US. This study has the largest reported sample of youth who have been arrested for an act of domestic battery toward a parent. The final tool and typologies were generated based on factor analysis and the items were all tested for their inter-rater reliability to ensure different types of assessors could rate the items of the assessment consistently. The sample of youth was tracked for an average of 10.6 months to determine whether the typologies validly predicted who was most likely to be charged with another act of domestic battery or to reoffend generally. The researchers also explored other characteristics of these typologies, such as whether they had mental health issues or a history of traumatic experiences.

The ADB Typologies are significant predictors of new charges for domestic violent acts. Youth falling into the Family Chaos and Escalating Types were significantly more likely to receive new petitions for a domestic violent act than the Defensive and Isolated Types. A progressive risk score (PRS) is also calculated. The PRS is an accurate indicator of individual youth in the lower risk Types who may progress in their risk level and commit domestic acts again if they do not receive intervention.

What Is the Value Added?

There are many screening and assessment tools available for use in juvenile justice settings to identify various types of behavioral health needs (e.g., mental health screening, potentially traumatic events screening) and to assess risk of reoffending. Before developing and releasing yet another tool into the juvenile justice field, it was important to determine whether the tool provided any unique information that the juvenile justice system would not get from other tools used in routine practice. The use of multiple tools in a juvenile justice setting, particularly in an early setting such as pre-adjudication intake, is essential but the number of tools should be kept to a minimum. Therefore, new tools are only necessary if the tool is filling an important gap.

The most important question in this context was whether the ADBTT added any value to general risk assessment tools for reoffending that are already used widely by juvenile justice agencies. The ADBTT was compared to several other popular and valid risk assessment tools (e.g., YASI, OYAS, ARNA) in its ability to predict youth who received new petitions for acts of domestic violence.

The ADBTT improved upon regular risk assessment tools with respect to predicting new domestic battery-related offenses because it was more discriminating. In addition, the information gathered for the ADBTT is more specific to ADB risk than a risk assessment tool for general reoffending, and therefore, should be better equipped to guide the appropriate ADB-related service modalities.

