

Cultural Responsiveness in Domestic Violence Fatality Review: A Guide to Self-Assessment

Introduction

With the growing diversity of Virginia’s communities, it is essential that services for victims of domestic violence are appropriate, accessible, and effective for everyone—regardless of gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, language, race, or ethnicity. One of the most important tools for assessing the cultural responsiveness of domestic violence services is domestic violence fatality review (DVFR). Through retrospective review of the facts surrounding an incident of fatal domestic violence, cultural factors that may have influenced the fatal events can be identified and examined to understand opportunities for improving services to future victims. But how can a team be sure they identify and understand the cultural factors relevant in a case? Consider the following four scenarios:

Smith County DVFR holds its monthly meeting on a Monday morning—the same time as an important staff meeting at the local elder services agency. Because of this scheduling conflict, the representative from the elder services agency is most often absent from DVFR meetings.

Mr. Cassidy recently moved to Jones City and joined the Jones City DVFR as part of his new job at XYZ Service Agency. Mr. Cassidy came from a community in another state that has a very different demographic profile than Jones City. Due to the timing of his start date with the team, he will not be receiving orientation training until after his first case review.

In discussing a fatality that occurred in a rural part of Pickett County, the regional DVFR recognized that victim contact with the local DV program may have prevented their death. However, the team agreed that residents of that area “just don’t access services” and made no recommendations in the case.

A case came under review by the Garden State DVFR involving a woman who moved to the U.S. from Ukraine and married shortly after. One of the team members wondered aloud if the victim was a “mail order bride”. Other team members laughed, but the circumstances under which the victim immigrated were not further explored.

Each of these scenarios invites reflection on the team’s capacity to understand and incorporate cultural factors in their interpretation of case facts and opportunities for intervention. As with any other organization, a DVFR can be assessed on whether their practices are culturally responsive and their reviews consider the victim’s cultural experiences. There are many tools available to assist an organization in conducting a self-assessment for cultural responsiveness, but none specific to domestic violence fatality review. The *Virginia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Cultural Responsiveness Self-Assessment Tool* provides a series of items allowing DVFR team members to consider and discuss the various aspects of their team’s capacity for culturally responsive reviews. This short guide is meant to accompany the Self-Assessment Tool and provide a framework for the self-assessment process.

Why Conduct a Cultural Responsiveness Self-Assessment?

The purpose of the Self-Assessment is to support DVFR teams in incorporating culturally responsive policies and practices into all aspects of the fatality review process. Its goal is to improve the quality and effectiveness of the team's activities, and to promote cultural responsiveness in the community's domestic violence response system. DVFR teams and the communities they serve can benefit from such a self-assessment through increased trust and partnership - with underserved populations in particular - and through improved matching of the team's recommendations and action steps with the needs of the community. Individual team members may personally benefit from the process by identifying areas for personal and professional growth.

What is a Cultural Responsiveness Self-Assessment?

The *Virginia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Cultural Responsiveness Self-Assessment Tool* is a strengths-based survey of DVFR activities. Because DVFR teams in Virginia vary in their makeup and mission, the assessment is designed to address cultural responsiveness on each of five core team functions:

- Policies and Procedures
- Team Structure and Capacity
- Case Review Process
- Findings and Recommendations
- Reports and Community Action

The Tool can be completed by itself, or along with other assessment strategies such as focus groups, community surveys, and key-informant interviews. The results are collected and shared in a non-judgmental way, carried out in the spirit of providing feedback for improving capacity for culturally responsive services to their community.

The Tool contains 32 items on the above five core team functions, and should take no more than 30 minutes to complete. The Tool should be filled out individually by each team member either on their own time or at a meeting designated for the assessment process. Team members are not required to put their name on their assessment, providing the opportunity for honest observations about the team.

How Do We Conduct a Cultural Responsiveness Self-Assessment?

A cultural responsiveness self-assessment is a process that can and should involve the whole team, as well as other members of the community. There are 6 steps to the self-assessment process:

1. **Determine the scope of your team's self-assessment.** Will your team conduct focus groups, interviews, or collect other data in addition to the *Self-Assessment Tool*? Will your team complete the entire Tool, or focus on one or more core functions?
2. **Create buy-in.** Talk as a team and with community stakeholders about what cultural responsiveness looks like in your area, and how you could benefit from a self-assessment.

3. **Choose a leader(s).** Designate one or more persons to take notes, assemble data, and present a report of the findings from the self-assessment.
4. **Collect data.** Complete the *Virginia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Cultural Responsiveness Self-Assessment Tool*, and any other surveys, interviews, and focus groups that will be part of your self-assessment. Record responses in a spreadsheet or database to make it easier to tabulate the information collected.
5. **Report back on your findings.** Discuss strengths and weaknesses, and identify priority areas for improved cultural responsiveness. Who else in the community should know about the findings? Perhaps the self-assessment can be incorporated into a report or strategic plan to be shared with stakeholders.
6. **Create an action plan.** Use the findings of your self-assessment to focus the team's efforts around training and capacity-building. Review and update team policies and procedures if needed.

Your Team's preparation for self-assessment or resulting action plan may include training. Training is a useful tool not only for understanding the theory and concepts related to cultural responsiveness, but to better understand the cultural groups and norms represented in your community. A recorded training on Cultural Responsiveness in DVFR is available on the [Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner](#) website, and agencies who serve populations relevant to your Team may be an additional resource. Examples of potential culturally specific training resources in your community include:

- Domestic violence service agency
- Elder services agency
- Immigration services agency
- LGBTQ support agency
- Local university or health department who can provide an up to date demographic profile of your community

Conclusion

Cultural responsiveness is an ongoing process that requires commitment and continued self-assessment. This self-assessment process can be repeated as needed. Ideally, your team will re-visit the tool and the process as you learn about community needs through review, data collection, and discussion. Routine reflection on the cultural issues relevant to your community and to your team will improve team functioning, and ultimately the effectiveness of your work to prevent fatal domestic violence.

Item adapted with permission from the *Cultural and Linguistic Competence Organizational Self-Assessment Instrument for Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Programs*, ©Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence, 2009.

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