

Introduction

Foundation: Case Processing

When a woman who is beaten in her home dials 911 for help, she activates a complex institutional apparatus. In the next few days as many as a dozen workers, representing six or seven different agencies and as many as five levels of government, will act on her “case.” For her, the call is more straightforward. She wants a large police officer, or several average-sized ones, to stand between her and the man who was hurting her, and to make him understand that if he doesn’t stop *now* something bad will happen to him.

As the call-taker asks her the basic questions—Where is he now? Can you get to safety? Does he have a weapon? Where are the children? Does anybody need an ambulance? Is there a security system in your building?—an observer is able to see the framework that guides the relationship between the caller and the dispatcher.

The dispatcher has a specific function: to get officers to the right place, aware of the immediate danger, as quickly as possible. The dispatcher is trained and organized to find and record the information needed to process the woman’s experience as a “case,” using a computer that assigns it an initial complaint number—the same number the officers will use when they write their reports. Behind the actions of each intervener is a web of institutional processes designed to standardize the way dozens of practitioners will respond to this woman’s experience as a criminal *case*.

The same set of circumstances will likely generate simultaneous cases in the civil protection order court, the child protection system, and the divorce court. The woman whose experience has become a series of cases will not necessarily see these multiple practitioners as distinct entities. Her life is a continuous lived experience, not a collection of separate or isolated cases. Each intervening practitioner, on the other hand, sees her situation through a specific functional lens which provides a narrow framework of concern and intervention.

Consider the experience of a woman named Rachel (a pseudonym), whose voluminous case file was analyzed by an Audit team. It began with a call to the police when Rachel’s partner assaulted her. Figure 1 shows the basic steps of processing her situation as a misdemeanor *criminal assault case*.

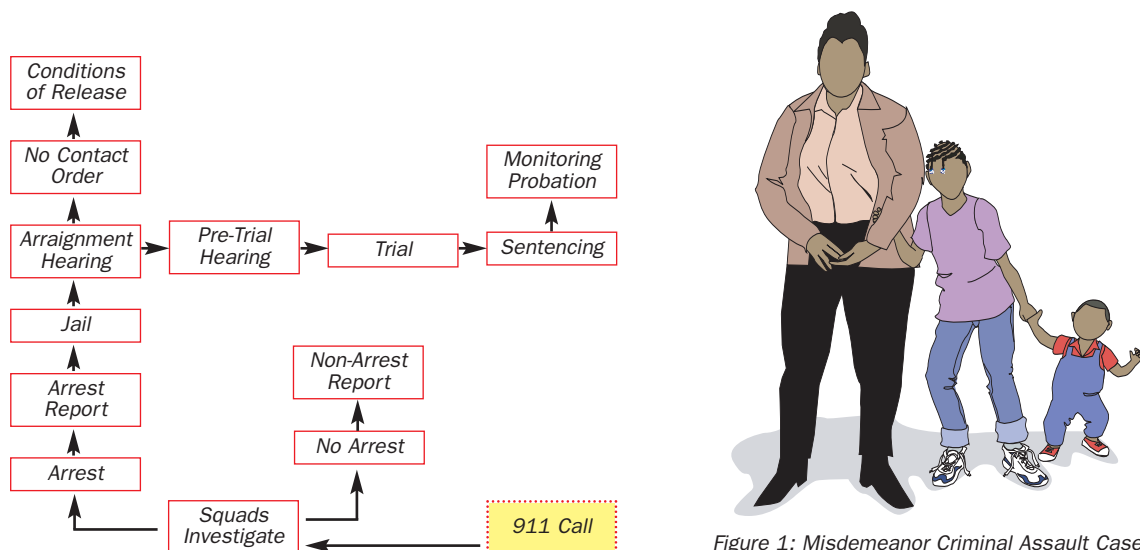


Figure 1: Misdemeanor Criminal Assault Case

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The police report was forwarded to the child protection agency, which opened its own separate investigation. Figure 2 depicts the steps in Rachel’s second *case* of institutional intervention.

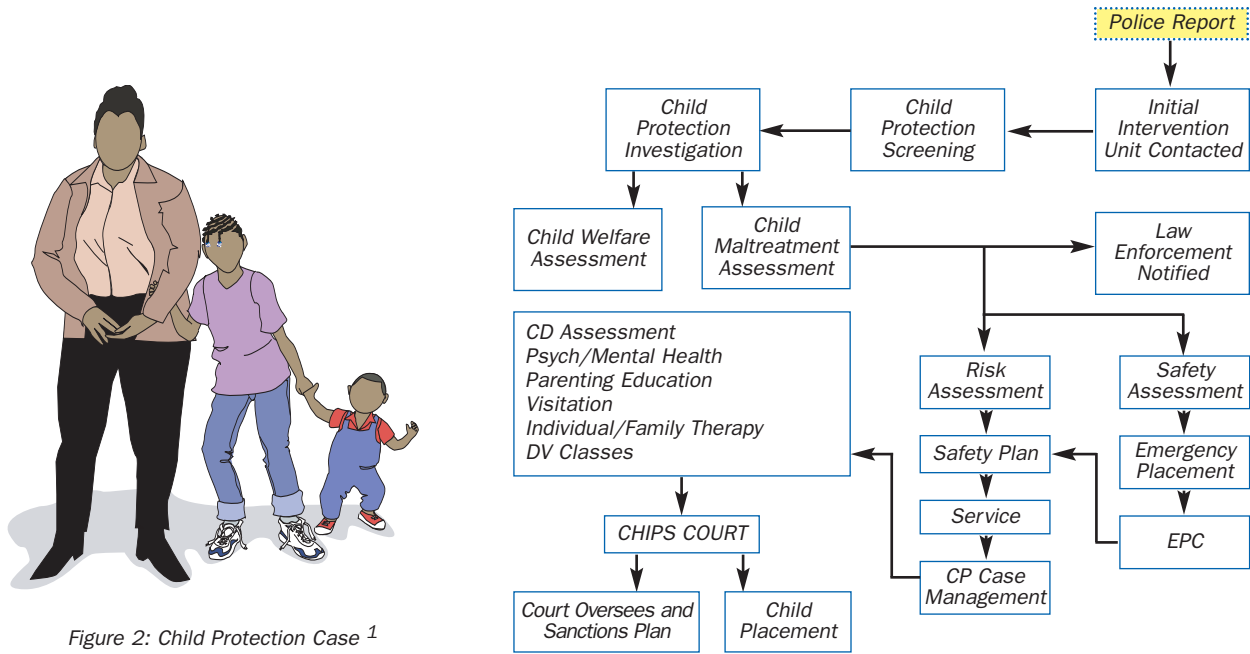


Figure 2: Child Protection Case 1

Because Rachael was the victim of ongoing abuse by her partner, the child protection worker presented her with two options: have him removed through a protection order or have her children placed in foster care. Figure 3 depicts the steps in issuing a protection order, the third separate legal proceeding and *case*.

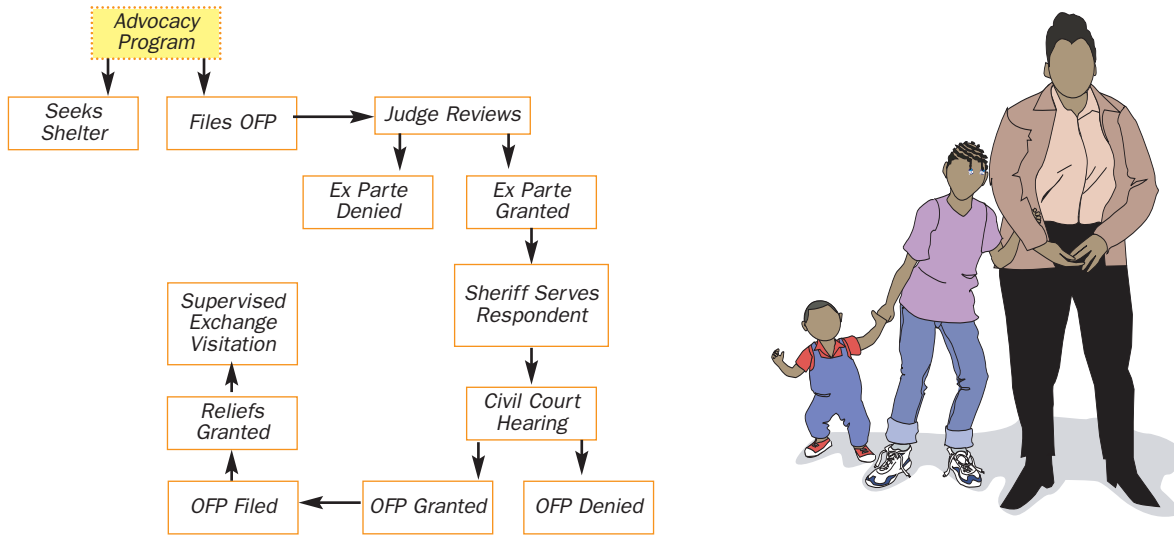


Figure 3: Order for Protection Case 2

¹ CD: chemical dependency; DV: domestic violence; CHIPS: child in need of protective services; EPC: Emergency Placement Care; CP: child protection

² OFP: order for protection

Because her partner had threatened to leave the state with the children in response to the protection order, the court also ordered supervised visitation, thereby launching a new *case* in the visitation center, Rachel's fourth case.

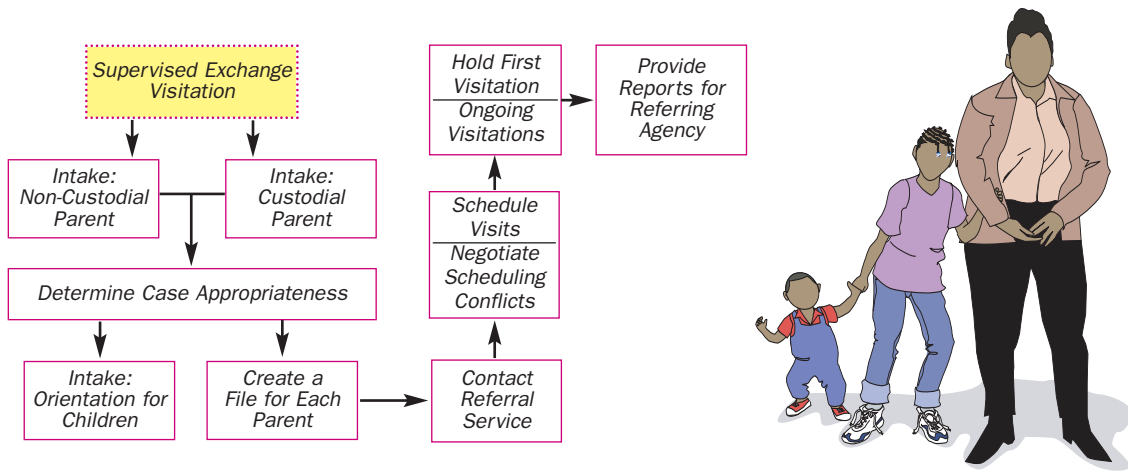


Figure 4: Supervised Visitation Case

Rachael filed for divorce, initiating a fifth legal process and *case*, with its own order for supervised visitation. Figure 5 illustrates case processing in the custody action.

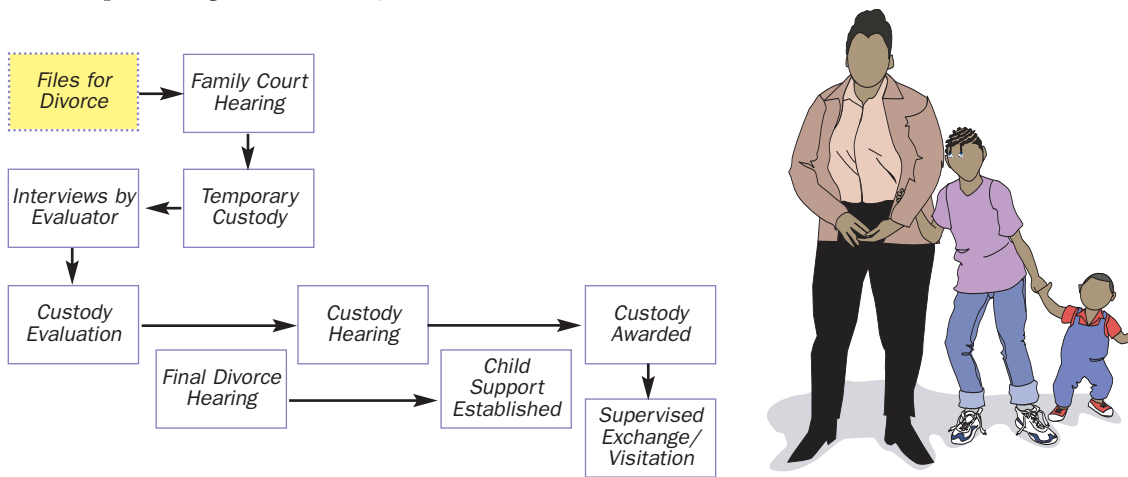
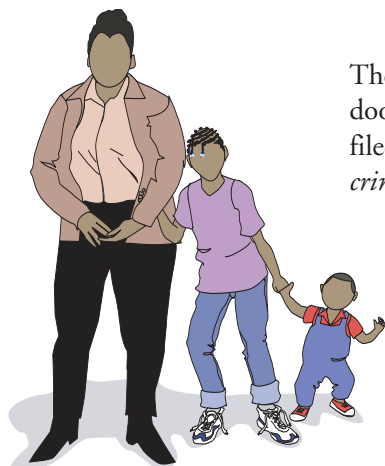


Figure 5: Custody Case



The day he was served with divorce papers, Rachel's partner broke down the door to her house, smashed her dishes, and shattered three windows. The police filed new charges and her landlord filed an eviction notice, initiating both a new *criminal case* (Figure 1) and an *eviction proceeding case* (Figure 6).

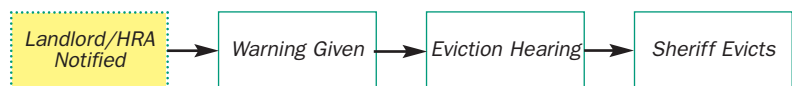


Figure 6: Eviction Proceeding Case ³

³ HRA: Housing and Redevelopment Authority

Charting the many institutional steps in the multiple case management of Rachel's experience reveals the enormity of the problems victims face when they turn to or are reluctantly drawn into public forms of intervention (Figure 7). Imagine this web of case processing overlaid with the realities of her everyday life: her son needs to get to band practice, her sister wants to plan a surprise party for their mother, she's missing too much time at work, she's behind with the bills and the phone has been shut off, her daughter wants a friend to sleep over, taxes are due, the kids both get chicken pox, they ask repeatedly about when their father is coming home, and her partner calls alternately wanting to work things out and threatening that she'll "be sorry."

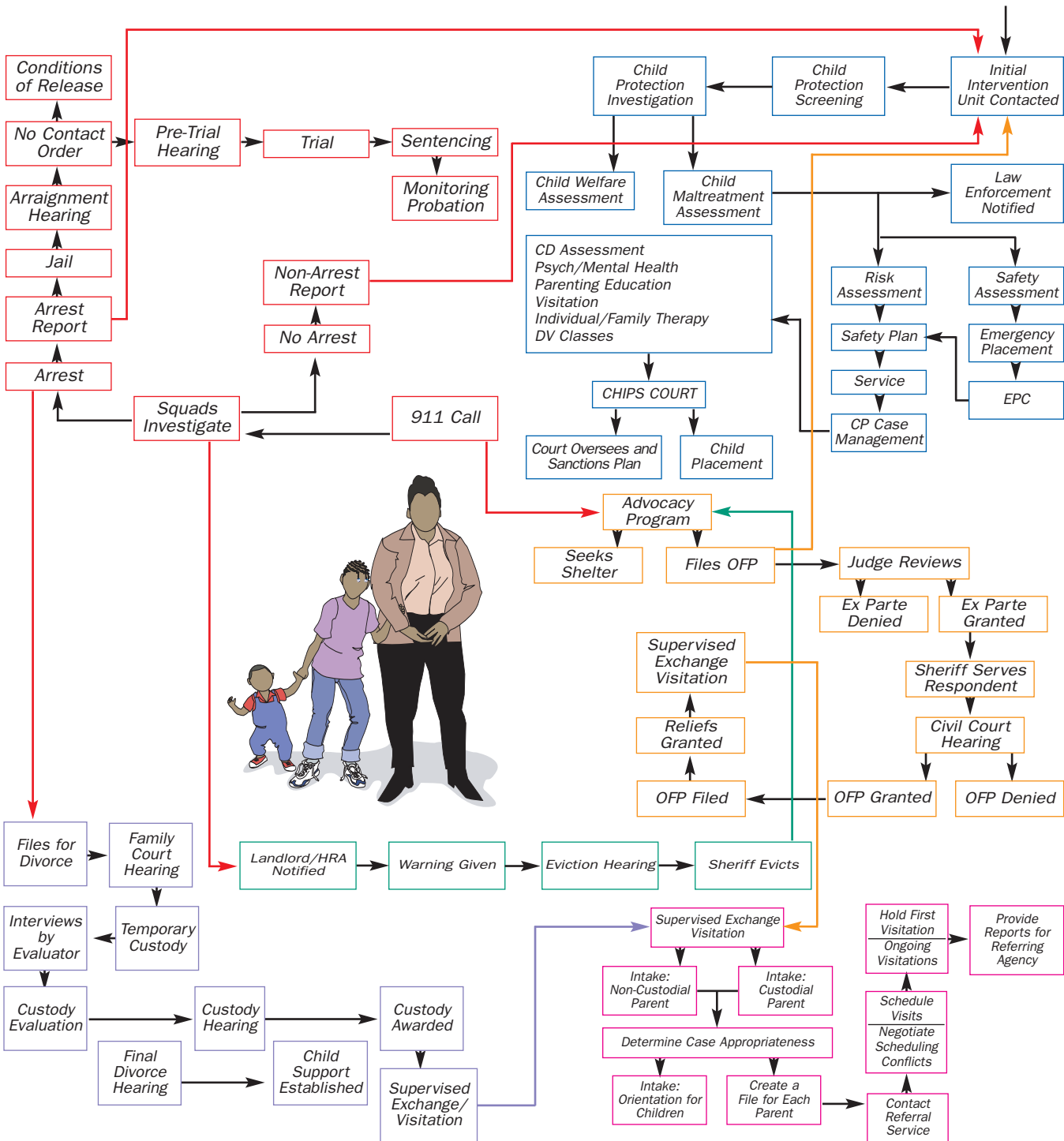


Figure 7: Institutional Intervention in Rachel's Life

Foundation: Audit Trails

Rachel's life has become a collection of cases: a criminal case, a child protection case, a civil protection order case, and so forth, all with their associated legal meanings. Through her experience we see how a victim of battering is drawn into parallel processes which address one set of life circumstances. The now dozens of practitioners who act on her case do so within the scope of their institutional functions. No one is responsible for drawing all of these interventions together in a way that addresses Rachel's particular circumstances. Each type of case has its own intervening framework.

None of the workers in these agencies decide independently how to process Rachel's experience as a case.

Understanding this is the foundation of the Praxis Safety Audit process: every worker is coordinated and organized to think about and act on cases in institutionally authorized or accepted ways. The Audit proceeds from eight primary methods that institutions use to standardize workers' actions (Figure 8). Most systemic problems will be found in one or more of these methods. Think of each as an *Audit trail* that points the way to discovering where victim safety is located as intervening agencies respond. Is safety at the center, on the margin, or somewhere in between? How did it get placed there?

Notice that none of these methods depend on the skills or attitudes of individual workers. While individuals can have a powerful impact on the safety of victims and offenders, the Safety Audit is an investigation of *institutional processes* rather than of the habits of particular practitioners

Until recently, none of these processes were designed with battering in mind, so your Audit will reveal countless opportunities, big and small, local and beyond, to make change.



Figure 8: Audit Trails

Foundation: Risk and Safety

Peoples' lives are complex and the factors that reinforce or diminish safety and risk are also complex. There is no universal victim of battering and there is no universal batterer. There is no single formula for securing a life free of danger, injury, and damage. In other words, there is no single formula for safety and accountability.

We often limit our notion of risk assessment to the danger that an individual batterer poses to the victim. In that regard, we ask: What types of intimidation and violence will he likely use? How severe is his future violence likely to be? What is the frequency of his abuse? Are there circumstances that might lead him to escalate in his violence? Who helps him maintain his system of abuse?

Aspects of culture can be a source of strength for victims of battering, but can also be used by a batterer to control. Interventions can pose their own risks, and when dominant culture institutions impose a "one-size-fits-all" response they cut off avenues of potential safety and support. We need to be equally mindful of the risks generated by a batterer, by a victim's immediate personal circumstances, by aspects of culture that increase her vulnerability, and by institutional responses. Figure 9 illustrates this essential framework of risk and safety. Figure 10 depicts the many identities of victims and offenders that should be continually present in our minds when crafting solutions to the problems *victims* face in securing safety.

While we've grouped elements of risk and safety under three headings, it is important to remember that these categories are not water-tight or exclusive. Nor are they complete representations of the complexity of individual lives. For example, class, race, and religion cross all three categories: institutions react differently to different cultural groups, and class, race, and religion also constitute an individual woman's immediate life circumstances.

A Safety Audit seeks to understand where and how and for which victims of battering an institutional practice is problematic. Hence, an Audit is always asking who is doing what to whom, with what impact and to what degree. As an Audit coordinator, be prepared to help your team keep the experiences of domestic violence victims at the center of your work. As you follow the Audit trails, keep these questions in mind: What are the implications for safety and accountability in how work is organized and coordinated at this point of intervention? What are the implications for immediate safety? From retaliation? From ongoing abuse and violence? From the unintended consequences of intervention?



What do we mean by culture?

Culture is the complex, symbolic frame of reference shared by a group of people. It takes in the totality of behavior patterns, art, beliefs, language, institutions, and other products of human work and thought. Its many aspects are dynamic, diverse, and often misperceived by those inside and outside the group.

To learn more: See Appendix D: *Assessing Social Risks of Battered Women*, by Radhia A. Jaaber and Shamita Das Dasgupta.

To learn more: *Safety Evaluations: The Meaning of Safety for Women and Children* is a five-part training series. Accompanying publications include *Creating Sustainable Safety for Battered Women*, by Shamita Das Dasgupta. (See the Praxis website at www.praxisinternational.org and click on Library).

For each woman and her children, what risks are generated by...

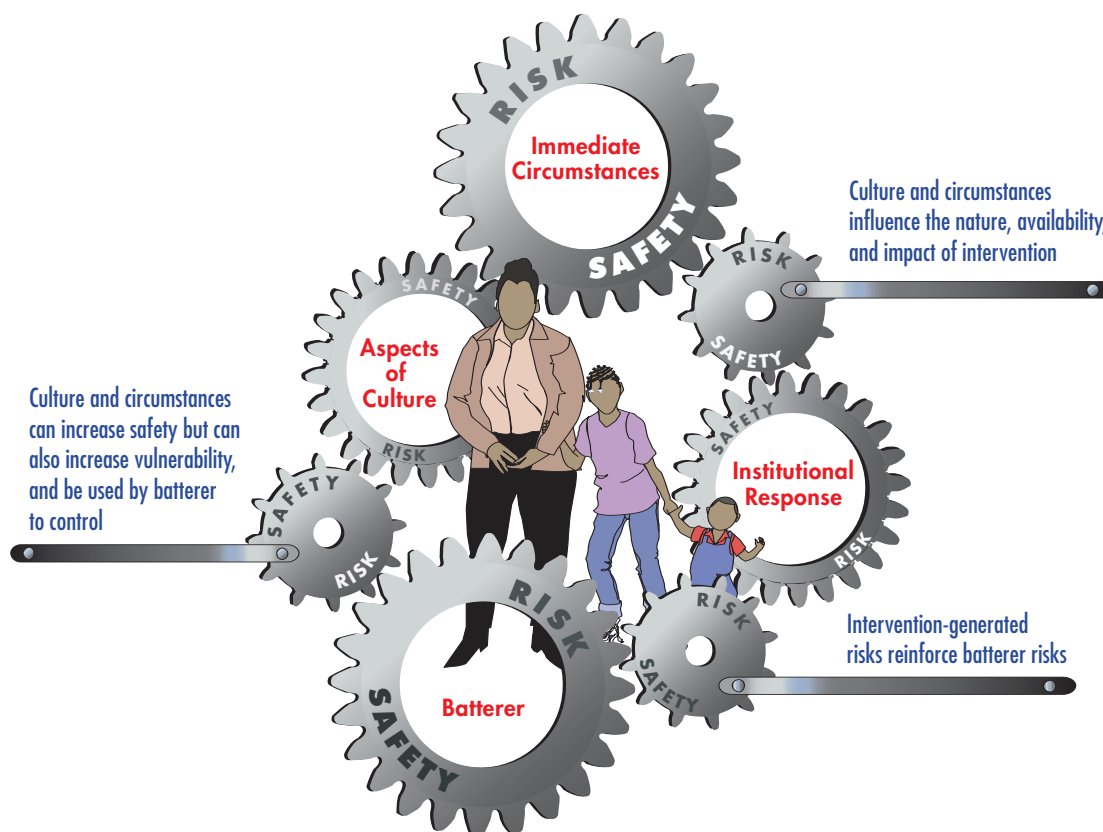


Figure 9: The Complexity of Risk and Safety ⁴

Immediate Circumstances	Aspects of Culture	Institutional Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration status • Limited English proficiency • Poverty • Lack of skills or education • Professional or social position • Abilities • Mental illness • Age • Sexual Identity • Alcohol/drug use • Rural isolation • Dependence on adults • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Nationality • Cultural Norms & Standards • Childhood Socialization • Community • Practices • Belief Systems • Ethnic Pride • Language • Class • Religion • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imposition of dominant culture response or adaptation to cultural needs • Promotion of victim autonomy or use of coercion • Anticipate or ignore unintended consequences of intervention (e.g. arrest, deportation) • Enhance or further damage victim's relationship with children • Make battering visible or ignore it in custody and visitation • Other
<div style="background-color: #ff00ff; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Batterer</div>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Violence • Sexual Violence • Psychological cruelty and manipulation • Economic abuse • Damages her relationship to children 		

What is the Risk?

- In the immediate situation?
- Of retaliation?
- Of ongoing abuse & violence?
- Of unintended consequences of intervention?

⁴ Figure 9 has been developed from several sources, including *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*, by Jill Davies, Eleanor Lyon, and Diane Monti-Catania (Sage Publications, 1998); *Assessing Social Risks of Battered Women*, by Radhia A. Jaaber and Shamita Das Dasgupta (Appendix B); and the Battered Women's Justice Project Criminal Justice Center.

Who are battered women? Women who are abused and battered are...



Figure 10: Who is a Battered Woman?

The following descriptions are drawn from real-life examples of women who have been battered. The purpose of this list is to illustrate the complex lives and experiences of women who have been battered, and remind us that there is no single universal victim of battering.

- Canadian Pakistani—homeless—with two teenage male children
- Firefighter, Irish-Catholic—separated, one child in college (blind) working in husband's family business
- Mexican migrant worker—local organizer with farm workers
- Baptist Sunday school teacher, black—married to church deacon
- School bus driver, white grandmother—abused and married for 25 years
- 32 years old, Algerian-French lesbian, losing custody of 8 year-old son, to former boyfriend
- Muslim social worker from former Yugoslavia—supervisor of Islamic social service agency
- Black Christian grandmother working as child care assistant in daycare
- 22 years old Tlingit factory worker—in a small town of 1,400 population with high unemployment rate
- First generation in the U. S.—17 years old, Chinese High school student—captain of volleyball team with college scholarship
- Undocumented house keeper from Guatemala with five children back home
- Emergency room nurse, Filipino arrested for stabbing husband

- 44 year old, European Hassidic Jew, Private elementary school principal—out of work due to physical injuries from battering
- Immigrant doctor from Afghanistan, speaks little English now working at hospital in housekeeping department
- Latina from Puerto Rico—stay at home mother—home schooling children, married to police officer
- 25 years old, white battered women’s counselor/advocate working in domestic violence agency
- 19 years old, Black, from Jamaica—theater actress—married to white manager twice her age
- White Mormon—intergenerational—grandmother, and mother were battered
- Nigerian (Ibo) felony criminal—sold drugs for batterer, implicated in murder
- 23 years old, white drug user with children—TANF recipient, enrolled in back to work program
- Young market executive, Indian immigrant with large corporate company newly wed, no children
- Young, white, store clerk, working three jobs, with no health benefits – fled from rural South Carolina
- 53 years old, Italian-Catholic, diagnosed with psychopathological disorder, and arrested for domestic violence assault
- Laotian newly wed, does not speak English, living with husbands, adult brother, mother and father
- White woman of uncertain age, drug addicted, has been living on the streets for three years
- Undocumented restaurant worker from Korea, living in a one bedroom apartment with three other couples
- Professor of law in a large university, white, alcoholic, living with husband, professor of philosophy at the same university
- Chinese immigrant, pregnant with girl for the second time
- 20 year old Latina gangmember, may be involved in armed robberies with boyfriend, who is the gang leader
- Mother of successful singer from South Africa, arrested for maiming husband of 45 years
- 52 year-old, white woman, prominent horse trainer who owns farms and businesses with her abusive husband
- 70 year-old Latina who called the police for the first time in a 50-year marriage
- Young white woman with a cognitive disability who is trying to live on her own for the first time and whose new boyfriend has been hitting her
- 35 year-old Black professional woman whose former boyfriend has been stalking her and calling her office
- 20 year-old Hmong mother of four children who has just relocated to the U.S. from refugee camp in Thailand
- Shoshone-Paiute woman, mother of two children, member of the school board
- Wife of military officer living in base housing overseas
- And...

How to use this Tool Kit

If you are using this tool kit you are already familiar with the overall structure of a Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit. Perhaps you have attended a Praxis training institute or read the manual.⁴ The tool kit has been developed as a reference for local Audit coordinators. It clarifies necessary steps and provides templates and worksheets for collecting, recording, and analyzing data.

- ❑ Tool #1: Case Processing Flow Charts: Use these charts to draw the steps in case processing, determining who intervenes where and how. They will help you locate a starting point for your Audit and figure out what kinds of interviews, observations, and text analysis your Audit should include.
- ❑ Tool #2: Audit Trails Framework and Worksheets: Use this material to focus on the key institutional methods that organize and coordinate workers to think about and act on cases. The heart of your Audit is the search for where and how these methods create a gap between the realities of a battered woman's life and the institutional response to her circumstances. Locating the source of these gaps identifies the problematic practices the Audit team seeks to change. Because the Audit process shows where and how the gap occurs, it can at the same time suggest specific solutions.
- ❑ Tool #3: Data Collection Guides and Videos: Use these training tools to describe and demonstrate the four types of Audit interviews and prepare your team for observations and text analysis. The videos show how to follow each of the eight Audit trails in your discussions and interviews with practitioners.
- ❑ Tool #4: Analysis Guidelines and Worksheets: Use these to help the Audit team discern key problem areas from the data and understand how they are produced by institutional case management practices. The worksheets provide templates for identifying problems and specific solutions.

Because this tool kit is a supplement that assumes a certain foundation and familiarity with Safety Audit planning, several items are *not* included. You will not find much information on the roles of the coordinator, team members, and Praxis consultants, or on forming your team, planning your Audit, securing inter-agency cooperation, and scheduling.

Note: See Appendix A for information about Safety Audit mechanics, logistics, and published reports available through the Praxis website, www.praxisinternational.org.

A Safety Audit is a process of listening, watching, reading, and analyzing in order to answer a question about how victims of domestic violence experience a particular point or points of intervention in ways that either enhance or diminish their safety and well-being. We are always looking for the **gap** between what people need and what intervening institutions provide. Our purpose is to minimize or eliminate that gap. This kit will help you and your team discover how different practices produce different problems for different battered women and what changes could solve those problems

⁴ *The Duluth Safety and Accountability Audit: A Guide to Assessing Institutional Response to Domestic Violence*, Ellen Pence and Kristine Lizdas, 1998.

To get familiar with this tool kit and share it with your team, we suggest that you take the following steps:

1. Read it through, keeping in mind the scope and focus of your Audit.
2. Watch the videos to see aspects of the safety Audit process in action.
3. Review the material with your team before scheduling interviews and observations.
4. Listen to the excerpts from the Audit team meetings to get a sense of your role in facilitating the discussion.
5. Use the worksheets and templates to guide Audit team members through each stage of data collection and analysis.

Finally, keep the framework in mind: articulate case processing, stay focused on the Audit trails, and keep the complexities of risk and safety at the forefront. The gaps in safety and accountability, and the specific ways that they can be closed, will become apparent.

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