



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest

# **Dorset Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse**

© HMIC 2014

ISBN: 978-1-78246-345-0

[www.hmic.gov.uk](http://www.hmic.gov.uk)

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 77 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2012/13.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, one in four young people aged 10 to 24 reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood.<sup>3</sup> 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:<sup>4</sup>*

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

<sup>1</sup> Walby, S. (2009). *The cost of domestic violence*. Retrieved from: [www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost\\_of\\_domestic\\_violence\\_update.doc](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost_of_domestic_violence_update.doc)

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

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

<sup>4</sup> All definitions are taken from [www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse](http://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.<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence](http://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 Dorset Police 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<sup>6</sup>. A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

<sup>6</sup>There is a requirement under section 55(5) and section 55(6) of the 1996 Police Act 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 Dorset<sup>7</sup>

### Calls for assistance



In Dorset, domestic abuse accounts for 5% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 9% were from repeat victims.

### Crime

# 7%

Domestic abuse accounts for 7% of all recorded crime.

### Assault with intent

# 24%

Dorset recorded 70 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 17 were domestic abuse related. This is 24% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

### Assault with injury

# 38%

The force also recorded 3,648 assaults with injury, of these 1,383 were domestic abuse related. This is 38% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

<sup>7</sup> 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

# 63%

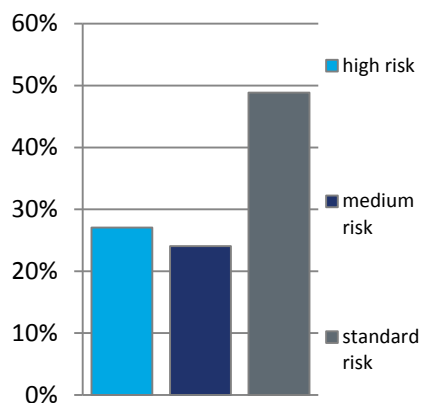
The force recorded 305 harassment offences, of these 192 were domestic abuse related. This is 63% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 22%

The force also recorded 586 sexual offences, of these 130 were domestic abuse related. This is 22% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



On, 31 August 2013 Dorset had 133 active domestic abuse cases; 27% were high risk, 24% were medium risk, and 49% were standard risk.

## Arrests



The force was unable to provide the number of domestic abuse related arrests. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90 arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker.

## Outcomes



Dorset recorded 2,648 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 24% resulted in a charge, 12% resulted in a caution and, 3% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

The public in Dorset can have confidence that, generally, the police provide a good service to victims of domestic abuse and help keep them safe. Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the force, and this is understood by staff at all levels. There has been a significant focus on domestic abuse, and its importance is reflected in the police and crime plan. The force has a well-developed and effective response to high-risk victims of domestic abuse and staff worked well with partners. This report outlines a number of areas where the force could further strengthen its response.

### Identifying victims

In Dorset, staff are trained well in identifying domestic abuse and have a good understanding of risk assessment. There are competent and experienced staff in the control room who deal with calls effectively. Oversight and supervision of the initial response is good.

Building as full a picture as possible of the risks faced by the victim is vital to ensuring the right level of response. HMIC found that staff understand the importance of identifying repeat victims and the force has good systems within its control room. There is a full-time risk management unit (RMU) located within the control room, comprising officers trained by specialist domestic abuse staff, to provide background intelligence on victims, witnesses and offenders to officers before they get to the scene of the incident. The force uses a number of different databases which complicates the process of checking previous history. However, there are plans for this year to replace the existing systems with one which will improve the efficiency of extracting information.

### Keeping victims safe

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for Dorset Police and there is a positive approach to ensure both a satisfactory investigation and a focus on keeping the victim safer. Allocation of cases to specialist investigators is based on the threat of harm and risk to the victim. The force uses computer based domestic abuse training for officers and staff to ensure they understand how to respond effectively. Most officers have received domestic abuse risk assessment training and have had additional training covering physical aspects of abuse, but not other forms, such as coercive control. There was computer-based training on stalking and harassment in 2013 but the force has no record of how many staff completed this. Officers and staff apply the definition of domestic abuse to situations and use their professional judgement and training to make decisions about the safety of the victim and other vulnerable people affected by the abuse.



Supervision is generally robust and effective throughout the response to domestic abuse and the force works hard to make victims safer from the first point of contact. All cases assessed using the domestic abuse stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment are reviewed by a supervisor. Control room and frontline staff display a good understanding of how important their role is in making victims safer and that this is their responsibility. Officers who attend a domestic abuse incident take immediate action to reduce risk and it is clear that the force supports and encourages staff to take positive action, although this is often interpreted as only meaning arresting the perpetrator to resolve the incident.

## **Management of risk**

The force works hard to make victims safer from the first point of contact. All cases assessed as high and medium risk are reviewed again by specialist officers. They set the investigation plan with resources selected based on the risk assessment. Safety plans are created with partner organisations to protect the victim and reduce the risk.

There is good and effective partnership working to support and safeguard victims. There are three multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) in the county. The force is the main driver providing a chair, co-ordination and structure to the process. The MARACs are regarded as working well; information is exchanged promptly and risk assessed, and safety plans are put in place to reduce risk. There is strong evidence that the force works with partners to reduce the risk to victims and as a result make them safer.

## **Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe**

The force has a number of quality assurance processes at appropriate points and has set thresholds for the escalation of risk. Risk gradings are regularly reviewed and changes to the victim's circumstances (for example, the perpetrator's release from prison), triggers immediate police action. The force identifies and manages high-risk offenders effectively together with partner organisations. However, the processes for managing medium and standard risk offenders are less well developed and not as effective.

There is currently no formal structure to examine and systematically embed the findings from the independent police complaints commission (IPCC); serious case reviews; domestic homicide reviews and HMIC recommendations. The force recognises this and is developing a centrally-applied management process to embed learning.

The police and crime commissioner (PCC) is keen to improve services for domestic abuse victims and is working with police and partners to do this. To support this there is sharing of performance information between police analysts and those located in partner organisations to improve knowledge and victim safety. However, the performance framework currently lacks quality assurance checks and does not include qualitative information including feedback from victims but more generally the results from quality-assurance checks.

## Findings

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

In Dorset, staff are trained well in identifying domestic abuse and have a good understanding of risk assessment. There are competent and experienced staff in the control room who deal with calls effectively. Oversight and supervision of the initial response is good.

Building as full a picture as possible of the risks faced by the victim is vital to ensuring the right level of response. HMIC found that staff understand the importance of identifying repeat victims and the force has good systems within its control room. There is a full-time risk management unit (RMU) located within the control room, comprising officers trained by specialist domestic abuse staff, to provide background intelligence on victims, witnesses and offenders to officers before they get to the scene of the incident. The force uses a number of different databases which complicates the process of checking previous history. However, there are plans for this year to replace the existing systems with one which will improve the efficiency of extracting information.

Victims of domestic abuse are identified at the first point of contact by call-handling staff in the emergency force control room and non-emergency public enquiry centre. Staff consistently establish the level of risk, threat and potential harm that may come to the victim using structured questions sets for a range of incidents. Staff are trained to apply the national decision-making model and use their professional judgement to decide the level of response and support given to the victim acting on information the force holds. We found that staff are aware of cultural differences including the varying levels of tolerance to domestic abuse and consider the presence of vulnerable people, particularly children. HMIC listened to a sample of calls reporting domestic abuse and found that call takers were professional and helpful when dealing with victims. They showed a good understanding and application of the definition of domestic abuse and appropriately identified domestic abuse incidents even when it was not entirely clear in the initial report.

The control room has a full-time risk-management unit (RMU) comprising officers trained by specialist domestic abuse staff to provide background intelligence on victims, witnesses and offenders to officers before they get to the scene of the incident. The RMU staff have received training from police and partner organisation specialists on vulnerable adults; child protection; and partnership arrangements between police and other organisations. They identify repeat victims from previously used telephone numbers, and vulnerable victims by examining the national DASH risk assessment reports from a victim's

previous contact. It also uses intelligence available from partner organisations concerned with domestic abuse through the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process. All MARAC cases are held on police intelligence systems and are checked to decide on the best method of supporting the victim and other vulnerable people associated with the victim or situation. The information is then passed to the attending officer in all cases.

The force uses a number of systems which hold information about domestic abuse, making it difficult for the RMU to extract all information quickly. However, there are plans to replace the existing intelligence systems with one system in 2014.

Supervisors and managers working in the control room check the calls and ensure the right action is being taken. The information gathered is passed to officers over the radio as they travel to the incident. In Dorset, there is a clearly defined attendance policy for incidents of domestic abuse and incidents. Officers are sent either immediately – where there is believed to be a risk to life or safety – or, when the victim is thought to be safe, officers will visit them as a high priority. In exceptional circumstances, for example, where the incident took place long before the victim's call, officers attend as a lower priority. The decision on how quickly resources have to attend is based on the assessment of harm, threat and risk faced by the victim.

Patrol sergeants are expected to attend all high-risk domestic abuse incidents. They are directed to do so by the control room, to supervise the primary investigation and ensure all safeguarding measures are put in place. However, in more rural areas, an officer frequently attends this level of incident without a supervisor. In most cases, supervisors subsequently ensure that positive action is taken and, in the event that an arrest is not made, they check the reasons why, before approving the decision taken by the officer. However, this level of scrutiny is not applied consistently across the force, although patrol sergeants will review and approve the submission of the DASH report for all domestic abuse incidents attended by their officers.

There is good management and supervision in the control room and staff question officers when incident logs were being closed without all the actions being completed. However, there is no independent quality assurance of this process or auditing to check if the closing of the incident was appropriate. HMIC listened to and reviewed a small sample of incidents and found staff to be attentive to the victim's needs in all cases. Call takers used the question sets before making an assessment of the risk in each case, although one report did lack sufficient information from the officer attending the incident before the incident log was closed.

All domestic abuse incidents are reviewed by a domestic violence officer (DVO) but the lack of specialist attention at the time the incident is closed creates a risk of potentially leaving someone vulnerable. These specialist officers are not available at weekends to monitor and direct the action immediately after officers have attended incidents.

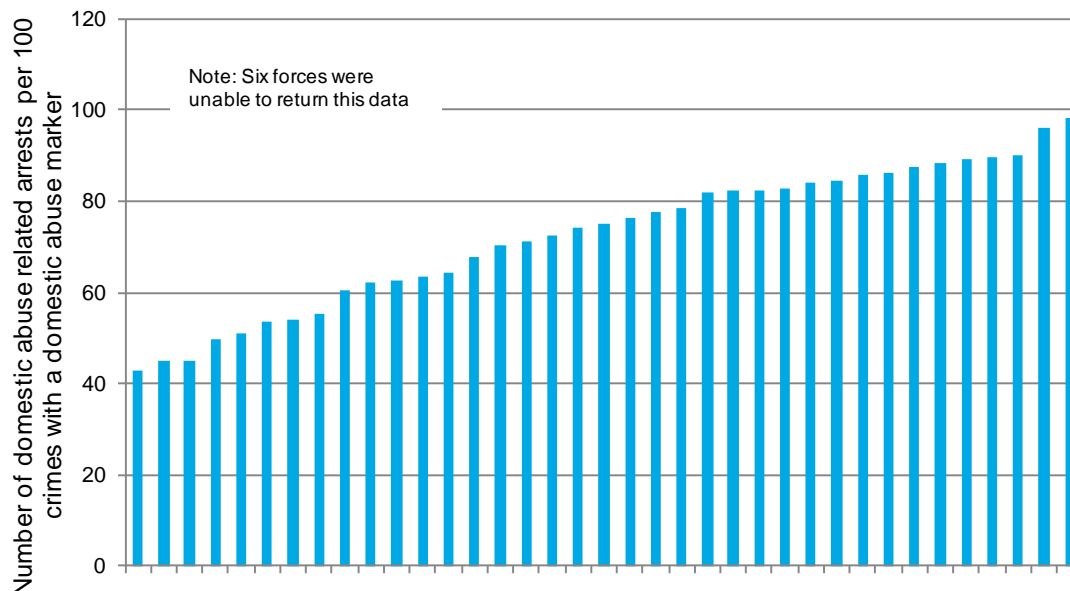
## **How does the force respond to victims of domestic abuse? This includes initial action, including risk assessment**

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for Dorset Police and there is a positive approach to ensure both a satisfactory investigation and a focus on keeping the victim safer. Allocation of cases to specialist investigators is based on the threat of harm and risk to the victim. The force uses computer based domestic abuse training for officers and staff to ensure they understand how to respond effectively. Most officers have received domestic abuse risk assessment training and have had additional training covering physical aspects of abuse, but not other forms, such as coercive control. There was computer-based training on stalking and harassment in 2013 but the force has no record of how many staff completed this. Officers and staff apply the definition of domestic abuse to situations and use their professional judgement and training to make decisions about the safety of the victim and other vulnerable people affected by the abuse.

Supervision is generally robust and effective throughout the response to domestic abuse and the force works hard to make victims safer from the first point of contact. All cases assessed using the domestic abuse stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment are reviewed by a supervisor. Control room and frontline staff display a good understanding of how important their role is in making victims safer and that this is their responsibility. Officers who attend a domestic abuse incident take immediate action to reduce risk and it is clear that the force supports and encourages staff to take positive action, although this is often interpreted as only meaning arresting the perpetrator to resolve the incident.

The force was unable to provide the number of domestic abuse related arrests, and is therefore not included in the following chart. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90 arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker.

**Figure 1: Number of domestic abuse related arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>8</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and a strategic direction and clear ambition has been set. There is a strong commitment to victim care with specific references to domestic abuse in the police and crime plan, to protect repeat and vulnerable victims and to tackle repeat offenders. Responding to domestic abuse is a high priority for the force and despite budgetary challenges the force has maintained numbers in its specialist domestic abuse teams. Chief officers have also reinforced this priority with internal messages and briefings to staff.

Domestic abuse performance is closely monitored by the force through its performance and tasking meetings which includes a daily assessment of risks relating to incidents of domestic abuse. The three daily management meetings

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

are attended by the force incident commander, who is located in the control room, and ensures that offenders are tracked and victims of domestic abuse are brought to the attention of the safeguarding referral unit. During office hours, the unit assesses the circumstances of the incident and immediately refers to other organisations if the incident is high risk and there are other vulnerable people involved. Staff from the unit also attend the management meetings to give information on case management of domestic abuse incidents in the preceding 24 hours. The force is working to improve co-ordination across the police and partners to improve support for victims and there is a clear and strong emphasis on taking positive action by all frontline staff and officers at the incident to make victims safer.

The force has invested heavily in training all frontline staff to apply the national decision-making model which has led to improved recording of information, particularly the completed tasks contained in victim safeguarding plans. Officers are encouraged to use their professional judgement within a framework of domestic abuse policy and procedures, including assessing risk at all stages of the process. Generally, their knowledge of the domestic abuse definition and procedures was good although there was less awareness of the impact of stalking and harassment on victims. There was an inconsistent approach to training for officers attending domestic abuse incidents. Some officers have received face-to-face training from specialist staff while those in neighbourhood teams received computer-based training, which is not valued as highly. Partner organisations also perceive a lack of consistency in the training of frontline staff responding to domestic abuse.

Detectives from the criminal investigation department (CID) also undertake a six-month attachment to the domestic violence teams in Weymouth and Poole before returning to their posts as 'force champions' with the responsibility to educate others and ensure compliance with procedures, particularly guidance to others on the investigation. The force has extended the force champions role to all local policing areas across the force. Staff are selected and trained to give advice and actively follow-up all domestic abuse cases allocated to teams to ensure tasks are completed.

The force requires officers to carry out an initial assessment of the risk faced by domestic abuse victims using the nationally recognised DASH risk assessment tool. HMIC found that a risk assessment is always completed when an officer attends an incident of domestic abuse and there is good knowledge and understanding of the assessment process with officers using professional judgement when considering the level of threat, risk and harm to the victim. Officers are clear about the benefits of completing a risk assessment in order to recognise and then reduce the risk to the victim although they would also

benefit from understanding the full extent of the use of the form with partner agencies and the implication of their decisions.

The force places a requirement on officers who deal with domestic abuse to take positive action, however this has been interpreted by some officers to mean that the offender must be arrested. While positive action could include arresting the offender, the force would benefit from reinforcing with staff the objectives of the policy. HMIC did find that officers and staff are committed to providing support to the victim, including taking immediate action to reduce any risk to the victim and this would include the arrest of the perpetrator. Officers said they felt they were not empowered to deal with the incident without an arrest and are criticised if they don't make an arrest.

When a decision is made to arrest a suspect for domestic abuse and their whereabouts are unknown, the force has put in a place a system to hand over enquiries to trace the suspect. This is monitored through the daily management meeting and supports the force policy, which is to actively pursue the offender.

There was a clear commitment displayed by staff at each stage in the process from the control room, to attending officers and domestic abuse specialists, to understanding the risk to everyone connected to domestic abuse incidents – in particular children and any vulnerable adults. Where a child is part of a family where there has been domestic abuse, the local authority children's social care services are informed through a referral process. This notice is then passed onto children's services. When children are in a family where there is a high risk of violence, the case will be discussed with social workers in order to properly protect them. Officers attending a domestic abuse incident where children have been present in the past, or where children have been identified as being at risk are informed of this. This helps them establish the current level of risk, ensure the children are safe and well at the incident and take any action necessary to protect them.

Officers' main priority is the safety of the victim and anyone else who may be at risk. Officers are expected to complete safety planning to make victims safer before they leave an incident. The management of the immediate risk is the responsibility of the attending officer until the case is passed to the investigating officer. Supervisors have responsibility to monitor the actions taken by staff, and HMIC found that the DASH risk assessment is always reviewed by a supervisor. High-risk incidents are also monitored by the force incident commander to ensure that all appropriate action is taken.

When officers are requested by the control room to attend a call relating to domestic abuse they must complete a DASH risk assessment. The attending officer will assess the level of risk as high, medium or standard risk using their



professional judgement and by completing the DASH risk assessment while they are with the victim. On return to the station it will be entered onto the force database and passed electronically to the safeguarding referral unit's specialist domestic violence officers (DVOs) who examine all domestic abuse incidents and ensure that repeat victims haven't been missed by the control room. DVOs conduct a secondary risk assessment of all high and medium risk cases, and most standard-risk-assessment reports to identify the presence and effect of domestic abuse on children and vulnerable adults for referral to social services where appropriate.

There is scope to improve how domestic abuse cases are investigated. The investigation process starts when the first officer attends the scene. Overall, the initial collection of evidence at the scene of domestic abuse is good, with officers using most opportunities to gather all potential evidence, and patrol sergeants also in attendance to guide the initial investigation. After an arrest has been made, the responsibility for high risk cases sits with CID, and medium and standard risk cases are allocated to the custody office-based dedicated volume crime team. Domestic violence detectives set the investigation plans for CID and the volume crime team, and guidance is also provided by evidence review officers (EROs) in the custody suite. At the time of inspection, the force is considering removing the investigative role of the domestic violence detectives and devoting their skills and knowledge entirely to safeguarding victims. The EROs are also being removed and supervision of the investigation will fall to patrol sergeants. It is therefore important that patrol sergeants are adequately trained to take on these responsibilities to ensure a high-quality investigation.

Until recently, the force's criminal justice department had been co-located with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the two had enjoyed an excellent working relationship in their approach to domestic abuse cases for over ten years. The CPS is relocating to Hampshire to serve the wider southwest region leaving the county of Dorset without dedicated prosecutors. With the impending removal of the EROs, this has further implications on the effectiveness of patrol sergeants to guide their staff through the investigation process.

HMIC examined ten case files for domestic abuse cases which had either been discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or no further action taken by Dorset Police. We found the quality and sufficiency of evidence is generally good with satisfactory investigation and file quality supervision. One assault case was discontinued due to lack of evidence to support a prosecution but the supervisor ensured that a formal warning for the first course of conduct under the Harassment Act was given. The victims of the abuse were supported and positive action taken against offenders. The content of the files was suitable for

submission for a decision from the CPS or for the police to decide on no further action.

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

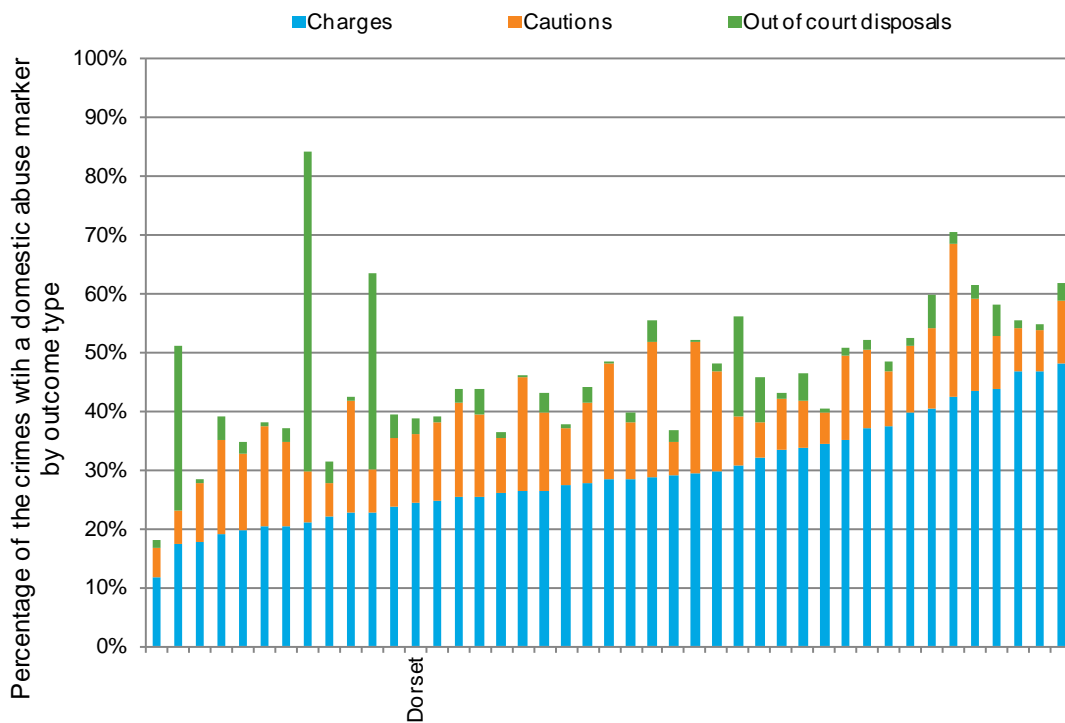
The force works hard to make victims safer from the first point of contact. All cases assessed as high and medium risk are reviewed again by specialist officers. They set the investigation plan with resources selected based on the risk assessment. Safety plans are created with partner organisations to protect the victim and reduce the risk.

There is good and effective partnership working to support and safeguard victims. There are three multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) in the county. The force is the main driver providing a chair, co-ordination and structure to the process. The MARACs are regarded as working well; information is exchanged promptly and risk assessed, and safety plans are put in place to reduce risk. There is strong evidence that the force works with partners to reduce the risk to victims and as a result make them safer.

Dorset Police recorded 2,648 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 24 percent resulted in a charge, 12 percent in a caution and, 3 percent had an out of court disposal.<sup>9</sup>

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

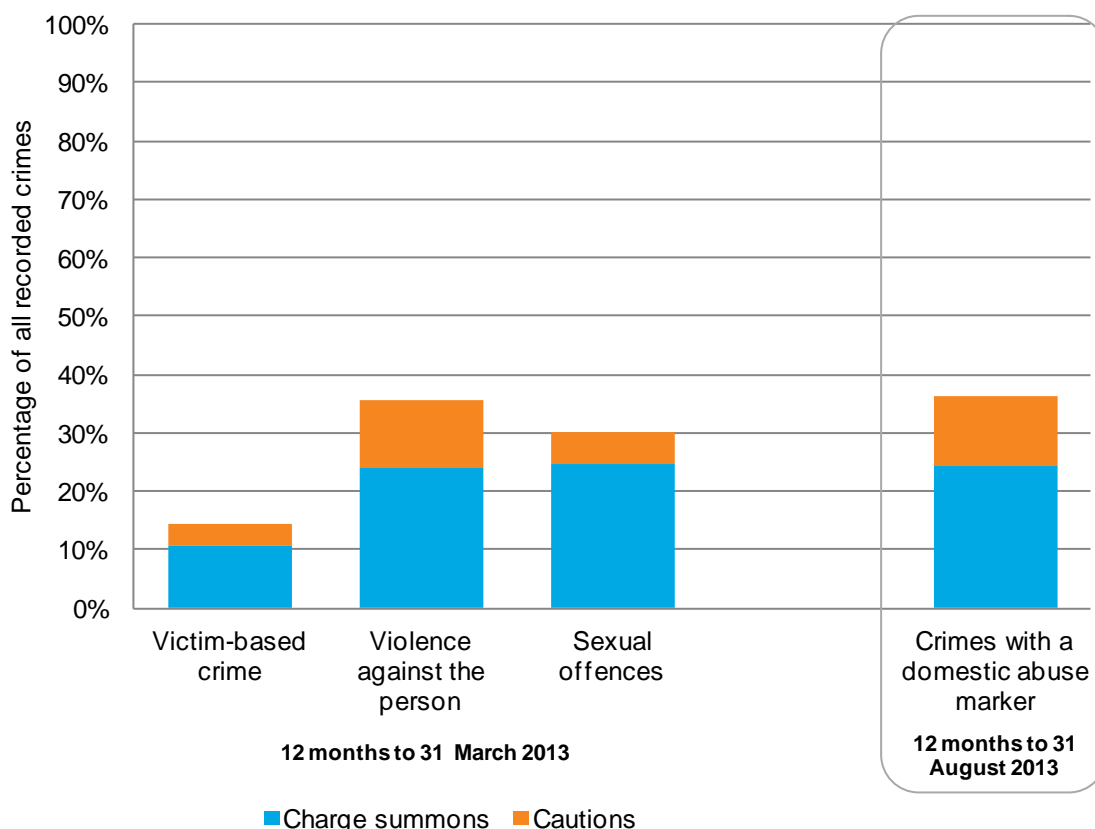
**Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013**



Source: HMIC data collection

Dorset Police charges a higher proportion of crimes with a domestic abuse marker than recorded victim-based crime. This may indicate that the force has a different approach to domestic abuse outcomes than other crimes.

**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 marker<sup>10</sup>**



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

The force area covers complex local authority boundaries and despite different approaches by partners the current working arrangements work well. Partners have made a commitment in principle to the concept of a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), where police, social services and health professionals are co-located, but without a firm delivery plan at this stage. There is a MASH pilot operating in Poole which involves sharing information between six organisations and regular telephone conferences to discuss levels of risk and safety action plans. The pilot is evaluating the reduction in the level of risk as a result of its interventions.

When a high-risk case has been identified, the case is referred to the MARAC and an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) will be appointed to make

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

contact with the victim. There are currently three well-attended MARACs in the force area, each chaired by police. In 2013, an independent review assessed them as 'effective'. There are good working relationships between the force and its partners including health services, housing and local authority. This means the force is able to share information and have a more complete picture around risk levels. The MARAC is set up to allow partner agencies to jointly develop and implement a risk management plan which will increase accountability, provide support for the victim and reduce risk of harm. The force works with IDVAs who act as a point of contact providing support for victims of domestic abuse. They attend the MARACs and guide the content of the conferences based on their experience of each victim. Actions are completed before the next MARAC with staff introducing safeguarding measures into the safety plan before the next conference. The meeting is there primarily to feedback the results of action taken by the services involved.

There is also a steering group which examines the consistency and effectiveness of each MARAC and implements recommendations. There are strong links between the MARAC process and MAPPA<sup>11</sup> with relevant senior managers from partner organisations appearing regularly at both meetings.

Safety plans are developed in all cases and regularly reviewed. Initially the plans are the responsibility of the attending officer and subsequently fall to the investigator in conjunction with specialist support from a DVO and IDVA staff. New information, such as court results triggers a review of the level of risk which can be escalated with additional measures being put in place. Risk re-assessment takes place at defined stages throughout the multi-agency referral process with DVOs checking the suitability and progress of safety plans which direct action for all agencies in support of the victim and the management of the offender.

The force has a relatively large number of victims who are assessed as medium risk. The force has a process to monitor these, as well as standard-risk victims, through the daily management meetings. Lists are prepared for each meeting by the force's intelligence team and officers are tasked to complete actions, with the results recorded on the crime and intelligence system.

The force has recognised the opportunities to improve investigations and develop best evidence, which means that officers are focused on corroborating

<sup>11</sup> Multi-agency public protection arrangement. The arrangements for statutory partners to monitor serious offenders.

the victims account from the outset. Specialist domestic abuse officers are specially selected because they have an investigative and safeguarding background. The force has invested in their training, although not all specialist staff have received training on dealing with stalking and harassment. There is recognition by the force that a dedicated team of domestic abuse investigators for high and medium-risk cases would further improve outcomes for victims, as there is some concern over the medium risk victims being dealt with by volume crime staff. These are often the cases that result in serious case reviews; consequently the force is working towards a dedicated unit.

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

The force has a number of quality assurance processes at appropriate points and has set thresholds for the escalation of risk. Risk gradings are regularly reviewed and changes to the victim's circumstances (for example, the perpetrator's release from prison), triggers immediate police action. The force identifies and manages high-risk offenders effectively together with partner organisations. However, the processes for managing medium and standard risk offenders are less well developed and not as effective.

There is currently no formal structure to examine and systematically embed the findings from the independent police complaints commission (IPCC); serious case reviews; domestic homicide reviews and HMIC recommendations. The force recognises this and is developing a centrally-applied management process to embed learning.

The police and crime commissioner (PCC) is keen to improve services for domestic abuse victims and is working with police and partners to do this. To support this there is sharing of performance information between police analysts and those located in partner organisations to improve knowledge and victim safety. However, the performance framework currently lacks quality assurance checks and does not include qualitative information including feedback from victims but more generally the results from quality-assurance checks.

The force has a good approach to managing victim safety. The risk levels to victims are reviewed at regular stages in the criminal justice process by the DVOs. Stages include: releasing the suspect on bail; court appearances; and sentencing. Specialist domestic violence officers are responsible for keeping victims informed from the point a perpetrator is charged through to the court case. An IDVA or an 'outreach person' is appointed in high-risk cases to help support and address the victim's needs throughout the duration of the action plan. A court IDVA supports the victim through the trial and maintains contact

with specialist domestic violence officers ensuring special measures are in place when needed.

Force computer systems allow for the use of warning markers to record sentence and release dates and the MARAC will set key dates for partnership engagement with the victim. There is also contact with the victim while the offender is in prison. DVOs receive a prisoner intelligence notification system (PINS) report if a perpetrator is due for release. The domestic abuse case is then referred back to the MARAC for further review. However, information is not currently provided by prisons on remand prisoners who may be released on bail by the court without notice. Instead, the force relies on court notification which makes timing of safety plan reviews more difficult.

If a victim breaks contact with the police, after a prescribed time, it triggers a 'no-contact' indicator and the domestic abuse team contacts the victim.

Externally, the force is engaged with various partner agencies across the county and is represented at the Dorset domestic violence strategic group which is a sub group of the Dorset community safety partnership (CSP). Its purpose is to deliver the Dorset domestic abuse strategy and coordinate the work of borough and county councils. Outside of the formalised safety partnership, contact is maintained through the MARAC and MAPPA structures, and daily contact takes place between partners particularly in relation to high-risk cases.

The identification of serial and serious domestic abuse perpetrators is undertaken by the force. Serial perpetrators are assessed against a risk matrix and a profile made of their offending and characteristics. Names of high-risk offenders and their offending profiles are passed to the offender management unit (OMU) and considered for action through the MAPPA and MARAC processes. Many offenders identified as serial perpetrators are managed through other existing offender management procedures, so information from the different processes is combined by the OMU. However, the OMU and MARAC only review high-risk perpetrators as there is currently not enough capacity to also manage perpetrators who are deemed medium or standard risk. This is concerning and the force needs to start tackling all domestic abuse perpetrators more systematically to manage future risk by reducing reoffending.

Officers understand the people and families at risk in their areas. The force's iTask system is used to alert patrol officers to look out for domestic abuse offenders for intelligence purposes or to make an arrest. Officers can attach an alert to a record of a victim, offender, location or vehicle relating to any crime including domestic abuse incidents. Any information that is uploaded to the system will generate an email to the requesting officer alerting them to the existence of this new information. iTask has an audit trail so supervisors can

track the progress of arrest enquiries. Tasks can be seen on desktop computers and can be sent to officers' hand held devices while they are on patrol. However, there are only a limited number of these available.

Daily management meetings are used to ensure victim safeguarding actions are completed and high-risk offenders discussed. The force intelligence bureau also examines the victim and perpetrator lists at least once a week and medium to standard risk perpetrators are discussed at weekly management meetings.

The use of information about domestic abuse in performance management is examined at the monthly strategic performance board. HMIC found that the performance framework lacks policy compliance checks and there is a gap around qualitative performance measures. The force would benefit from developing its performance framework to include the results of existing quality assurance measures and a set of key measures for examination at the strategic level to ensure compliance. Analysts from partner organisations are permitted controlled access to computer systems on the force's premises to obtain detail on cases and in turn, partners share their performance information with the force. While the force currently monitors some areas of performance in respect of domestic abuse it does not currently monitor the views of victims about the service they receive. This would provide an opportunity to further improve its service to victims.

There is currently no formal structure to examine and embed systematically the findings from the independent police complaints commission (IPCC); serious case reviews; domestic homicide reviews and HMIC recommendations. The force recognises this and is developing a centrally-applied management process to embed learning.



## 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. All frontline staff should receive face-to-face training in the definitions and implications of stalking and harassment; and a general overview of public protection from the many organisations that help to support victims and tackle domestic abuse. First responders also need training specifically for their initial attendance at an incident built around the management of the victim and the early stages of the investigation.
2. The force has established the mindset of taking positive action but should now develop a more considered approach to include taking the victim's view and the implications of each positive-action option before deciding on action.
3. The force should review weekend provision by domestic violence officers.
4. The force must improve the contact between officers and staff working in rural areas and patrol sergeants, through the force incident commander in the control room. This will help ensure all parts of the police response to domestic abuse are supervised at every stage.
5. In line with the force's promotion of the 2013 ACPO domestic abuse definition, we recommend that the force uses the term 'domestic abuse' in place of 'domestic violence' in all systems, role titles and documents to ensure that the mindset of officers and staff reflects the full extent of the definition.
6. The force should review how medium and standard risk perpetrators are managed so that it can reduce re-offending and improve victim safety.
7. The force should review the current performance framework to improve quality assurance checks and include qualitative information.
8. Publicise the role of the specialist team in order that all staff understand what they do and how they can help make victims safer.
9. The force should review the roles carried out by specialist domestic abuse officers to improve investigative outcomes for medium risk and standard victims.



## 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](http://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.