

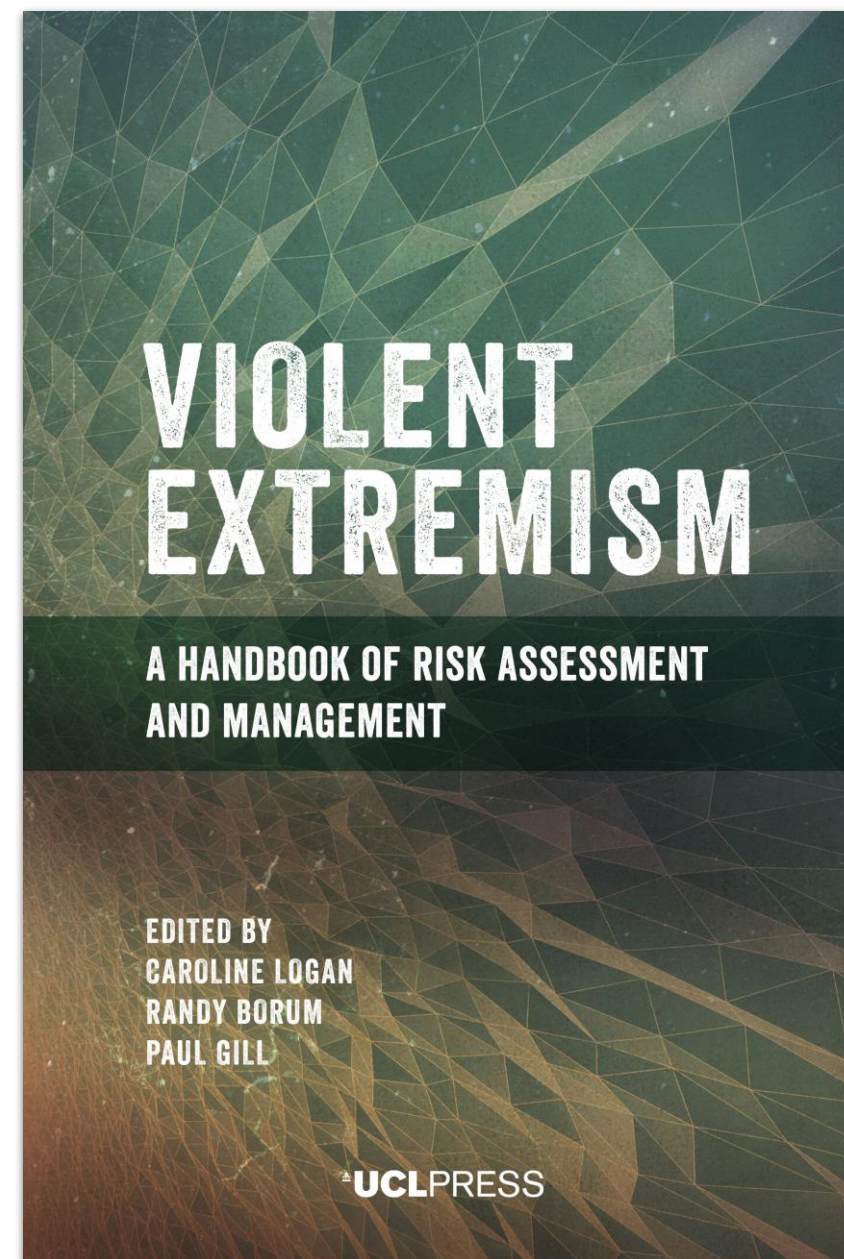
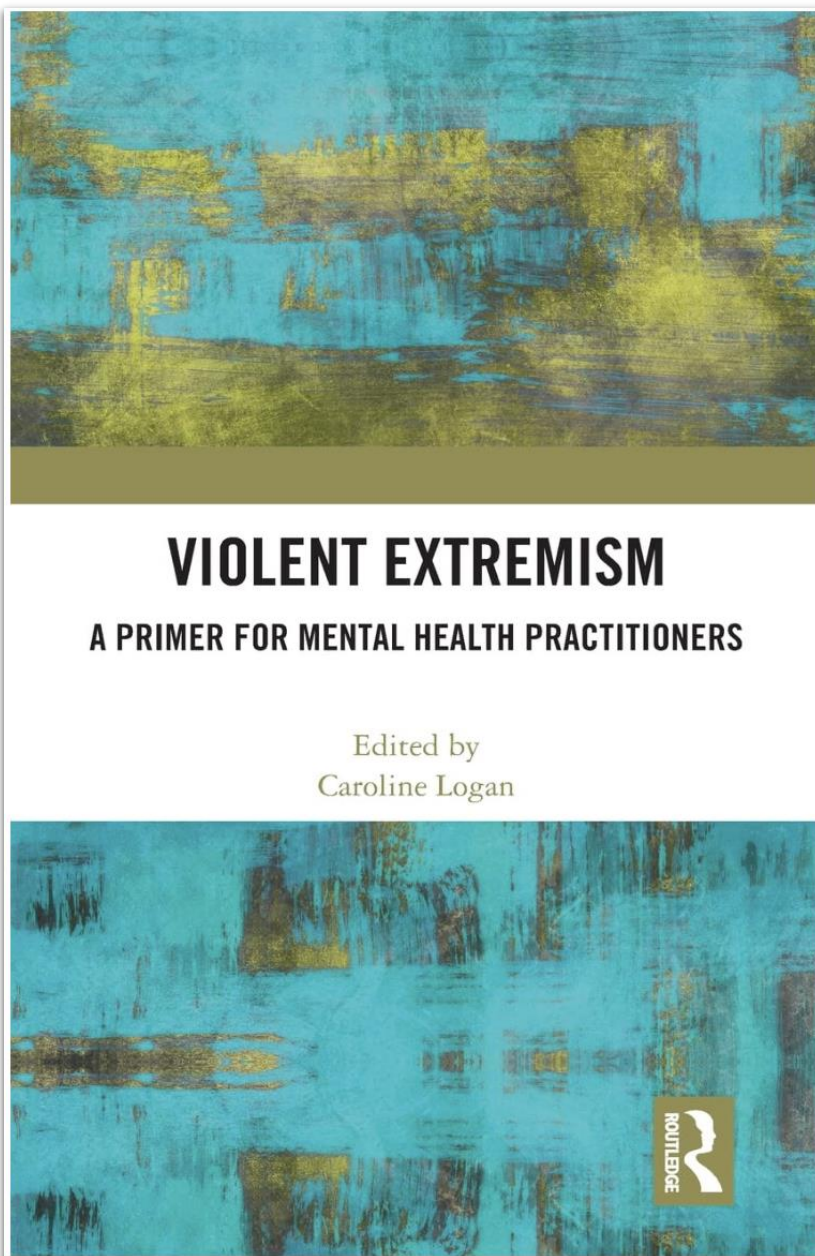
# violent extremism

a primer for mental health practitioners

[caroline.logan@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.logan@manchester.ac.uk)

# objectives

- violent extremism
  - explicit definition
  - relevance of factors notably mental health problems
  - risk formulation
- concluding comments



# violent extremism

foundational principles

# a working definition

an act, attempt or threat of bodily (i.e., physical or psychological) harm  
that is intentional, unauthorised and motivated at least in part by a  
personal or group ideology that encourages, incites or obliges the use of  
violence to further or support social goals

extremist ideology essential for an act of actual, attempted or threatened  
violence to be identified as an act of violent extremism

(violent extremism = extremist violence = terrorism)

Hart & Vargen, in press

# challenges in the violent extremism field

determining  
whether an  
extremist ideology  
is even *one* of the  
motivations for  
violence in a  
person  
not always clear

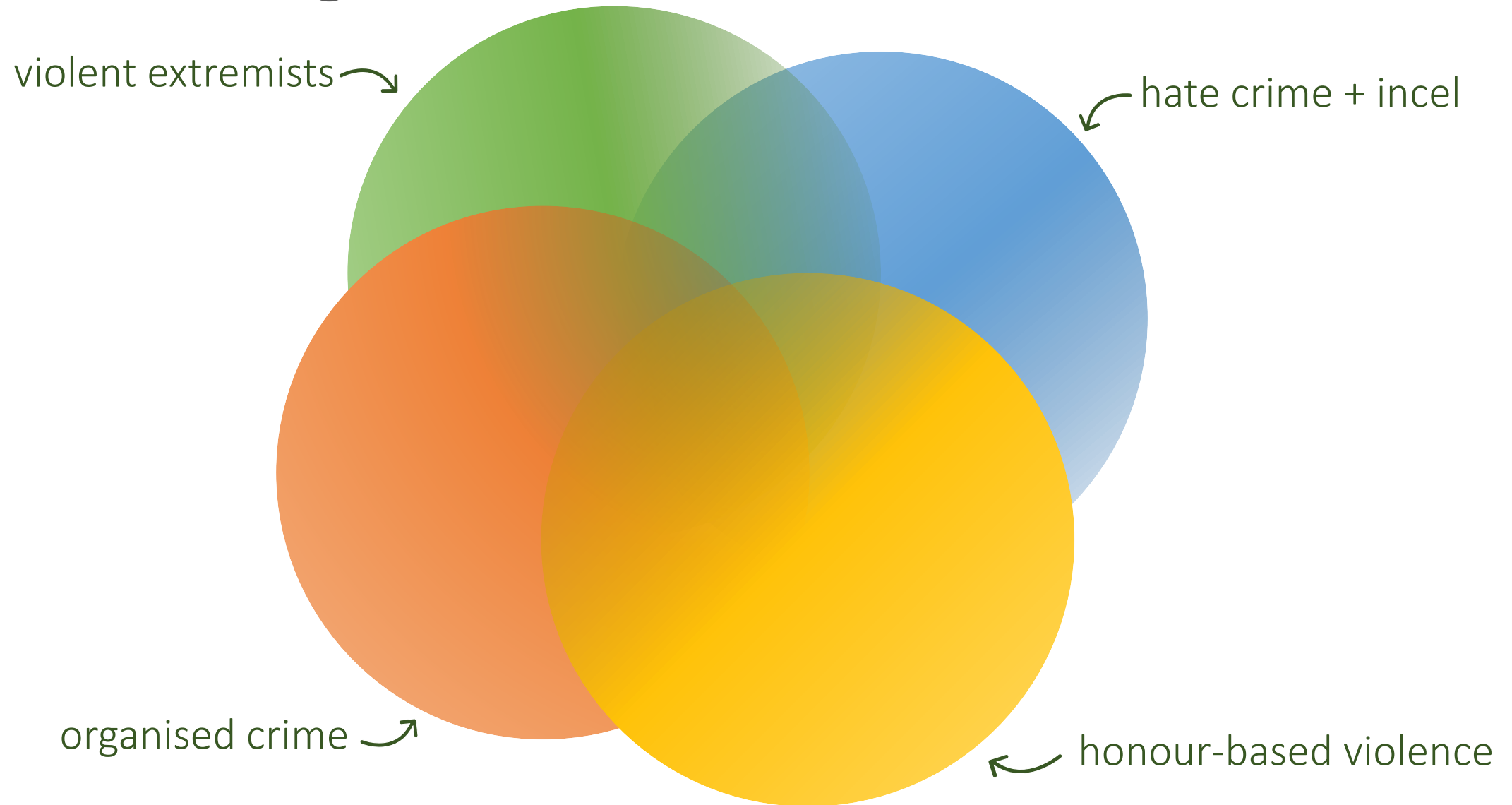
determining  
whether an  
extremist ideology  
is the *only*  
motivation for  
violence

determining  
whether an  
extremist ideology  
is the *primary*  
motivation for  
violence  
or is it a secondary or even  
tertiary motive?

*differentiating* a  
violent extremist  
ideology from  
other motivational  
drivers (e.g.,  
racism)  
if possible

Hart, 2019

# differentiating violent acts



# differentiating violent acts

violent extremists ↗

↖ hate crime + incel

**EXAMINING THE *PURPOSE* OF  
VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN  
THE INDIVIDUAL CASE WILL TAKE  
YOU CLOSER TO UNDERSTANDING  
WHAT IS REQUIRED TO  
PREVENT HARMFUL OUTCOMES**  
structured professional judgement

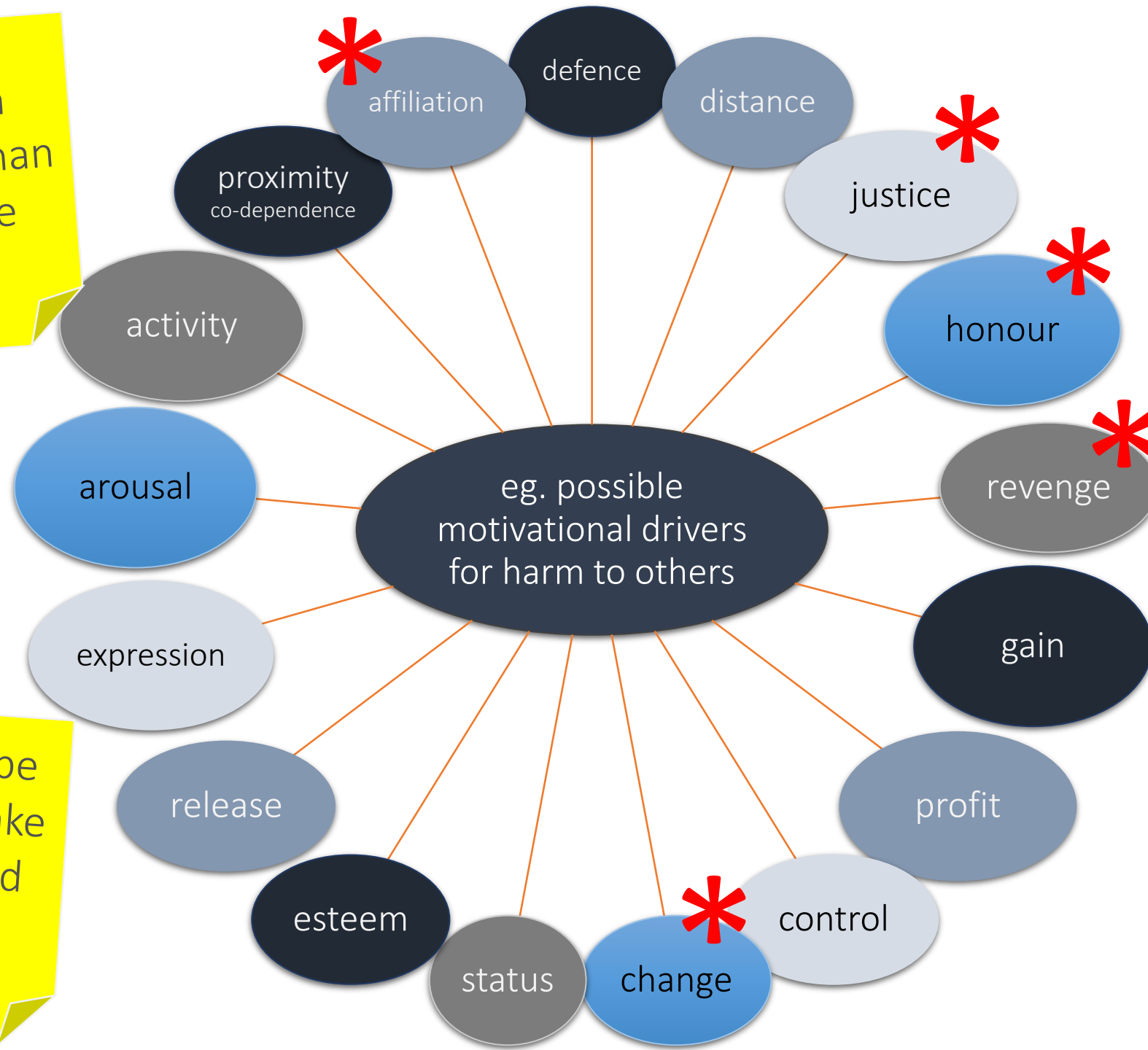
organised crime ↗

↖ honour-based violence



why do individuals engage in acts of  
violent extremism?

the heart of formulation-based practice



people can have more than one motive

or their motives may vary from event to event or over time

or you may be unable to make up your mind  
that's okay  
hypothesise

Douglas et al, 2013  
Howells, 2011  
Hart et al, 2022  
Logan, 2023

# risk factors common to VE risk guidance

**an interest in or adherence  
to a violent extremist  
ideology**

THE NATURE OF THE PERSON'S  
VIOLENT EXTREMIST INTERESTS

**grievance thinking & a sense  
of injustice or threat**

THE NATURE OF THE PERSON'S  
VIOLENT EXTREMIST INTERESTS

**identity-seeking**

THE NATURE OF THE PERSON'S  
VIOLENT EXTREMIST INTERESTS

**an extremist social network**

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT FACTORS

**a history of actual,  
attempted or threatened  
violence, including exposure  
to violence**

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT FACTORS

**a history of non-extremist  
antisocial and/or criminal  
behaviour**

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT FACTORS

**antisocial and pro-criminal  
attitudes and beliefs,  
including attitudes that  
justify the use of violence**

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT FACTORS

**problems with relationships  
with others**

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT FACTORS

**problems with education &  
employment, affecting  
financial & accommodation  
security & stability**

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT FACTORS

**personality characteristics  
and difficulties**

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING  
FACTORS

**mental health issues**

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING  
FACTORS

**substance use problems and  
other addictive behaviours**

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING  
FACTORS

# risk factors common to VE risk guidance

experience of victimisation,  
trauma and loss  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT  
FACTORS

problems with stress and  
coping  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT  
FACTORS

a context of social instability,  
disagreement and  
uncertainty  
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

behaviours that may suggest  
the person is on an  
escalating pathway to an act  
of violence  
PATHWAY FACTORS

# protective factors common to VE risk guidance

a willingness to debate and question

exposure to non-extremist social support and contacts

roles and responsibilities that compete with the person's commitment to violent extremism

negative attitudes towards violence including the effects of violence

engagement with interventions for factors that increase the person's dependence on violent extremism

# the potential relevance of mental health problems to violent extremism ...?

*mental health problems alone will not explain violent extremism (or any other) risk*

the attraction of  
violent extremist  
ideologies

the strength of  
grievance thinking  
& the associated  
perception of  
threat

identity-seeking

# sidebar: complexity

multiple co-  
occurring conditions  
*comorbidity*

hard-to-understand  
people & conditions  
e.g., personality disorder,  
autism, brain injury, learning  
disability

challenging context  
to try to formulate  
problems &  
interventions  
e.g., transgender, culture,  
deaf

people who struggle  
to communicate and  
engage  
e.g., more easily disengage


challenging context  
to try to formulate  
problems &  
interventions  
e.g., understaffed prisons,  
poorly trained & supported  
staff

hard-to-like clients;  
clients who press  
your buttons  
e.g., child or animal cruelty

hard-to-understand  
and explain  
behaviours  
e.g., torture, violent  
extremism

missing or restricted  
access to  
information

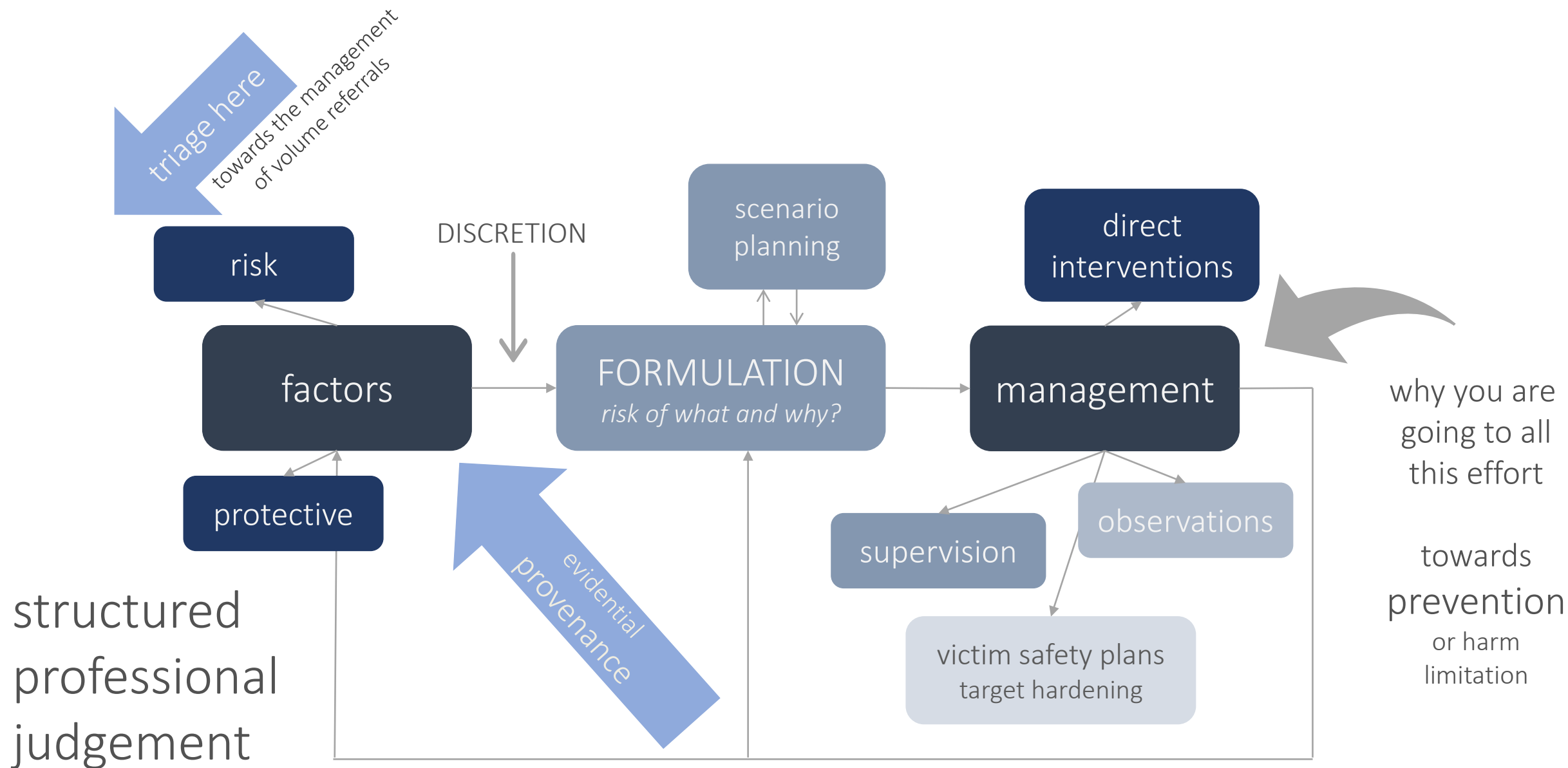
Offender Personality Disorder Pathway in England and Wales



# what do we mean by risk 'formulation'?

an answer to the question *risk of what and why?*



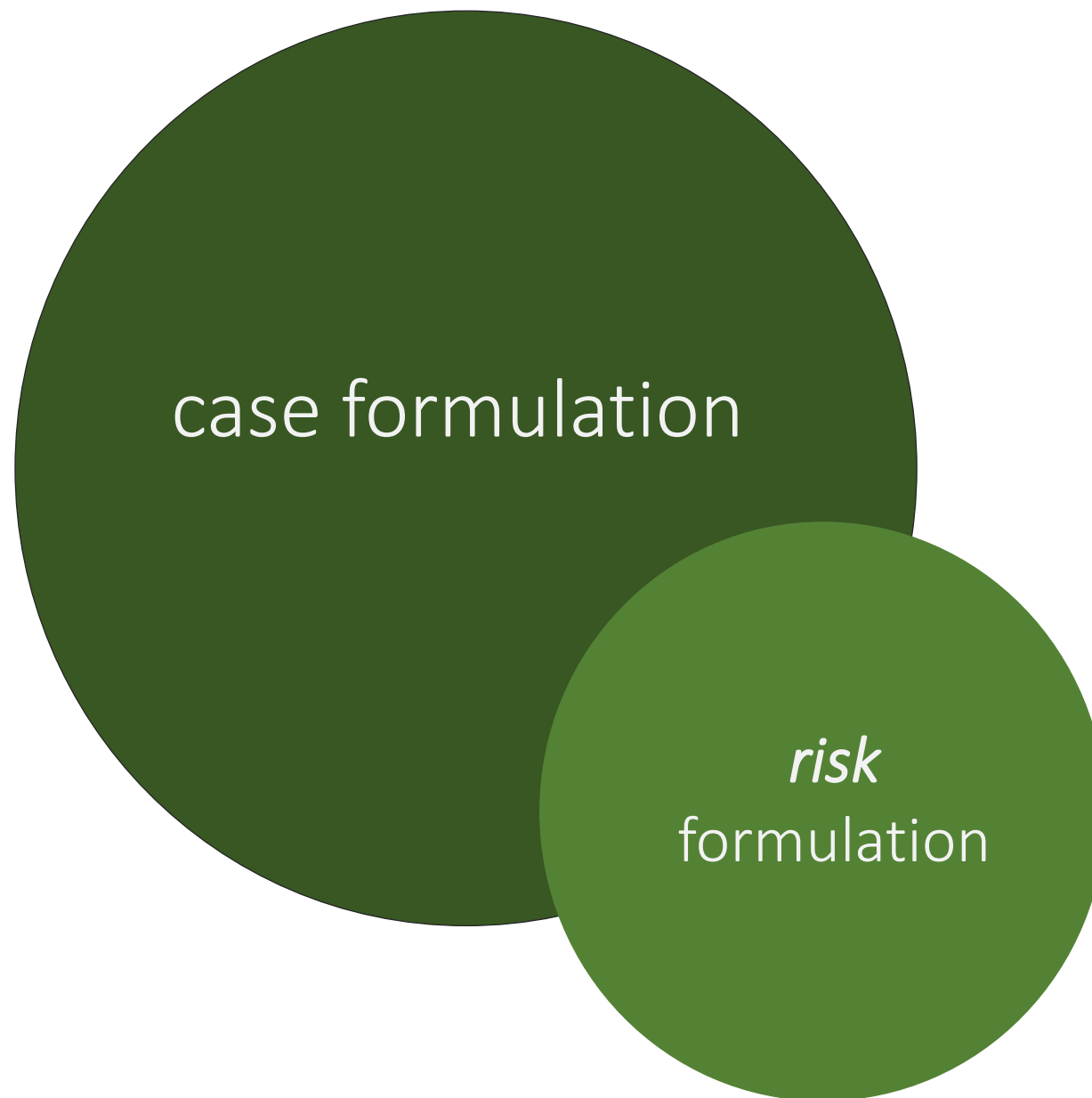


NB. risk guidance – or decision support aids – vary in the extent to which they operationalize SPJ



case formulation

problem  
formulation



# the purpose of formulation

organise

Weerasekera, 1996

mutual understanding

Kuyken et al., 2009

connections

Eells et al., 1998; Hart et al.,  
2011; Nezu & Nezu, 1989;  
Persons, 1989; Tarrier, 2006

intervention

Eells & Lombart, 2011; Vess  
& Ward, 2011

communication

Logan, 2016; HMPPS/NHSE, 2020

# the purpose of formulation

this activity amounts to  
about 90% of the effort of  
doing a formulation!

organise

Weerasekera, 1996

mutual understanding

Kuyken et al., 2009

connections

Eells et al., 1998; Hart et al.,  
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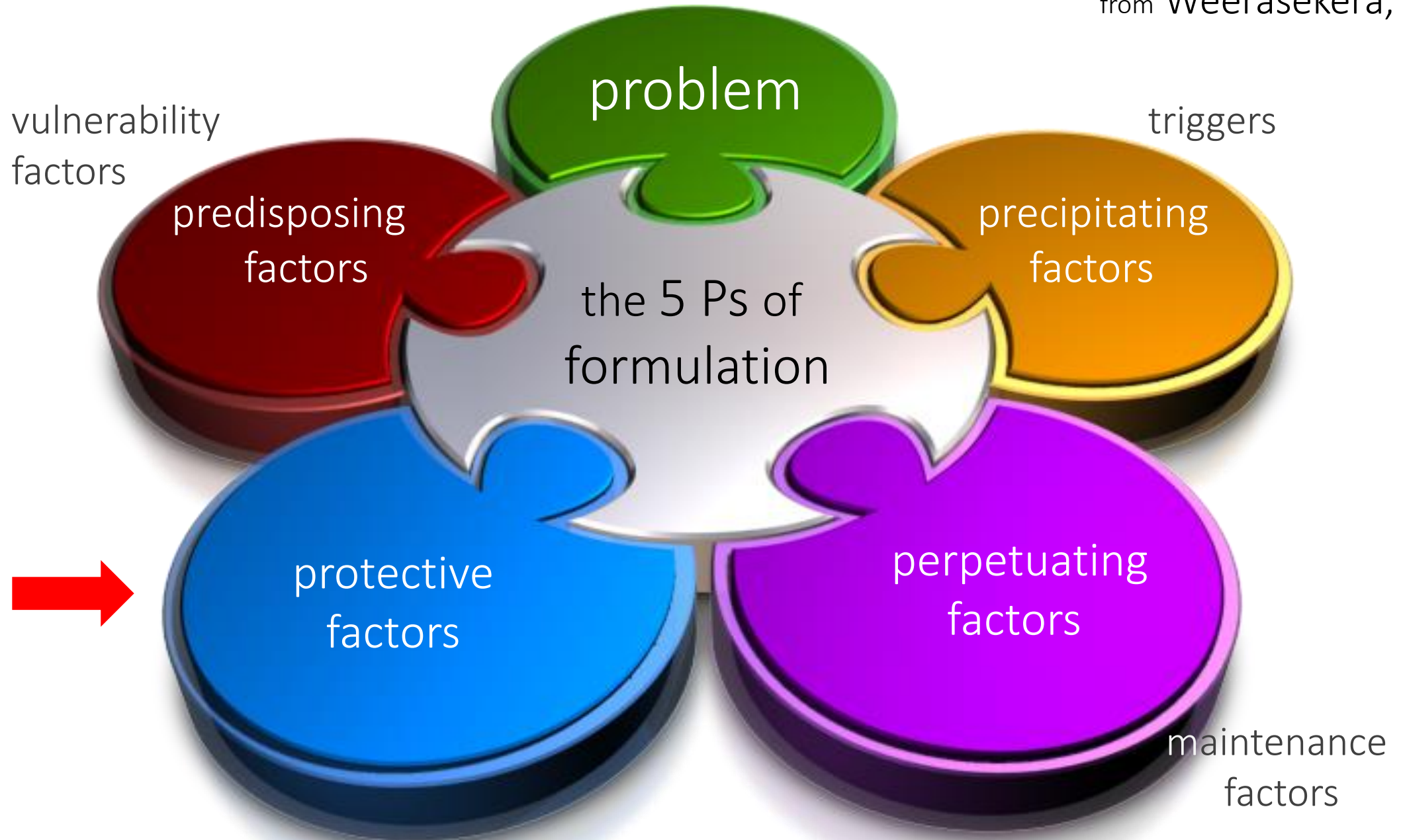
intervention

Eells & Lombart, 2011; Vess  
& Ward, 2011

communication

Logan, 2016; HMPPS/NHSE, 2020

from Weerasekera, 1996



# the purpose of formulation

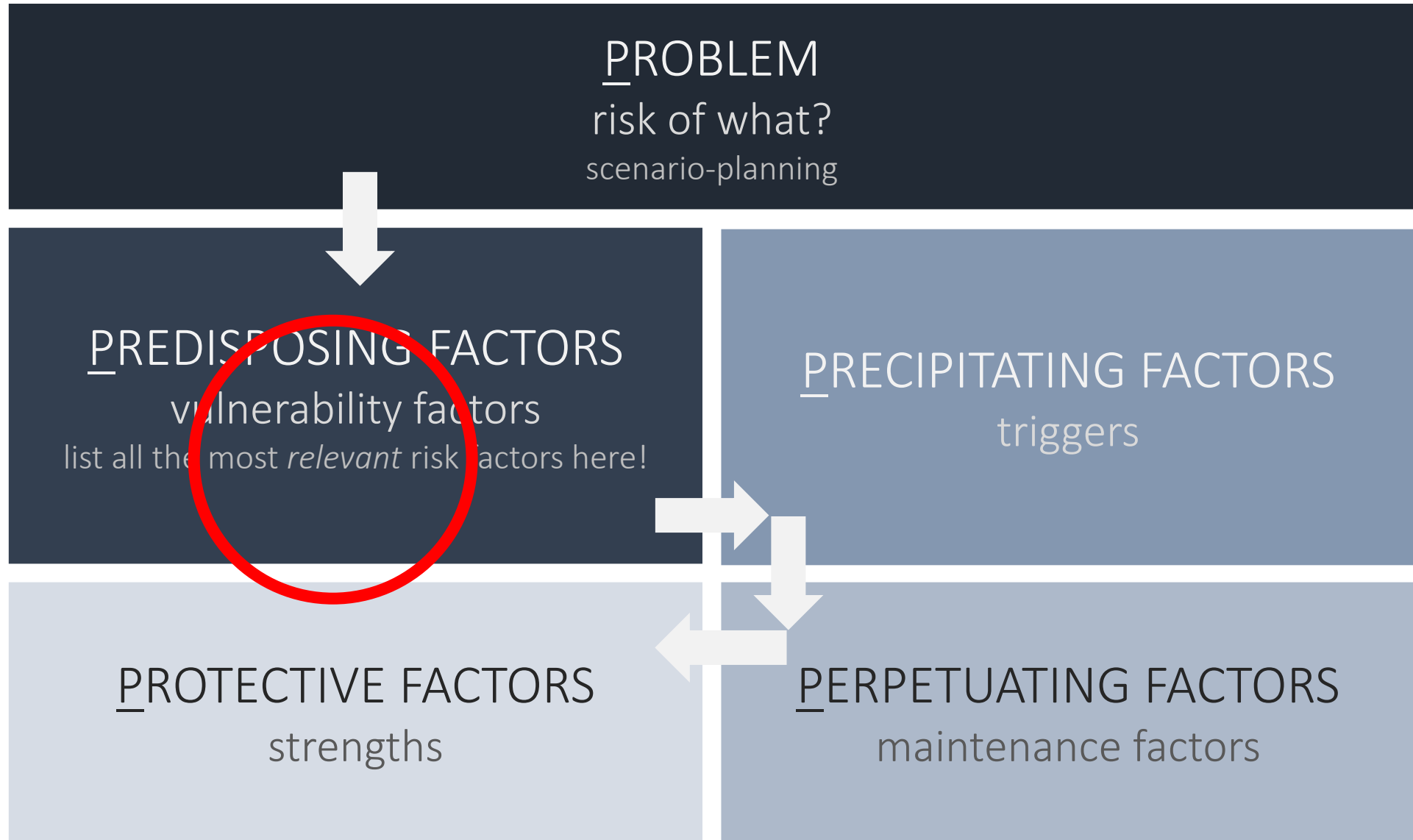


[USE THEORY HERE]  
mono-theoretical formulation;  
theory-knitting or blending or  
integrated; a theory-mash-up!  
or theoretically undeclared or  
agnostic

# how do you prepare a risk formulation?

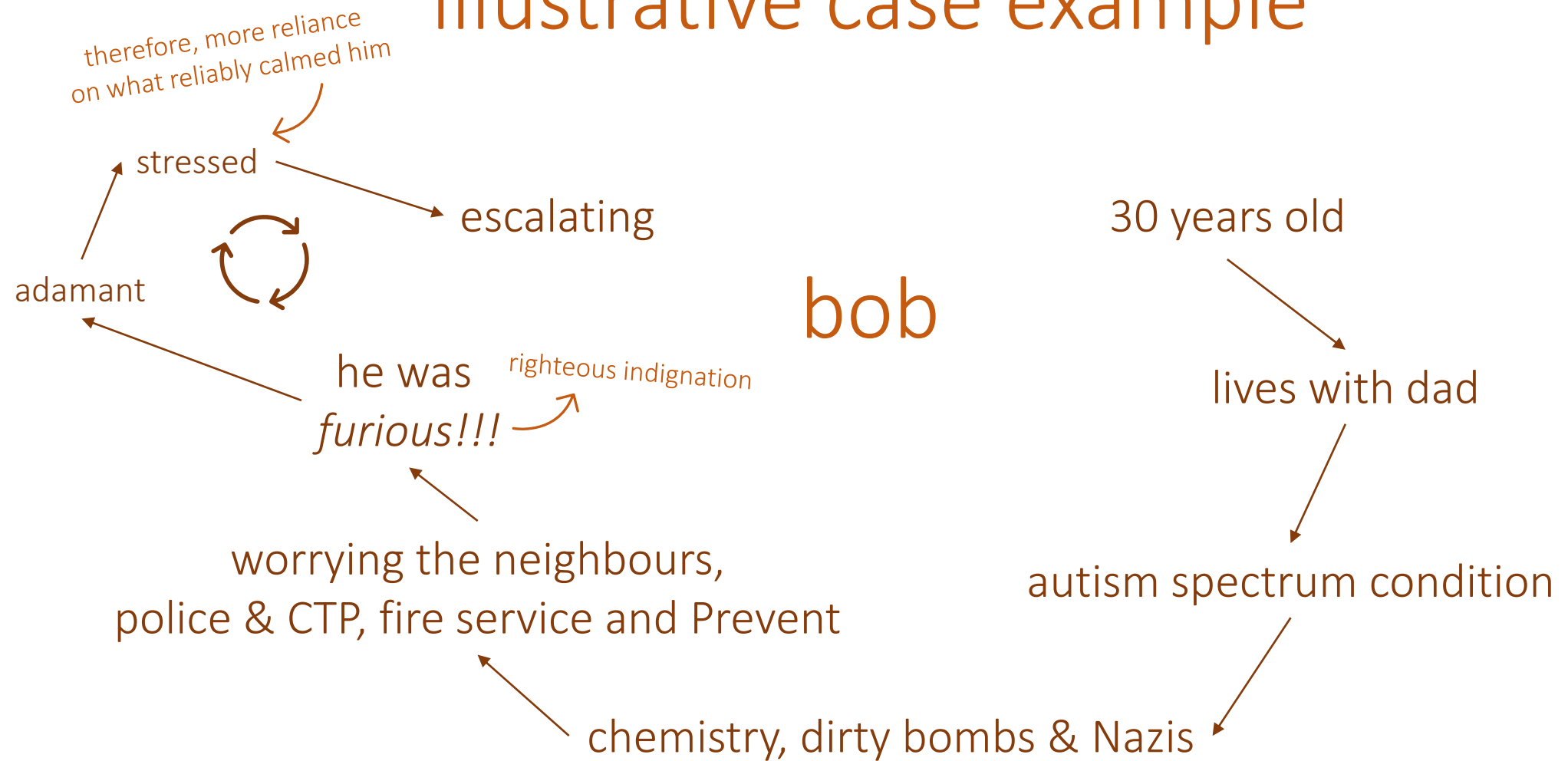
start by organizing the information you have flagged  
through your application of a suitable set of risk assessment  
and management guidance (a decision support aid)





then you are ready to start explaining ...

# illustrative case example





then you are ready to start your formulation ...

**[RISK OF WHAT?]** Bob is a 30-year-old man who lives with his father in the NW of England, who is thought to be at risk of accidentally – or on purpose – harming himself and/or others through his misuse of chemicals in his home laboratory. **[INFORMATION BASE]** Concerns have arisen from a combination of public reporting and the evidence of the emergency services who have been called to the property on numerous occasions in the last 14 months. **[DEVELOPMENTAL ORIGINS]** Bob has always been interested in chemistry – indeed, he has a degree in chemical engineering – but his more recent unhappiness and increasing preoccupation with extreme right-wing themes has resulted in a worrying fusion of the two activities. **[PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATION]** Bob would appear to be at risk of harming himself and others because he feels increasingly disempowered, a feeling that is being compounded by the response of emergency services, and with which he copes by spending more and more time both researching chemical weapons and bombs as well as extreme right-wing websites that give voice to his rising anger and self-righteous indignation. **[ACTION ORIENTED]** The key to risk management in the short-term is to help Bob feel less disempowered, thus reducing his reliance on unhelpful ways of coping with the stress engendered by the response of the emergency services. Therefore, without delay, we recommend that police and fire services are assisted to understand Bob's point of view more and to reconsider their interactions with him.

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# the elements of your explanation

risk of *what*?

evidence base

developmental  
trajectory

connections (*why*?)  
hypotheses

action  
towards risk management

is your formulation  
accessible?  
readable, available?

the added value of formulation in the risk assessment and management process ...?

a person-centred  
explanation of harm  
potential and its  
mitigation

because people are potentially  
harmful, not collections of risk  
factors, and one risk factor does  
not account for all of the risks  
posed by a person

formulations are  
adaptable

they may address  
reoffending, but they can  
address so much more  
besides  
*risk of what and why?*

they provide the  
assurance of  
evidence-based  
practice

a helpful explanatory  
formulation is based on  
evidence



# concluding comments

## and recommendations

mental health problems will  
be one of several  
potentially relevant risk  
(and protective) factors in  
violent extremism

it will never be the only one;  
people are complex; address their  
complexity

risk of what ...?

violent extremism? hate crime?  
lone actor grievance fueled  
violence?

a risk formulation should  
address the connections  
between risk factors and  
potential outcomes

it should try to say *why*  
ideologically motivated violence  
might seem like a good idea to this  
person some of the time – and  
differentiate it from harmful  
behaviour motivated by other  
kinds of drivers

risk formulations should drive interventions

direct interventions, supervision, monitoring and victim safety planning

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