



Avon and Somerset Constabulary's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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Introduction

The extent and nature of domestic abuse remains shocking. A core part of the policing mission is to prevent crime and disorder. Domestic abuse causes both serious harm and constitutes a considerable proportion of overall crime. It costs society an estimated £15.7 billion a year.¹ 77 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2012/13.² In the UK, one in four young people aged 10 to 24 reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood.³ Forces told us that crime relating to domestic abuse constitutes some 8 percent of all recorded crime in their area, and one third of their recorded assaults with injury. On average the police receive an emergency call relating to domestic abuse every 30 seconds.

People may experience domestic abuse regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, age or disability. Domestic abuse may also occur in a range of different relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender, as well as within families.

While both men and women can be victims of domestic abuse, women are much more likely to be victims than men.

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

“any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:⁴

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional”.*

¹ Walby, S. (2009). *The cost of domestic violence*. Retrieved from: www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost_of_domestic_violence_update.doc

² Office for National Statistics (2013). *Focus on violent crime and sexual offences 2012/13 – Chapter 4: Intimate Personal Violence and Partner Abuse*. Retrieved from: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf

³ Radford L, Corral S, Bradley C et al (2011) *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. London: NSPCC.

⁴ All definitions are taken from www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse

Controlling behaviour is defined as a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is defined as: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This definition includes so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Tackling domestic abuse and keeping its victims safe is both vitally important, and incredibly complicated. The police service needs to have the right tools, resources, training and partnerships in place to help it identify victims and keep them safe. It also needs to investigate and bring to justice offenders, when no two domestic abuse environments are the same, and some victims have suffered in silence for years or even decades.

In September 2013, the Home Secretary commissioned HMIC to conduct an inspection.⁵ We were asked to consider:

- the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence and abuse, focusing on the outcomes for victims;
- whether risks to victims of domestic violence and abuse are adequately managed;
- identifying lessons learnt from how the police approach domestic violence and abuse; and
- making any necessary recommendations in relation to these findings when considered alongside current practice.

To answer these questions, HMIC collected data and reviewed files from the 43 Home Office funded forces. We spoke to 70 victims of domestic abuse in focus groups throughout England and Wales and surveyed over 100 victims online. We also surveyed 200 professionals working with victims of domestic abuse.

We inspected all police forces in England and Wales, interviewing senior and operational leads in forces, holding focus groups with frontline staff and partners, and carrying out visits to police stations (which were unannounced) to test the reality of each force's approach with frontline officers. Our inspection teams were supplemented by expert peers, which included public protection

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence

experts from over 15 forces and those working with victims of domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This report details what HMIC found in Avon and Somerset Constabulary and at the end of the report we set out some recommendations. These recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for all forces made in the national report.⁶ A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

⁶ There is a requirement under section 55(5) and section 55(6) of the Police Act 1996 for the police and crime commissioner to publish a copy of their comments on this report, and the recommendations for all forces in the national report, and forward these to the Home Secretary.

Domestic abuse in Avon & Somerset⁷

Calls for assistance



In Avon and Somerset, domestic abuse accounts for 2% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 3% were from repeat victims.

Crime

8%

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

21%

Avon and Somerset recorded 248 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 52 were domestic abuse related. This is 21% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Assault with injury

36%

The constabulary also recorded 7,828 assaults with injury, of these 2,788 were domestic abuse related. This is 36% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

⁷ Data in this section is based upon forces' own definition of calls for assistance and domestic abuse, and forces' use of domestic abuse markers on IT systems.

Source: HMIC data collection. Crime figures are taken from police-recorded crime submitted to the Home Office.

Harassment

57%

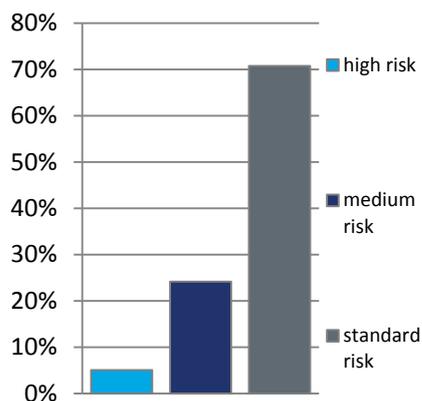
The constabulary recorded 882 harassment offences, of these 503 were domestic abuse related. This is 57% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

13%

The constabulary also recorded 1,641 sexual offences, of these 216 were domestic abuse related. This is 13% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



On, 31 August 2013 Avon and Somerset had 14,840 active domestic abuse cases; 5% were high risk, 24% were medium risk, and 71% were standard risk.

Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 70 arrests in Avon & Somerset. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Outcomes



Avon and Somerset recorded 7,877 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 28% resulted in a charge, 10% resulted in a caution and, 2% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

The public of Avon and Somerset can be reasonably confident that the constabulary can identify and conduct an initial investigation into reports of domestic abuse including identifying safeguarding issues to manage the risk to vulnerable people. The public can be confident too of the commitment of the constabulary's public protection unit in its response to victims of domestic abuse.

The public can be less confident of the constabulary's organisation and arrangements to manage the safety of all victims of domestic abuse. The management of high risk victims is generally good, but medium and standard risk cases are not consistent across the constabulary, and in some, parts of the procedural management of cases is disorganised.

Investigation of domestic abuse after the initial response lacks a coherent procedure. The management of serious and serial offenders is uncoordinated and is a risk to the constabulary.

Identifying victims

There are some risks, and room for improvement in the way Avon and Somerset Constabulary identifies victims of domestic abuse. Most calls for police help are received in the force service centre (FSC), where HMIC found that, although staff take domestic abuse very seriously and understand their role, they were, in some cases, not always getting the full picture of risk from the victim or the police databases.

While ensuring a consistent approach to gathering information, the use of a mandatory set of questions can be a barrier to dealing with victims with empathy. In addition, the question set does not include asking the victim if there have been any previous incidents of abuse. Unless a marker has been previously placed on the system, previous incidents may not be picked up at this first point of contact. This means that the risks may not be accurately assessed, some victims may not get the right level of police response and officers may not have all the information available to them at the scene.

There is good supervision of incidents within the FSC, although HMIC was concerned to find that a previously identified weakness, in failing to follow procedure and transfer all domestic abuse incidents to the public protection unit, in order that specialist officers can review the action taken, has still not been fully addressed. This means that the constabulary cannot be confident that appropriate safeguarding measures are put in place for all victims.

Keeping victims safe

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the constabulary and there are comprehensive procedures in place for dealing with domestic abuse. However, HMIC was concerned to find that, in practice, there are serious inconsistencies in the way domestic abuse incidents are responded to initially. There is insufficient supervision of the risk assessment process by patrol sergeants, leading to a lack of compliance with procedures at the first attendance. This means that risk may not be properly assessed, and immediate safeguarding actions needed, may not be put in place for some victims.

There is also an inconsistent approach to the allocation of responsibility for investigations, as it is not based on the level of risk to the victims, rather on the availability of officers to take on the case. There is confusion around the roles and responsibilities for maintaining contact with the victims throughout the investigations, with the risk that victims may either be contacted by several different officers or, of more concern, may not be contacted at all.

Management of risk

The constabulary consistently identifies reports of domestic abuse at the first point of contact, but the accurate transfer of domestic abuse information from one computer system to another needs to improve. Information the constabulary holds is provided to officers attending to victims, except at times of high demand, which can mean they are not always properly prepared for dealing with the situation. Staff have an understanding of the definition of domestic abuse, but knowledge of stalking and harassment was inconsistent.

Previous contact and repeat victims are generally identified at the first point of contact, but there is uncertainty among response officers as to the significance of this and what action they should take. An appointments-based customer service desk is being trialled in Bristol's Trinity Road police station, which offers privacy to people reporting sensitive matters, including disclosure of domestic abuse. The service desk would benefit from consistent scheduling of staff. Every victim of domestic abuse is assessed for risk, enabling immediate safeguarding measures to be put in place. High risk victims receive additional services, but medium and standard-risk victims do not seem to benefit from this.

Patrol supervision is inconsistent and often absent during the response to domestic abuse incidents, and when following the domestic abuse stalking and harassment (DASH) procedure. The risk to victims is reviewed by the constabulary's public protection unit (PPU) immediately following DASH submission (irrespective of the timeliness of the submission). DASH submission rates and quality differs across the constabulary.

Domestic abuse champions have been selected and are a focal point for the circulation of domestic abuse guidance. The training of response officers and force control room (FSC) staff is of a good standard but now needs to develop, by introducing a greater understanding of the impact of actions taken by the officer, and what the officer can contribute to the remaining safeguarding process.

Victim safety plans created and held by the PPU are not readily accessible to everyone in the constabulary. Neighbourhood teams in particular would benefit from the information they contain.

Investigation allocation lacks structure and co-ordination. There is no clear view on which team should investigate individual domestic abuse crimes. The constabulary expects all high risk cases to be investigated by PPU specialists. However, we found they are routinely undertaken by local detectives, and in some cases, response officers. The type of crime and the availability of resources is generally the driver for the decision. Responsibility for individual victims is not always clear outside of PPU.

The constabulary provides unambiguous guidance for officers and we found practical use of information sharing protocols with partner organisations. Partnership engagement is good, but there are some difficulties created by the complex local authority landscape.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and other victim support services support high risk victims, but there is concern over the maintenance of their number and longevity of contracts.

There is no apparent constabulary-wide system to tackle serial and serious offenders. The management of serial and serious offenders outside Bristol basic command unit (BCU) is uncoordinated. The constabulary should use the experience of its successful integrated offender management and apply it to violent offenders across all BCUs and reduce the list of wanted suspects.

Partnership engagement in the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) is good but differences in workloads exist – Northern is well-organised and manageable; Bristol is just tenable; Southern (east and west Somerset) is unwieldy.

The constabulary does not have robust quality assurance checks or qualitative auditing across many areas of its procedures, which would provide an insight into the effectiveness of police action, or the quality of service victims are receiving.

Officers and staff are committed to making people safe and tackling offenders. The PPU comprises a willing, dedicated resource with a commitment to protecting people. However, we believe that the response teams and the PPU are becoming distant from one another with the perception of 'risk' being passed from one to the other.

Findings

How does the force identify victims of domestic abuse, and in particular repeat and vulnerable victims?

There are some risks, and room for improvement in the way Avon and Somerset Constabulary identifies victims of domestic abuse. Most calls for police help are received in the force service centre (FSC), where HMIC found that, although staff take domestic abuse very seriously and understand their role, they were, in some cases, not always getting the full picture of risk from the victim or the police databases.

The use of a mandatory set of questions, while ensuring a consistent approach to gathering information, can be a barrier to dealing with victims with empathy. In addition, the question set does not include asking the victim if there have been any previous incidents of abuse. Unless a marker has been previously placed on the system, previous incidents may not be picked up at this first point of contact. This means that the risks may not be accurately assessed, some victims may not get the right level of police response and officers may not have all the information available to them at the scene.

There is good supervision of incidents within the FSC, although HMIC was concerned to find that a previously identified weakness, in failing to follow procedure and transfer all domestic abuse incidents to the public protection unit, in order that specialist officers can review the action taken, has still not been fully addressed. This means that the constabulary cannot be confident that appropriate safeguarding measures are put in place for all victims.

Most requests for police help in dealing with domestic abuse are received by telephone into the FSC. Staff in the FSC are trained to take 999 emergency and 101 non-emergency calls, to identify domestic abuse incidents and send the appropriate police response to victims. When dealing with domestic abuse calls, it is important that staff gather as much relevant information from the caller and from any previous police involvement as possible, so that they start to build a full picture and can assess the risks involved. The constabulary has a prescribed set of questions for staff to use to obtain information about the incident which helps to establish the potential risk of harm to the victim, and defines the level of police response.

Some domestic abuse incidents are reported in person at police stations. Enquiry office staff in stations, are employed by a joint venture company which includes Avon and Somerset Constabulary, local councils and IBM. HMIC found that these staff received no formal domestic abuse training and, while they had some understanding of the issues, the constabulary cannot be confident that

they are dealing with victims appropriately, nor that they are consistently identifying domestic abuse in all its forms and making the correct assessment as to the response needed.

The constabulary recognised the need for greater privacy for certain types of victims attending police stations. An appointments-based customer service desk is being trialled in one Bristol police station, which offers privacy to people reporting sensitive matters, including disclosure of domestic abuse.

The constabulary has recently changed its call-taking procedure to ensure domestic abuse crime is more effectively identified at the first point of contact. An internal audit revealed that as much as 15 percent of the domestic abuse incidents were not being transferred manually from the incident and resource management system (STORM) to the crime and intelligence system (Guardian) – the systems are not integrated. However, a replacement crime and intelligence system, due to come into service in 2014, will enable automatic transfer of data. It is only incidents that are recorded on the Guardian system that are transferred to the public protection unit (PPU). In the PPU, specialist officers review the incident and any safety measures that have been put in place by the attending officers. Despite the audit findings and the requirement to transfer all domestic abuse incidents for PPU review, HMIC was concerned to find that this is still not happening consistently. This means that without the review by specialist officers, the constabulary cannot be confident that all victims of domestic abuse are being adequately safeguarded.

Information from a wide range of sources is provided by an intelligence team in the FSC to officers before they attend to the victim. The comprehensive information, which includes potential offender details and firearms licensing checks, helps create a picture of the situation and the degree of risk for officers before they arrive. However, at times of high demand for police services which coincide with increased reporting of domestic abuse, information may not be received in time. Officers told HMIC they had occasionally arrived at the scene of the incident, before the FSC staff had completed the mandatory question set, leaving the victim to explain the situation again.

STORM and Guardian can be used to apply markers, known as flags, to addresses and people, to alert the FCR of previous contact with the constabulary, if further calls are received. This also helps to assess the level of risk and decide on the speed and nature of the police response. If there is any doubt, staff err on the side of caution and send officers to the incident at a higher response grade. Domestic abuse incidents will usually be graded for response as either immediate (within 20 minutes) or priority (within one hour); only in very exceptional circumstances will an appointment be made for a slower response. Over half of all domestic abuse calls are graded as immediate

and over 90 percent of these receive an attendance within the 20 minute target. However, we found that only 48 percent of priority domestic abuse incidents were attended within one hour compared with all priority incidents at 69 percent (April – September 2013). HMIC found that there is a tendency to prioritise other offences, such as burglary, over domestic abuse when sending officers. This may contribute to the low arrest rate of domestic abuse offenders in Bristol, which is well below the constabulary average, and where the time taken to respond to priority incidents is at its lowest. The constabulary does send the nearest available officer to attend the incident and during times of high demand, patrolling officers with specialist responsibility such as firearms can be directed to attend domestic abuse incidents alongside or in place of their patrol colleagues.

A victim of domestic abuse who has been subject to repeat incidents of abuse is likely to be at greater risk, and it is important that the police are able to spot a pattern of escalating abuse. A repeat victim of domestic abuse is defined by the constabulary as someone who has experienced abuse on more than one occasion in the last 12 months. We found that staff in the FCR do understand that a repeat victim is likely to be at greater risk and will routinely increase the grading of the response to immediate and let the attending officer know of the previous history. Staff can apply flags to STORM and Guardian to identify a repeat victim or treat as urgent when they contact police in the future. If there is no flag, previous contact with police can also be readily seen on the constabulary's databases. However, we found that these are not systematically checked by FCR staff and there are occasions when repeat victim status is missed.

While the use of question sets provides a way of structuring the narrative in domestic abuse incidents and leading call takers to obtain important information, its rigid application in the FCR can be a barrier to effective and empathetic treatment of victims. It does not contain questions about any previous incidents, which is in contrast with the question sets for other types of crime such as anti-social behaviour and criminal damage, which both explore whether the caller is a repeat victim.

We found that there is strong supervision and oversight of domestic abuse incidents in the FCR, although there is still room for improvement in supervising medium and low risk incidents, and checking the transfer of information from STORM to Guardian. FSC supervisors monitor incident logs, concentrating in particular on those that are high risk, and take remedial action to ensure the accuracy of the information.

Staff in the FCR understand the importance of their role in identifying and managing domestic abuse incidents. FSC incident recorders were recently

trained by PPU staff to challenge officers on the content and fullness of their reports on the incident record. We also found that FSC staff had raised concerns with the PPU that attending officers may not be consistently identifying all vulnerable people involved in domestic abuse incidents. In response, PPU staff had intervened to tackle this issue; thus creating additional workload, this could have been better resolved by improving the first line supervision within the response teams.

How does the force respond to victims of domestic abuse? This includes initial action, including risk assessment.

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the constabulary and there are comprehensive procedures in place for dealing with domestic abuse. However, HMIC was concerned to find that, in practice, there are serious inconsistencies in the way domestic abuse incidents are responded to initially. There is insufficient supervision of the risk assessment process by patrol sergeants, leading to a lack of compliance with procedures at the first attendance. This means that risk may not be properly assessed, and immediate safeguarding actions needed, may not be put in place for some victims.

There is also an inconsistent approach to the allocation of responsibility for investigations, as it is not based on the level of risk to the victims, rather on the availability of officers to take on the case. There is confusion around the roles and responsibilities for maintaining contact with the victims throughout the investigations, with the risk that victims may either be contacted by several different officers or, of more concern, may not be contacted at all.

Tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority for the PCC and the police. It is one of the four top priorities in the PCC's police and crime plan, and the constabulary's control strategy also reflects this priority. The constabulary has developed a 'violence against women and children' delivery plan which sets out how they plan to respond to domestic abuse. There is a target to see an increase in reporting of domestic abuse, as a measure that there is greater public awareness and confidence in the police to deal with it. HMIC found that staff throughout the constabulary recognise that tackling domestic abuse is a police priority, but most point to the fact that there is greater emphasis on tackling burglary, which is one of the other priorities. Chief officers have recognised that this is an issue and intend promoting the four priorities as being of equal importance to ensure that domestic abuse receives the focus it deserves.

The assistant chief constable's recent appointment as the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) national business lead for domestic abuse is seen as a means of raising the focus within the constabulary. The head of crime is the chair of the Avon and Somerset violence against women and children strategic group. He is well placed to be able to draw on his experiences as an area commander, and on relationships with colleagues to raise the profile and priority of domestic abuse throughout the constabulary.

Patrol officers are usually sent as the first response to domestic abuse incidents, they are required to undertake a formal assessment of the risks posed to the victim. Officers use the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool to aid their professional judgement. All DASH risk assessments are submitted to the PPU for further assessment and the action taken by the attending officer is reviewed and a victim safety plan is put in place by the PPU officers.

HMIC found that in spite of clear procedures and guidance documents, there are inconsistencies in the practice at this initial attendance. The constabulary has produced a comprehensive guidance document. This sets out clearly what is expected, and the procedures for officers to follow when dealing with domestic abuse incidents. In addition, the PPU has issued a reminder containing the DASH requirements to all patrol staff. In some instances officers are not completing DASH risk assessments even though the incident falls within the definition of domestic abuse. PPU officers have to check STORM and Guardian incident logs to identify where DASH risk assessments are missing.

There are clear weaknesses in the supervision of the initial attendance and risk assessment by the patrol sergeants. We found that in one area of the constabulary, PPU staff had identified that 25 percent of DASH risk assessments were missing, until the patrol supervisors were reminded that they must ensure compliance. PPU staff had to make an assessment of risk in these cases, in the absence of the full information from the victim, via the DASH risk assessment. This presents a clear risk that key factors may be missed and the victim may not receive the services they need.

Patrol sergeants rarely attend incident scenes to supervise; even in high risk cases, they oversee the incident remotely and rely on an update from the officer once completed. They do not review the completion of the DASH risk assessment prior to its submission to PPU, instead trusting their officers' judgement. This means that there is no supervision of the rationale when an officer is exercising discretion not to complete a DASH risk assessment before the incident is reviewed by the PPU.

Every patrol officer has received domestic abuse definition training within the last three years. This is delivered through a training programme known as cycle, which provides a specific training day every three months – domestic abuse has featured as part of this rolling programme several times, including an explanation of the DASH risk assessment. Despite this, we found that there is a lack of awareness of the less obvious forms of domestic abuse such as coercive controlling behaviour, and stalking and harassment are not universally understood. Indeed, the fact that the constabulary uses the term ‘domestic violence’ rather than ‘domestic abuse’ tends to reinforce this perception. We also found that many response officers were uncertain of the repeat victim definition, and importantly, were unaware of the significance of repeat victimisation on the risk to the victim and any action they should take. However, where a DASH risk assessment is submitted to PPU they are able to promptly identify repeat victims and draw on partner organisation information to bring together a complete picture of the victim’s situation for reassessment of risk and the formation of an appropriate safety plan.

Victims’ groups have also given presentations to some groups of police officers across the constabulary, and a DVD with victim accounts of domestic abuse and the police’s involvement has been circulated. Those staff that have seen a presentation and the DVD, consider them to be a powerful training aid. However, their use has not been widespread throughout the constabulary and has been reliant on the local PPU staff organising their delivery. The constabulary also provides computer-based self-learning packages for domestic abuse training, which are mandatory for all staff, but completion rates are not checked. HMIC is recommending that in the future, domestic abuse training should be face-to-face, rather than online.

In order to raise awareness of domestic abuse and provide a single point of contact within neighbourhood teams with enhanced expertise, the constabulary has recently established a network of safeguarding champions within beat teams, usually police and community support officers (PCSOs), and the FSC. Their role is to communicate key messages and positively influence colleagues’ outlook on dealing with domestic abuse. HMIC found a mixed picture of their effectiveness as there are inconsistencies in practice; some have taken this role seriously for their team’s benefit, while others have not circulated messages provided to them.

HMIC found the allocation of any investigation to be uncoordinated and dependent on the capacity of teams to take on individual cases, rather than a rationale based on risk. All high risk cases should be investigated by PPU specialists, but there is no clear view as to which team should investigate medium and standard risk cases. However, PPU investigates only 2 percent of the 12.8 percent high risk domestic abuse cases. The remainder of high risk

and a minority of medium risk cases are routinely conducted by BCUs' crime investigation department (CID) officers or crime investigations teams (CIT) based in custody suites. Patrol officers also investigate high risk cases but are typically responsible for the majority of medium and low-risk investigations. The direction given by the daily management meeting (DMM) and the involvement of criminal justice inspectors applies some structure to investigations with the latter helping to set investigation plans. However, HMIC found that the seriousness of the offence, and the category of crime, was more generally a driver for the decision as to who should investigate, and not the level of risk.

PPU, CID and CIT see it as their responsibility to keep victims informed of progress during and after the investigation. Patrol officers consider their involvement with the victim to have finished following the investigation. As a result, it is unclear who picks up the responsibility to update victims in the majority of domestic abuse cases.

Again, HMIC found weaknesses and inconsistencies in the supervision and quality assurance of investigations conducted by patrol officers. We examined a small number of investigation casework files and found the standard to be mixed with limited evidence of the three-week supervisors' review, which is required by the investigative policy. However, we found criminal justice supervisors to be knowledgeable about detention procedures and the investigation process. The constabulary is trialling body-worn cameras in one area. Video evidence, obtained at the initial attendance, can prove very powerful in any subsequent court proceedings, as it provides a graphic account of the demeanour of the offender and any injuries to the victim or damage to the property. Officers who use them say that they also act as a deterrent to escalating hostility and violence. Officers told us that the availability of other equipment to support the investigation was limited and patchy. There were examples of officers using their own mobile phone cameras to take photographs of domestic abuse injuries.

There are significant variations in the workloads of the three PPU teams and as a consequence, there are differing degrees of supervision of DASH reports. The number of resources in Northern PPU can adequately review all new incidents, conduct safeguarding reviews and risk assessments. However, this is not replicated in the Southern or Bristol areas, where greater demand and lack of resources creates challenges for supervisors to actively oversee all new cases. We also found that patrol staff in Bristol were not able to catch up with all outstanding offenders from previous days and weeks. Lists of wanted persons are long and outdated. The ability to deal with "today's jobs today" and make quick arrests of new offenders was impeded by this backlog.

How are victims of domestic abuse made safer as a result of the police response and subsequent action?

The constabulary consistently identifies reports of domestic abuse at the first point of contact, but the accurate transfer of domestic abuse information from one computer system to another needs to improve. Information the constabulary holds is provided to officers attending to victims, except at times of high demand, which can mean they are not always properly prepared for dealing with the situation. Staff have an understanding of the definition of domestic abuse, but knowledge of stalking and harassment was inconsistent.

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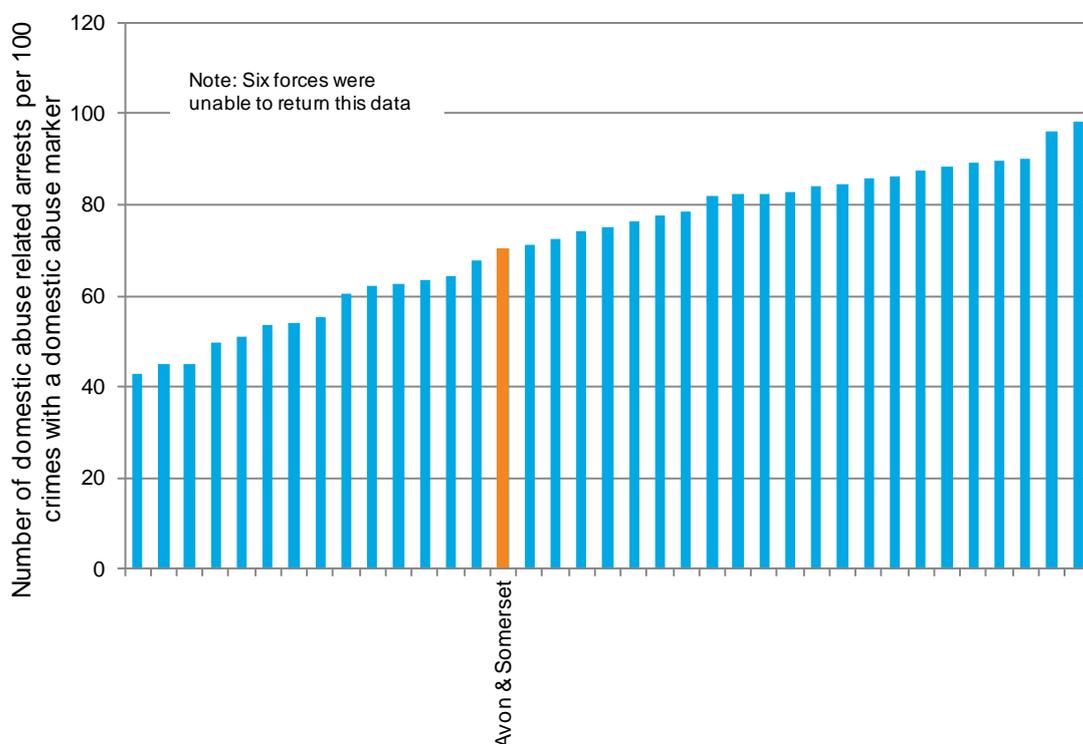
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resources is generally the driver for the decision. Responsibility for individual victims is not always clear outside of PPU.

The constabulary provides unambiguous guidance for officers and we found practical use of information sharing protocols with partner organisations. Partnership engagement is good, but there are some difficulties created by the complex local authority landscape.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 70 arrests in Avon and Somerset. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90. This low arrest rate compared to other forces indicates that this is an issue the constabulary may want to review.

Figure 1: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013⁸



Source: HMIC data collection

The constabulary employs specialist staff in the PPU to deal with domestic abuse. Despite of recent austerity measures and many areas of the constabulary having their budgets and staffing numbers cut, the PPU has been

⁸ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

protected and has had additional investment and a growth in staff numbers. The PPU is managed centrally and is made up of three teams, each based in one of the basic command units. However, these teams have started from different positions under the new structure because of unequal resources, including vacancies that were not filled.

PPU staff and patrol officers expressed their concern over moving the responsibility of managing individual cases from one to the other because of a lack of clear ownership and burgeoning workloads. This is exacerbated in Southern PPU where patrol officers working in rural areas are remote to the PPU hub, whereas Bristol officers and staff are close to the PPU.

Staff in the PPU receive all domestic abuse risk assessments for review, they reassess the risk in all cases, in a timely manner, supplementing the information from the DASH risk assessment with all available intelligence from the constabulary's databases and with partner agencies information. From this they will put in place an appropriate safety plan for the victim. High risk cases are referred for consideration by a MARAC, and high risk victims are referred to an independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) for additional safeguarding and support. The PPU will also routinely allocate tasks to patrol officers for follow-up enquiries. PPU supervisors check the accuracy of the risk assessments made by their staff.

Victim safety plans are created for all levels of risk by the PPU, in conjunction with partner organisations, and are available on Guardian for officer and staff use. The plans are used to co-ordinate action to support victims and manage the risk against them for the time during which police have responsibility for their safety. The content of each plan is proportionate to the level of risk. High-risk plans will invariably be used by the MARAC, as well as use by staff in the FCR. Custody sergeants take account of any existing safety plan or create the beginning of one before discussing release plans with officers. PPU will later develop the safety measures into a full plan. However, safety plans are not promoted amongst neighbourhood teams who would benefit from taking greater responsibility for safeguarding and victim care. Examples were given of the immediate involvement of multi-agency working to reduce risk where possible, such as alcohol referral in custody suites.

Partnership engagement in each of the five MARACs is good, despite the view held by senior PPU managers that there are differences in the workloads – Northern is well organised and manageable; Bristol's workload is just tenable and Southern (east and west Somerset) is still settling, after two MARACs were brought together as one. Southern PPU is experiencing the biggest challenge in managing its workload due to the greater changes it has faced and higher number of vacant posts.

Partners in Bristol agreed to run a meeting before that of the MARAC comprising PPU and IDVA staff with information contributions from partner organisations. In some cases, partners are asked to attend for clarity of information or to make representation. This meeting assesses cases with a risk score of 14–15 which is at the lower end of the high risk category, to determine if the case should be reassessed as medium or go on to the MARAC. In 2013, the charitable organisation, Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA), approved the five MARACs, including the Bristol pre-MARAC, though with a cautionary approach to some. However, while we appreciate that Bristol PPU deals with a high volume of cases, this additional process duplicates the PPU's early assessment of cases that are high risk and denies victims the access to services from other agencies.

HMIC found that partnership working is good; the constabulary works constructively across a complex partnership landscape. There are four unitary authorities and one two-tier county council with six district councils. Each unitary authority and the county council have a community safety partnership. There are local domestic abuse forums in the district councils and a force-wide violence against women and children (VAWC) group. A MARAC steering group monitors the five MARACs. There has never been a withdrawal of a partner organisation from a meeting or poor attendance. The two counties have two crown courts, and there are specialist domestic abuse courts held on certain days in four of the local Magistrates' Courts. The relationship between the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and police at strategic and practitioner levels is good.

We found clear guidance and information sharing protocols between each of the local authorities and the police for day-to-day case work and those specific to each of the MARACs. However, the practice of sharing of information is not without difficulty. Northern PPU operates in an environment where information is shared, with acceptance that police redact sensitive information. In Bristol this is generally accepted by partners. But in Southern PPU, officers and staff are regularly challenged to provide all that is held on victims and offenders. The domestic abuse co-ordinators try to ensure a single policy and are working towards setting a consistent approach.

IDVAs and other victim support services are respected and working well, but there is concern over the future funding arrangements, particularly in west and east Somerset.

Where agencies are co-located with the police the information sharing is most effective. The constabulary's ambition is to have three multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs) covering the entirety of the area. The Bristol MASH is developing with city council staff, co-located with PPU staff, and progress

made with other partner organisations. The other two MASH areas are in development with formal discussions ongoing between partners.

Safeguarding high-risk victims is the responsibility of the PPU with oversight of cases of medium risk. CIT takes responsibility for keeping all victims informed of the progress of investigations conducted by its staff. PPU staff read the incident and review the DASH risk assessment. Once research into the circumstances is completed, a further risk assessment will be conducted, and any alteration made. If children are mentioned or involved, a referral is made to children's social care, and if children are under five, or the female involved or affected is pregnant, a referral is made to health visitors. All children of school age are referred to education services.

If there are concerns for an adult, a referral is made to adult social care. Mental health concerns are referred to the Somerset partnership. However, ownership of individual victim care is not always clear outside of PPU and CIT. Ninety-five percent of domestic abuse crime reports for investigation are allocated to patrol officers and responsibility for updating victims can pass from one team to the next. A robust tracking of completed action and victim updates at regular intervals is lacking.

HMIC found that PCSOs engage community agencies to build an understanding of how to best support victims. Their day-to-day involvement in their area helps them understand the context of a community, and they gain intelligence that helps them manage problem issues including domestic abuse. PCSOs and neighbourhood colleagues have the potential to support victims in a more structured and purposeful way.

Does the force have appropriate systems, processes and understanding to manage domestic abuse and risk to victims in the future?

Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and other victim support services support high risk victims, but there is concern over the maintenance of their number and longevity of contracts.

There is no apparent constabulary-wide system to tackle serial and serious offenders. The management of serial and serious offenders outside Bristol basic command unit (BCU) is uncoordinated. The constabulary should use the experience of its successful integrated offender management and apply it to violent offenders across all BCUs and reduce the list of wanted suspects.

Partnership engagement in the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) is good but differences in workloads exist – Northern is well-

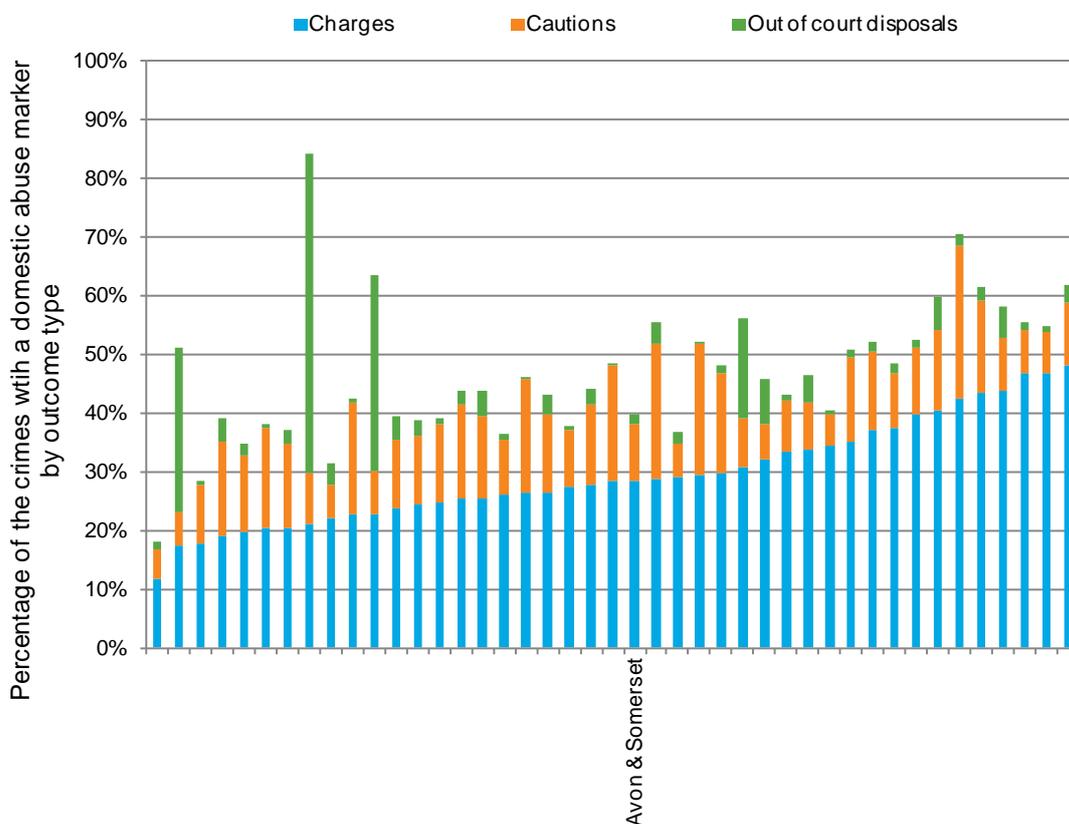
organised and manageable; Bristol is just tenable; Southern (east and west Somerset) is unwieldy.

The constabulary does not have robust quality assurance checks or qualitative auditing across many areas of its procedures, which would provide an insight into the effectiveness of police action, or the quality of service victims are receiving.

Officers and staff are committed to making people safe and tackling offenders. The PPU comprises a willing, dedicated resource with a commitment to protecting people. However, we believe that the response teams and the PPU are becoming distant from one another with the perception of 'risk' being passed from one to the other.

Avon and Somerset recorded 7,877 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013.⁹ Of these crimes 28 percent resulted in a charge, 10 percent resulted in a caution and, two percent had an out-of-court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013

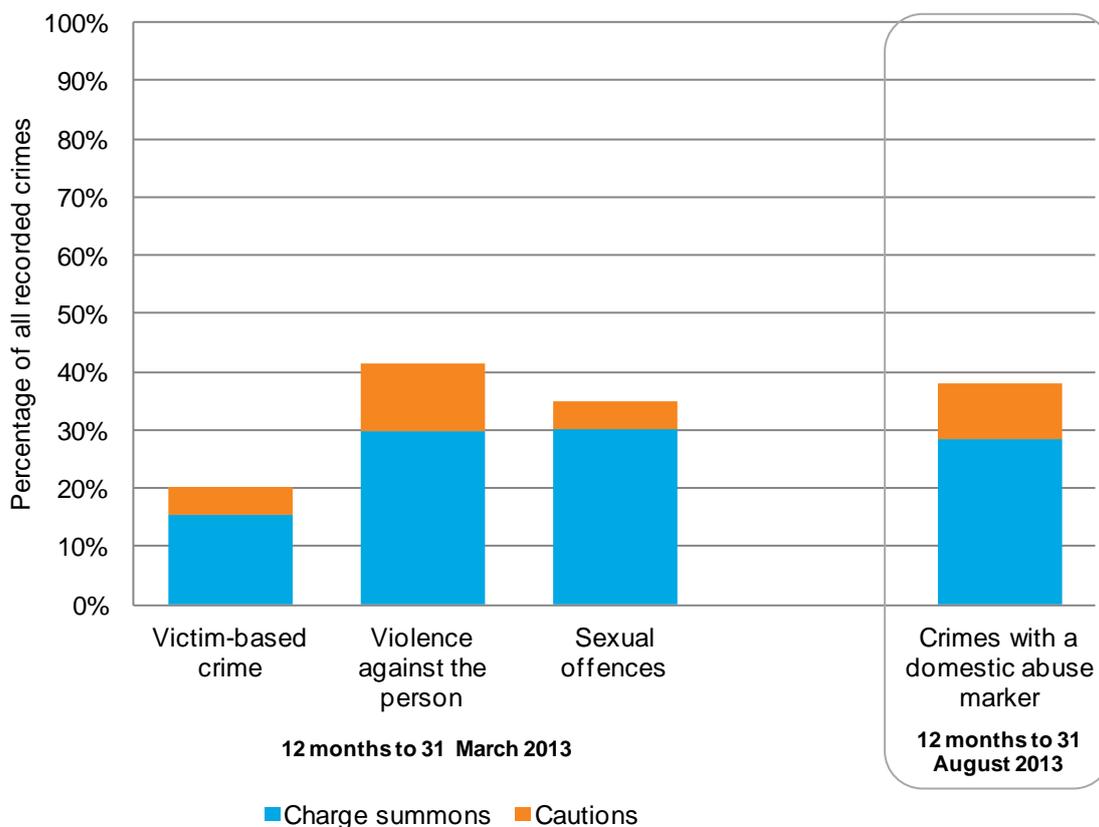


Source: HMIC data collection

Avon and Somerset Constabulary charges a higher proportion of crimes with a domestic abuse marker than recorded victim-based crime. This may indicate that the constabulary has a different approach to domestic abuse outcomes than other crimes.

⁹ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

Figure 3: Percentage of charge summons and cautions used for victim-based crime, violence against the person, sexual offences and all crimes with a domestic abuse marker¹⁰



Sources: HMIC data collection, Home Office crimes detected in England and Wales, ONS Crime in England and Wales

Systems and processes for the support and safeguarding of high risk victims to prevent further harm in the future are uncoordinated. Victim support services contact with the victim remains only until the point of the offender’s sentence. IDVAs are seen as being responsible for maintaining links with victims while offenders are in prison, on remand or serving a sentence and the probation service links with offenders who have served more than 12 months on their release. However, we found no clear constabulary-wide fixed structure for victim contact and updates where offenders’ sentences are less than 12 months.

¹⁰ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

As mentioned earlier there may be opportunity to involve neighbourhood teams and in particular PCSOs, in maintaining contact and supporting victims. The force intelligence bureau supplies a list of all prisoner intelligence notification system (PINS) releases, this is passed to PPU staff, who identify high risk offenders – but, the information is not always accurate. There is a daily prison release sheet sent through to the PPU in Bristol by the force intelligence bureau, but pressures on the unit mean it is not actively scanned.

Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) deal with violent offenders including domestic abuse perpetrators. The nationally recognised Bristol-based integrated offender management unit (IOM) dealing with property-related crime has developed the Integrated Response, Integrated Services (IRiS) pilot to closely manage identified high risk violent offenders through MAPPA, including those committing domestic abuse. The multi-agency partnership (including the probation service, prisons, and psychologists) works with offenders to manage the risk, and also inform victims. This innovative work, respected by partner organisations, should now be considered for development across the constabulary.

Other than the Bristol-based IRiS, there is no apparent constabulary-wide system to tackle serial and serious offenders. However, we acknowledge the head of crime's intention to introduce a structured process of identifying patterns of offending. 'Top 20 offender' lists are provided regularly to all teams and are checked enthusiastically by the FSC and used during the DMM. However, we found long-lists of suspects wanted for questioning about all types of offences which needs the co-ordination through iTask and DMM.

Staff have an understanding of the families that pose the greatest risk within each policing area but again action needs to be coordinated through iTask and the DMM.

Domestic homicide investigations are conducted by the major crime investigation team. The PPU is involved immediately, to provide information to the enquiry and continue any safeguarding of people affected. The constabulary currently has 18 ongoing domestic homicide reviews (DHR), including both homicide and suicide. The PPU conducts a learning process and escalates significant issues to the senior leaders' forum. However, concerns exist about the capacity in the PPU policy team to conduct timely environmental scanning on DHRs and national serious case reviews. The added work involved is considerable and each case impacts on day-to-day responsibilities.

There is a clear emphasis on addressing and achieving the priorities contained within the Police and crime plan, which includes domestic abuse. The constabulary has moved away from simple achievements of recorded and

detected and has broadened performance into how well professional services were delivered to victims. Domestic abuse features heavily in the monthly performance review meeting using a story-board style of qualitative performance monitoring. Beneath this, there is a 'number and percentages' scorecard reflecting both quantity and quality performance results.

Recent case studies examined by the performance meeting include: the standard of DASH reports – senior managers discussed the content of a series of reports which showed good work and demonstrated areas for improvement; and, important messages from 31 victims of domestic abuse surveyed by partner agencies on behalf of the constabulary. Again, senior managers explored the impact police services had on victims and took this to their local performance meetings to reiterate supervisor responsibilities.

Recommendations

As a result of this inspection HMIC has developed recommendations which are designed to tackle any risks identified in the service to victims of domestic abuse. These force specific recommendations should be considered in conjunction with recommendations to all forces set out in HMIC's national report on domestic abuse.

1. The constabulary should replace the term domestic violence with domestic abuse to encourage staff to see the subject as more than just violence.
2. The constabulary should establish clear procedural responsibility for patrol supervisors in the examination and quality assurance of DASH reports and the timely submission to the PPU.
3. The constabulary should develop officers' understanding of the inclusion of safeguarding vulnerable adults exposed to the effects of domestic abuse.
4. The constabulary should implement robust quality assurance checks and qualitative auditing across areas of the procedures which would provide an insight of the effectiveness of police action or the quality of service victims are receiving.
5. The constabulary should provide clarity on the ownership and accountability of victim care.
6. The constabulary should create a consistent allocation process for domestic abuse investigations

Glossary

Bail conditions

A court can remand a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached. Before the first court hearing, the police can also retain a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached, but their powers to do so are more limited than the court's. Conditions can only be imposed to ensure that the defendant attends the next court hearing, commits no new offences in the meantime, and does not interfere with any witnesses or obstruct the course of justice.

Body worn camera

A video camera, worn on the helmet or upper body of an officer, which records visual and audio footage of an incident.

CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse)

CAADA is a national charity supporting a strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse. Its work focuses on saving lives and public money.

CAADA provides practical help to support professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims. The aim is to protect the highest risk victims and their children – those at risk of murder or serious harm.

CCTV

Evidence from Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) can be used to support police investigations. It is primarily used for corroborating what is already known in investigating incidents and to trigger further opportunities to carry out investigation, such as the identification of witnesses and suspects.

Clare's Law

Clare's Law – the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – is designed to provide victims with information that may protect them from an abusive situation before it ends in tragedy. The scheme allows the police to disclose information about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts. The

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is named after Clare Wood who was brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (the Victims' Code) places a statutory obligation on criminal justice agencies to provide a standard of service to victims of crime or, where the victim died as a result of the criminal conduct, their relatives. The obligations the Victims' Code places on the agencies concerned include that:

- They provide victims, or their relatives, with information about the crime, including about arrests, prosecutions and court decisions;
- They provide information about eligibility for compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme;
- Victims be told about Victim Support and either be referred on to them or offered their service;
- Bereaved relatives be assigned a family liaison police officer; and
- Victims of an offender who receives a sentence of 12 months or more after being convicted of a sexual or violent offence have the opportunity to make representations about what licence conditions or supervision requirements the offender should be subject to on release from prison.

There are enhanced entitlements for victims of the most serious crime which includes domestic violence.

Coercive control

This is term and concept developed by Evan Stark which seeks to explain the range of tactics used by perpetrators and the impact of those on victims. It highlights the on-going nature of the behaviour and the extent to which the actions of the perpetrator control the victim through isolation, intimidation, degradation and micro-regulation of everyday life. Crucially it sets out such abuse can be psychological as well as physical. Coercive control is explicitly covered by the definition of domestic abuse.

Control room

A police control or communications room manages emergency (999) and non-emergency (101) calls, and sending police officers to these calls.

Counter-allegation

Where someone initially identified as the perpetrator makes an allegation against the victim. If counter-allegations are not identified and resolved agencies may be providing services to the perpetrator and inadvertently helping them isolate and control the victim. The victim may not get access to the services they need because they are labelled 'the perpetrator'.

Crime Scene Investigator

Police staff who work alongside uniformed and plain clothed police officers during the investigation of a crime to locate, record and recover evidence from crime scenes.

DASH – domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH 2009)

DASH is a risk identification, assessment and management model adopted by UK police forces and partner agencies in 2009. The aim of the DASH assessment is to help front-line practitioners identify high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and so-called honour-based violence.

Domestic Homicide Review

Local areas are expected to undertake a multi-agency review following a domestic homicide. The process aims to assist all those involved, to identify the lessons that can be learned from homicides where a person is killed as a result of domestic violence, with a view to preventing future homicides and violence.

Domestic Violence Prevention Notices (DVPN)

A DVPN is the initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence.

This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively bar the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim.

A DVPN may be issued to a person aged 18 years and over if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that:

- the individual has been violent towards, or
- has threatened violence towards an associated person, and
- the DVPN is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the intended recipient of the DVPN

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (sometimes referred to as female circumcision) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is illegal in the UK.

Frontline

These are police officers or police staff who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law. The HMIC publication, *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge* (2013) sets this out in more detail.

Golden hour

Commonly used to refer to the time after a crime has been committed during which there is maximum potential for recovery of forensic evidence

Harassment

The term harassment is used to cover the 'causing alarm or distress' offences under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 as amended (PHA), and 'putting people in fear of violence' offences under section 4 of the PHA.

House-to- house

House-to-house enquiries are likely to feature in many investigations to: identify suspects and canvas for witnesses in areas connected to an incident, establish who lives or works in a particular location, and obtain an account of their movements during relevant times.

High risk

Term used when, following a DASH risk assessment, there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious. Risk of serious harm (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006): 'A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible'.

IDVA – independent domestic violence adviser

Independent domestic violence advisers or advocates (IDVAs) are trained specialists who provide a service to victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, with the aim of securing their safety and the safety of their children. Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, IDVAs normally work with their clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans.

Incident

When a member of the public calls for police assistance, or a police officer observes or discovers a crime the police usually create an incident record. This is the first step, the police will then decide whether a crime has been committed and, if it is appropriate, create a crime record.

Intimate Partner Violence

This describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy.

MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

MARACs are regular local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies. By bringing all agencies together at a MARAC, and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the victim is represented by the IDVA, a risk focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the victim. There are currently over 270 MARACs operating across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland managing more than 64,000 cases a year.

MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

A Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) brings together staff from police and partner agencies who work from the same location, sharing information and ensuring a timely and joined-up response to protect children and vulnerable adults.

Medium risk

Term used when following a DASH risk assessment there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender has the potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances, for example, failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse.

National Domestic Abuse helpline

A Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge, is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

The Helpline can give support, help and information over the telephone, wherever the caller might be in the country. The Helpline is staffed 24 hours a day by fully trained female helpline support workers and volunteers. All calls are completely confidential. Translation facilities for callers whose first language is not English, and a service for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing are available.

Partnership

A term used where collaborative working is established between the police and other public, private or voluntary organisations.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the PACE codes of practice provide the core framework of police powers and safeguards around stop and search, arrest, detention, investigation, identification and interviewing detainees.

www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions

Positive action

The term refers to the steps and action taken at all stages of the police response to ensure effective protection of victims and children, while allowing the criminal justice system to hold the offender to account. It is often used in the context of arrest policy, police guidance states that “arrest will normally be ‘necessary’ under the terms of PACE to protect a child or vulnerable person, prevent the suspect causing injury and/or to allow for the prompt and effective investigation of the offence”.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving is a term used in policing where forces systematically identify and analyse crime and disorder problems, develop specific responses to individual problems and subsequently assess whether the response has been successful.

Refuge

A refuge is a safe house where women and children who are experiencing domestic violence can stay free from abuse. Refuge addresses (and sometimes telephone numbers) are confidential. According to Women’s Aid on a typical day, **over 7000 women and children** are resident in refuge accommodation in England

Risk assessment

A risk assessment is based on structured professional judgment. It provides structure and informs decisions that are already being made. It is only a guide/checklist and should not be seen as a scientific predictive solution. Its completion is intended to assist officers in the decision-making process on appropriate levels of intervention for victims of domestic violence.

Safeguarding

The term safeguarding is applied when protecting children and other vulnerable people. The UK Government has defined the term 'safeguarding children' as: *"The process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care that enables children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully."*

Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

SARCs are specialist medical and forensic services for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted.

They aim to be a one-stop service, providing the following under one roof: medical care and forensic examination following assault/rape and, in some locations, sexual health services.

Standard Risk

Term used following a DASH risk assessment where current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.

Victim Personal Statement

The Victim Personal Statement (VPS) gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support.

Provisions relating to the making of a VPS and its use in criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), which was published on 29 October 2013 and came into force on 10 December 2013.

Vulnerable

A term used to describe a person who is in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.

What Works Centre for Crime Reduction

The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction is hosted by the College of Policing. The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction will: review research on practices and interventions to reduce crime, label the evidence base in terms of quality, cost and impact, and provide police and crime commissioners and other crime reduction partners with the knowledge, tools and guidance to help them target their resources more effectively.

It will be led by a core team from the College of Policing, and supported by a "commissioned partnership programme" which has been jointly funded by the College and the Economic and Social Research Council.