



# **Gloucestershire 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.<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”.*

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<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

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<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)

test the reality of each force's approach with frontline officers. Our inspection teams were supplemented by expert peers, which included public protection 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 Gloucestershire 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.<sup>6</sup> A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

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<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 Gloucestershire<sup>7</sup>

### Calls for assistance



In Gloucestershire, domestic abuse accounts for 3% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 42% were from repeat victims.

### Crime

# 6%

Domestic abuse accounts for 6% of all recorded crime.

### Assault with intent

# 24%

Gloucestershire recorded 141 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 34 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.

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<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.

## Assault with injury

**33%**

The constabulary also recorded 2,362 assaults with injury, of these 771 were domestic abuse related. This is 33% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Harassment

**53%**

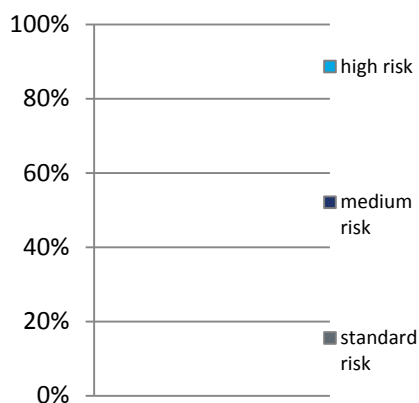
The constabulary recorded 143 harassment offences, of these 76 were domestic abuse related. This is 53% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

**25%**

The constabulary also recorded 534 sexual offences, of these 131 were domestic abuse related. This is 25% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



Gloucestershire was unable to provide data relating to the number of active high, medium and standard risk cases they had.

## Arrests



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

## Outcomes



Gloucestershire recorded 1,904 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, 4% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

HMIC has significant concerns about the ability of Gloucestershire Constabulary to deal consistently and appropriately with victims of domestic abuse and to reduce the risk of harm to them. There are weaknesses in the way the constabulary deals with domestic abuse at the first point of contact and in the ability of the constabulary to consistently provide an effective response to safeguarding victims. The service is fragmented because the systems in place are incoherent and confusing. Specialist resources are stretched and the strong commitment to tackling domestic abuse within the constabulary's public protection bureau (PPB) is not replicated across the constabulary leadership as a whole. Given the scale of the areas for improvement, HMIC has concluded that swift action is needed by the constabulary to address the risks identified in this report.

### Identifying victims

HMIC found risks with the way the constabulary manages the initial service to victims. While there is commitment at the first point of contact to identify victims of domestic abuse, there are no routinely followed processes to ensure a consistent approach. Risk assessment is inconsistent and, as a result, those most at risk may not get the best available service at the earliest opportunity. Supervision in the control room and on the front line needs to be enhanced to support immediate action and safeguarding so that the constabulary can have confidence that victims consistently get the service they need.

### Keeping victims safe

Although there is strong commitment to tackling domestic abuse within the constabulary's public protection bureau (PPB), HMIC found that across the constabulary as a whole there is a lack of clear ownership; and, other than where a serious crime has occurred, there are weaknesses and inconsistencies in the response to domestic abuse victims, especially in relation to their safeguarding. The current governance structures around domestic abuse act as a barrier to effective strategic oversight and direction for the constabulary as a whole. The result is a dilution of any common understanding that domestic abuse is everyone's responsibility resulting in the risk that some victims may not get the service they need.



## **Management of risk**

Victims of domestic abuse that are subject of serious crime receive a good service from the PPB. However, the service to victims not dealt with by the PPB is disjointed and inconsistent. The PPB only deals with a very small proportion of domestic abuse incidents, though these are with the highest risk victims. The vast majority of cases are dealt with by other local teams across the constabulary, where the focus is on the crime and the offender, not the victim. There is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities for victims' safety and there is a risk that safeguarding is not effective for all victims.

Partnership working in Gloucestershire in relation to high-risk domestic abuse cases is a real strength, and effective relationships between the PPB and partners are focused on making victims safer. The daily multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) pilot is innovative and promotes early multi-agency intervention and information sharing.

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

HMIC found various points in the process where the systems are not sufficiently robust to effectively manage future risk to victims. The constabulary has recognised that it needs to evaluate outcomes for domestic abuse and to properly manage domestic abuse and risk to victims in the future. However, there is no consistent understanding of what good or improved performance looks like, performance is not considered across the constabulary and monitoring does not currently lead to management and performance improvement. Established processes are in place to embed corporate learning following recommendations from serious case reviews and domestic homicide reviews and there is some encouraging work being done to identify and manage high-risk perpetrators of domestic abuse.

## Findings

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

HMIC found risks with the way the constabulary manages the initial service to victims. While there is commitment at the first point of contact to identify victims of domestic abuse, there are no routinely followed processes to ensure a consistent approach. Risk assessment is inconsistent and, as a result, those most at risk may not get the best available service at the earliest opportunity. Supervision in the control room and on the frontline needs to be enhanced to support immediate action and safeguarding so that the constabulary can have confidence that victims consistently get the service they need.

Victims of domestic abuse are identified by Gloucestershire Constabulary through calls to their police control room, attendance at stations or by other agencies, such as health and children's services, at a MARAC. The majority of incidents and crimes are reported through the police control room where call handlers assess the nature of the call and apply a generic risk assessment process to 'grade' the police response. All domestic-related incidents are graded along with other incident types on a case-by-case basis. There is no additional priority given to domestic abuse incidents and crimes to decide whether and how soon police attendance is necessary.

There is no accepted or consistent process for staff to follow which would ensure that victims of domestic abuse can be consistently identified at the first point of contact. The effectiveness of identifying domestic abuse is reliant on the skills, experience and professional judgement of each call handler in questioning callers to obtain history and context, for example whether weapons are involved or children present.

The constabulary has produced a '*Policing Domestic Violence – How To?*'<sup>8</sup> document which outlines the importance of dealing with domestic abuse incidents and provides guidance in relation to receiving reports; responding to and investigating such incidents. This document also provides a reminder for call takers, which includes the identification of any history of domestic abuse and vulnerability in terms of disability or barriers to communication. There are

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<sup>8</sup> *Policing Domestic Violence – How To?* Gloucestershire Constabulary, June 2013.

also a number of prompts for questions that call handlers can access to assist with questioning callers. However these practices are not compulsory and are not routinely used by control room staff, meaning that full assessment of callers and the circumstances of the report are not consistent.

The specialist team in the constabulary's public protection bureau (PPB) is developing further guidance for control room staff to cover the breadth of the definition of domestic abuse and the key areas of information call handlers need to establish from the caller and available intelligence systems. This work is part of the domestic abuse service improvement plan informed by the HMIC report into domestic-related Essex homicide<sup>9</sup>.

Control room staff 'tag' incidents as they enter the details on the force's command and control system (STORM) that they consider fall within the definition of domestic abuse. A daily print out of these incidents is conducted by the central referral unit in the PPB who then manually transfer the information onto a standalone domestic abuse database. Notwithstanding the duplication of effort and independence of this system, the domestic abuse database is available to control room staff when researching information and intelligence and provides detailed information about victims and offenders.

In addition to the domestic abuse database, call handlers, dispatchers and police supervisors have access to the constabulary's various intelligence systems to inform their assessment of a call at first point of contact and provide information to officers attending. This includes a general intelligence system (UNIFI), a child risk database and an overarching searching system (GCIS). Again, use of these systems to inform an assessment of risk is not consistent; the quality of interrogation of the various systems is down to the individual call handler or call dispatcher, depending on the time available and their knowledge and expertise.

The main intelligence and information systems across the organisation are not fully integrated. This presents challenges for staff in conducting research, handling investigations and managing the ongoing safeguarding of victims. That said, officers attending incidents felt that generally good quality information and intelligence was relayed to assist their assessment at the scene. This includes

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<sup>9</sup> *Essex Police's Approach to Managing Cases of Domestic Abuse*, HMIC, June 2013, <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/media/essex-polices-approach-to-managing-cases-of-domestic-abuse.pdf>

checks against the domestic abuse database and relevant information about children if they are present.

Previous contact from callers to the control room can only be identified consistently through the address or telephone number. Constabulary systems cannot identify previous contact from a named individual alone. This means that while there could be repeated incidents of domestic abuse by the same perpetrator at different locations, the connection could not be made and so the scale of the problem not fully appreciated by the police. Markers may be placed against an individual victim or offender but these are dependent upon correct understanding and interpretation of details so their use is inconsistent.

The constabulary has a specific policy on domestic abuse and honour-based violence, which outlines the approach to taking positive action against those who commit domestic abuse offences, ensuring there is provision for support for victims and families. The policy includes a definition of 'repeat victim' but this is not widely understood, either in the control room or by those attending or investigating domestic abuse incidents and crimes. There is a degree of reliance on the caller to identify themselves as a repeat victim and even when they do, repeat status does not equate to an enhanced response. Vulnerability is also not consistently considered and there is no definition of a 'vulnerable victim'. These issues cause confusion and have an impact on the ability of the constabulary to identify those victims potentially most at risk of harm and properly consider and manage threat of harm and risk.

The level of training in relation to risk assessment and domestic abuse received by control room staff varied. New starters receive a four-week training course which includes sessions on identifying and managing vulnerability, including domestic abuse cases. A specific session on domestic abuse is also provided, including the definition and associated areas such as stalking and harassment.

There is approximately 140 staff within the control room. Of those, the constabulary has assessed that 109 staff have received either the new starter training package or refresher training on the key domestic abuse elements within the course. During our fieldwork, we interviewed a number of staff in the control room and found that training received was inconsistent, with some established staff reporting no training on domestic abuse in recent years.

There is no routine supervision in real time or retrospectively of domestic abuse incidents in the control room. Control room staff may prompt officers if they consider that more could be done at the scene. This is not a consistent practice and is based upon professional judgement rather than policy. Similarly, frontline

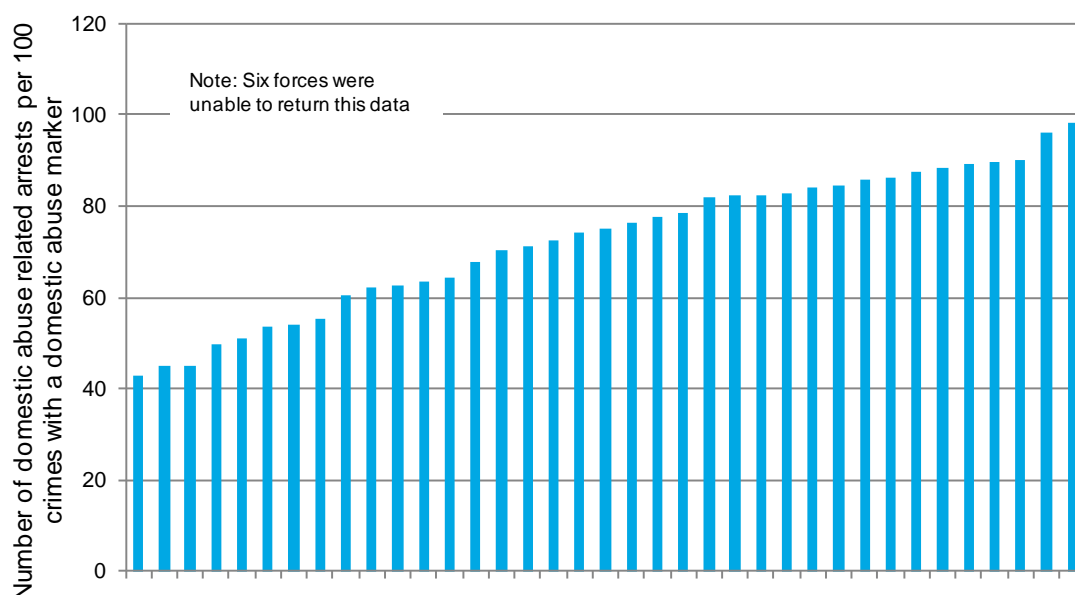
supervisors are not directed to supervise domestic abuse incidents and supervision is dependent upon capacity and time, with priority given to higher-grade incidents of any kind. There is no established authority level to close domestic abuse incidents to check that all appropriate action has been taken.

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

Although, there is strong commitment to tackling domestic abuse within the constabulary's public protection bureau (PPB), HMIC found that across the constabulary as a whole there is a lack of clear ownership; and, other than where a serious crime has occurred, there are weaknesses and inconsistencies in the response to domestic abuse victims, especially in relation to their safeguarding. The current governance structures around domestic abuse act as a barrier to effective strategic oversight and direction for the constabulary as a whole. The result is a dilution of any common understanding that domestic abuse is everyone's responsibility resulting in the risk that some victims may not get the service they need.

The constabulary 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<sup>10</sup> and 90 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**



Source: HMIC data collection

Tackling domestic abuse is not a stated priority for the constabulary. The police and crime commissioner’s (PCC’s) police and crime plan has links to safety and vulnerability. However, there is no specific focus on domestic abuse in the plan and it does not feature in the constabulary’s stated priorities or objectives. Safeguarding is acknowledged to be one the greatest areas of risk for the constabulary but is not embedded in culture at all levels.

There is clear ownership and commitment in relation to domestic abuse within the public protection bureau (PPB) in Gloucestershire Constabulary. Those

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

directly involved in the public protection arena at all levels are clearly passionate about making people safer in Gloucestershire and committed to a continuous improvement plan for domestic abuse. Despite the austerity challenges, the constabulary has continued to invest in public protection including domestic abuse.

Leadership and governance of domestic abuse is split between two assistant chief constables, with one having responsibility for external domestic abuse partnership working and the other having responsibility for the internal delivery of services for tackling domestic abuse. This disconnection is adding to the lack of focus across the constabulary for domestic abuse. Aligning the overarching partnership and operational accountability for domestic abuse may assist in achieving clearer oversight and direction and a common understanding that domestic abuse is everyone's responsibility. This is not to say that domestic abuse is not taken seriously by staff, but links to those managing the majority of the staff dealing with domestic abuse are not as strong as they could be. Lead responsibility is invariably perceived across the organisation to lie with the PPB, which in reality only deals with a very small proportion of cases.

Success in tackling domestic abuse lies in effective partnership working among agencies working to protect and support victims. The assistant chief constable (ACC) (organisation) leads the external partnership arrangements through the Gloucestershire safer stronger leadership board. Linked to this framework is the multi-agency domestic abuse and sexual violence strategic board chaired by the executive director of Cheltenham borough council and attended by representatives of the PPB. Various sub-groups operate beneath this level to drive partnership work around domestic abuse. However, internally, ACC (operations) is the constabulary lead for domestic abuse. He chairs the monthly performance and operations meeting which has a standing agenda item for public protection. The meeting features a quarterly update on the constabulary's service improvement plan for domestic abuse, review of the multi-agency sharing hub (MASH) project and multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) pilot. This meeting links to the weekly chief officer group (COG) meetings and to management meetings held daily and fortnightly.

The PPB was developed in 2009 to co-locate key partners with safeguarding responsibilities. Currently working from the same location are the police, probation, elements of children's social care and the Gloucestershire domestic abuse support service (GDASS). Full integration has been difficult to achieve due to office layout and differing governance arrangements. The partners are currently involved in a daily MARAC pilot which operates from the PPB in

Cheltenham. The intention is to achieve a fully integrated MASH by April 2014. The MASH is likely to absorb the MARAC pilot, the vision being to include domestic abuse referrals as well as child and vulnerable adult safeguarding concerns.

In addition to public protection partnership developments, the constabulary is currently undergoing an organisation development review where six regional commands will be replaced by a functional command structure. One of the commands will be for public protection and safeguarding which will cover all safeguarding (including domestic abuse) and sexual offences. The intention is to extend the current remit of the PPB to deal with more domestic abuse cases.

There is a clear emphasis on tackling domestic abuse which results in serious crime and where victims are assessed as 'high risk'. However, ownership of the safeguarding responsibility for medium and standard risk victims is less clear, which may create a disparity in levels of service. In its current form, specialist staff within the PPB are responsible for the investigation of domestic abuse crimes that fall within the definition of serious crime with a high risk of serious harm. However, their capacity is limited and during peak workloads some high-risk victims and offenders will be dealt with by general CID or local policing teams (LPTs). All remaining medium and standard risk cases are dealt with by LPTs and their criminal justice investigation units (CJIUs) which interview detainees. LPTs are responsible for investigations that have not yet resulted in an arrest.

The training received by staff dealing with victims of domestic abuse is inconsistent, both within the PPB and LPTs. A half-day lesson has been developed by the constabulary (effective April 2013) which includes the most up-to-date definition of domestic abuse, role of the first responder, risk levels, stalking and honour-based violence (HBV), case studies, lessons learned, and information in relation to support services. The training also includes how to apply the national domestic abuse stalking and harassment risk assessment model (DASH). The intention is to deliver this to all staff in due course.

The attending officer is the initial decision-maker as to whether the incident is domestic abuse. During the inspection, we found a varied understanding of the definition of domestic abuse which creates a risk that officers' professional discretion is not accurately or consistently applied when identifying incidents and crimes.

Once the attending officer has established that a domestic incident has occurred, they are expected to undertake a risk assessment using the nationally



recognised DASH risk assessment tool. Following this, they should carry out an immediate safeguarding action to reduce the risk to victims and their family. Guidance is provided in the '*Policing Domestic Violence – How To?*'<sup>11</sup> document which includes an example safety plan. There was a consistent understanding that children of domestic abuse victims were vulnerable and needed safeguarding and officers understood the referral processes to children's services in appropriate cases.

Attending officers are instructed to complete a DASH risk assessment in all cases of domestic abuse. The level of DASH compliance is poor in some areas of the constabulary and more work needs to be done to better understand this. There is a risk that some victims are not being properly risk assessed to determine the most appropriate level of service and intervention.

There are weaknesses in the supervision of the responses provided. There is no formalised structure to the real time supervision of risk assessment and immediate safeguarding activity. High-risk cases tend to attract more intrusive supervision, particularly where children are involved or present. Levels of endorsement are required before DASH forms can be submitted but this is generally considered to be an administrative process. Risk assessments and safety plans are not consistently reviewed. There is also no structure to monitor or supervise investigations not dealt with by the PPB and, like supervision of risk assessment, practice is inconsistent. During the inspection we identified that the use of cautions rather than criminal prosecutions for domestic abuse crime appears to be high. No specific analysis has been conducted to understand the reasons behind this or the consequences.

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

Victims of domestic abuse that are subject of serious crime receive a good service from the PPB. However, the service to victims not dealt with by the PPB is disjointed and inconsistent. The PPB only deals with a very small proportion of domestic abuse incidents, though these are with the highest risk victims. The vast majority of cases are dealt with by other local teams across the constabulary, where the focus is on the crime and the offender, not the victim.

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<sup>11</sup> *Policing Domestic Violence – How To?* Gloucestershire Constabulary, June 2013.

There is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities for victims' safety and there is a risk that safeguarding is not effective for all victims.

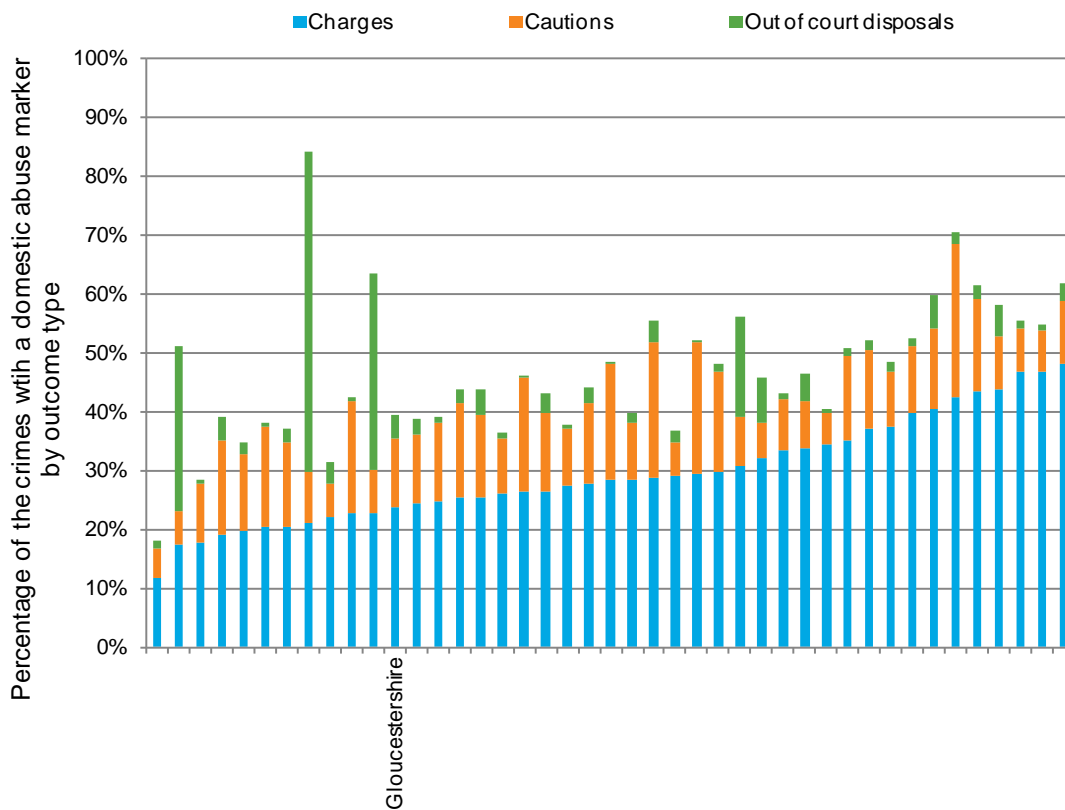
Partnership working in Gloucestershire in relation to high-risk domestic abuse cases is a real strength, and effective relationships between the PPB and partners are focused on making victims safer. The daily multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) pilot is innovative and promotes early multi-agency intervention and information sharing.

Gloucestershire recorded 1,904<sup>12</sup> domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 24 percent resulted in a charge, 12 percent resulted in a caution and, 4 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**

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<sup>12</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse marker on the IT recording systems.

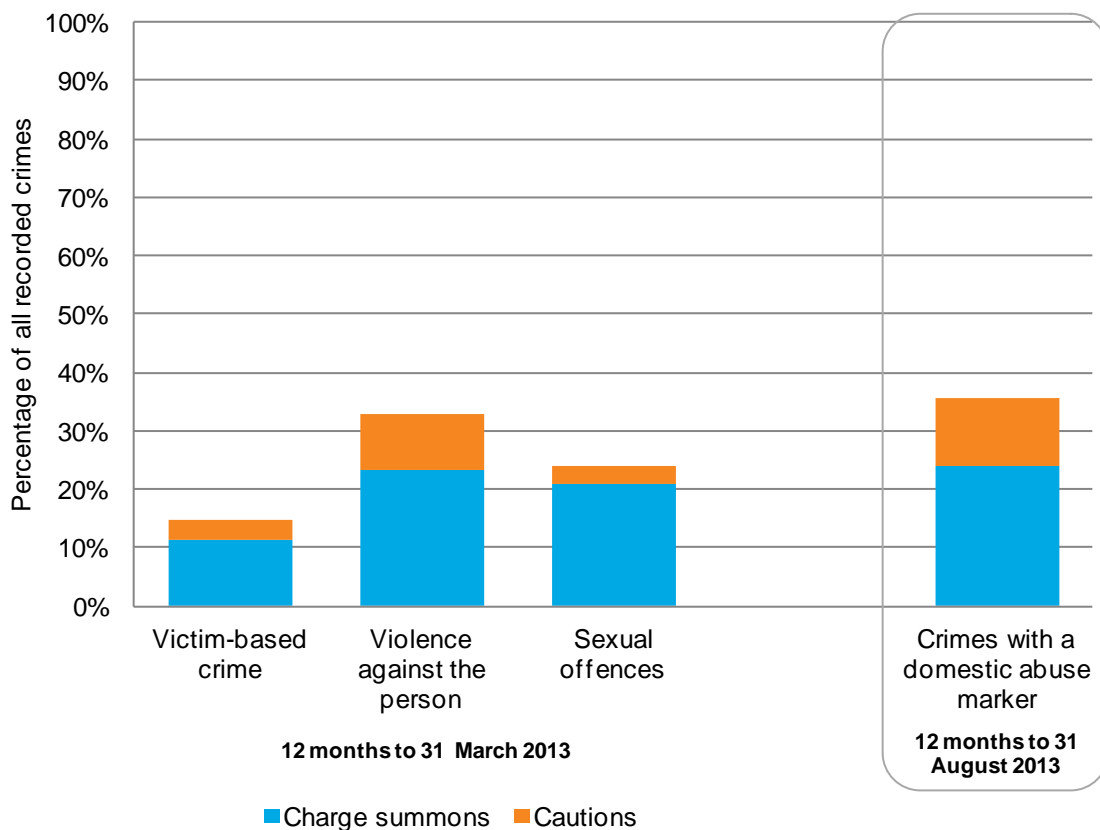


Source: HMIC data collection

Gloucestershire 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.

**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>13</sup>**

<sup>13</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse marker on the IT recording systems.



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

The specialist PPB receives all risk assessment forms from domestic abuse incidents completed by attending officers. On a day-to-day basis, they review all victims assessed as high risk and use additional information from partner agencies to develop a more complete picture of the risk that victim may be facing. High-risk cases are automatically referred into the MARAC process where the GDASS provides independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) to give additional support to victims and review safety plans.

The vast majority of domestic abuse risk assessments, those graded as medium and standard risk by the attending officer, receive an administrative review by a local sergeant. This review does not consist of a review of the grading but rather focuses on completeness of the form which is then submitted to the PPB. There is no checking mechanism to ensure a risk assessment form is completed in all necessary cases because victims assessed as medium and standard risk are not reviewed by the PPB unless three or more incidents involving the same person occur within a rolling six-month period which

automatically triggers a review by a PPB sergeant. This means that victims in medium and standard cases may not be properly risk assessed or reviewed. Given the lack of understanding of the definition of domestic abuse amongst staff and poor compliance in carrying out risk assessments in some areas, the constabulary cannot be confident that the majority of victims are receiving a consistent or appropriate service.

In medium and standard risk cases, referral to other agencies including GDASS only takes place if the victim has consented to third-party contact. Where their victims consent, GDASS outreach workers support them. There is one exception where lack of consent is overridden – where children are involved. In these cases referral takes place either directly to children’s services (where the children are known to social services) or through a separate process referred to as the domestic abuse referral process (DARP) meeting. The DARP operates in a similar way to the MARAC process, where relevant agencies come together to discuss cases in an effort to reduce the harm caused by domestic abuse to children.

The PPB in conjunction with partner agencies provides a good service to victims of domestic abuse subjected to a serious crime but there is lack of clarity across the constabulary about what the team do and for whom. The team’s remit is not strictly defined so they may deal with all high-risk victims one day but only high-risk victims subjected to serious crime the next, depending upon their capacity. Clarification and communication of different team’s roles and responsibilities may assist the constabulary in refining service standards and holding leaders to account for performance.

This lack of clarity is particularly acute in relation to victim safeguarding and the management and supervision of safety plans not dealt with by the PPB. There is a real risk that safety planning for standard and medium-risk victims is lost in current processes. For example, where a crime passes to the CJIU for prisoner processing, the ‘officer in the case’ (OIC) responsibility for the incident also passes to them. After submission of the DASH risk assessment form, the original attending officer has no further involvement with either the perpetrator or the victim. The CJIU officer deals with the offender as a prisoner and with any subsequent criminal proceedings, and will update the victim with respect to the outcome. This means that for all standard and medium risk cases dealt with by CJIU, there is no review or reassessment of the victim as the case continues through the criminal justice system.

The current role of neighbourhood teams in dealing with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse is very limited. There is an opportunity to better involve neighbourhood teams in safety planning and safeguarding. We found a genuine willingness to be more involved and a frustration that valuable intelligence was not currently exchanged between constabulary teams, and into the partnership arena. Where links do currently exist between the PPB and local teams, these have been fostered through individual relationships rather than structure or process.

There is positive partnership work in Gloucestershire in relation to domestic abuse and strong relationships between partners and the PPB. There are a number of strategic partnership forums where domestic abuse is discussed. The partnership structure is currently under review to ensure membership of the various meetings is appropriate and that there are good links between them to co-ordinate action. Police and partners are signed up to an action plan for 2012-2014 to reduce the harm caused by domestic abuse and sexual violence in Gloucestershire (2012–14).

The PPB has developed some innovative approaches which enable timely multi-agency risk assessment and action in support of high-risk domestic abuse victims and their children. These include the daily MARAC and the DARF framework. Links are less strong between the partnerships framework and local policing areas.

The constabulary are four months into a six-month pilot of a daily MARAC (with reduced membership) in place of the traditional fortnightly or monthly larger membership meeting. The meeting discusses all high-risk victims and is attended by health, children services, police (PPB) and GDASS who are co-located at the constabulary's PPB. Referrals into the meeting can come from any agency. The process allows early information sharing between agencies and much swifter engagement between victims and support services. While all statutory partners do not attend the daily MARAC, immediate actions are allocated followed by information requests to all established MARAC partners about the case in question. If further discussion is required, a full bespoke MARAC is held as soon as possible with all relevant partners.

The daily MARAC appears to operate effectively to reduce risk to high-risk victims at the earliest opportunity. The pilot is currently being evaluated by the local safeguarding children's board (LSCB) which will help the constabulary better understand how the process is working and where it can be improved.

The national charity co-ordinated action against domestic abuse (CAADA) has also been invited to assess the pilot.

The constabulary is also moving towards a new MASH, due for implementation, in stages, between January and April 2014. The MASH is likely to absorb the MARAC pilot, the vision being to include domestic abuse referrals as well as child and vulnerable adult safeguarding concerns.

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

HMIC found various points in the process where the systems are not sufficiently robust to effectively manage future risk to victims. The constabulary has recognised that it needs to evaluate outcomes for domestic abuse and to properly manage domestic abuse and risk to victims in the future. However, there is no consistent understanding of what good or improved performance looks like, performance is not considered across the constabulary and monitoring does not currently lead to management and performance improvement. Established processes are in place to embed corporate learning following recommendations from serious case reviews and domestic homicide reviews and there is some encouraging work being done to identify and manage high-risk perpetrators of domestic abuse.

There are various points in the process where the systems are not sufficiently robust to effectively manage future risk to victims of domestic abuse. As previously discussed, the responsibility for victims' safety passes from one team to another as the case progresses. It is not always clear to the officers involved where their responsibilities lie when it comes to reassessing the risk to victims. In addition, there is no system in place to ensure that contact is maintained with victims when a perpetrator is imprisoned, to ensure that they are updated when the prisoner is to be released, and the risk to the victim is not properly reassessed. In some high-risk cases, victims may be contacted by the IDVA or PPB officer in the case, but there is no formal structure and a general lack of clarity surrounds arrangements.

Neither is there a system in place to ensure a routine follow up with victims of domestic abuse who are no longer contacting the police. Where there have been no further calls from victims who have historically been victims on a number of occasions there is no mechanism to make contact with the victim or understand why they have stopped calling.

The constabulary has started tackling domestic abuse perpetrators more systematically to manage future risk. A weekly intelligence meeting takes place within the PPB which considers all intelligence in the public protection arena including intelligence on high- risk domestic abuse victims and perpetrators. Daily tasking processes operate effectively to manage outstanding arrests for high-risk perpetrators.

Identification and general management of serial and serious domestic abuse perpetrators happens through the PPB. Over 160 perpetrators of concern have been identified and the highest-risk 25 perpetrators are regularly reviewed by a detective sergeant who is responsible for management plans and preventative intervention opportunities. While this is a positive step, resilience in perpetrator management is an issue with one officer responsible for managing a large number of high-risk perpetrators. More could be done to involve local teams and share responsibility for individual perpetrator management plans.

The PPB is making efforts to ensure local supervisors understand the families at greatest risk in their areas. This is not consistent. Where it works well, it is as a result of personal relationships rather than robust structure or processes. In a similar way to perpetrator management, processes could be refined to share the responsibility for safeguarding victims and their families with officers in local teams.

The constabulary is currently involved in its first domestic homicide review. Recommendations and lessons from this review will follow the normal process for embedding corporate learning where qualified staff conduct organisational reviews and draw out lessons learned. Any recommendations go to the performance and operations meeting chaired by the ACC for consideration and dissemination to relevant staff.

With the leadership of domestic abuse being split between the two ACCs (one responsible for partnership activity and the other for police service delivery) opportunities for learning that involve, for example, better sharing of information between agencies, may not be as easy to capture.

The PPB has developed a service improvement plan to generate improvements in relation to risk, victim focus and quality assurance. This report will hopefully assist the constabulary in refining focus and addressing the current disjointed and inconsistent service to domestic abuse victims.

The constabulary has recognised the need to evaluate outcomes for domestic abuse and has put in place a domestic abuse performance dashboard. The



dashboard is in the early stages of development and has identified a number of measures and is now collecting high level data including domestic abuse incidents and crimes, DASH risk assessment compliance, outcomes and MARAC referrals. At this stage, these measures are monitored through the strategic performance and operations meeting, but there is no apparent management of identified issues, for example, low levels of DASH compliance in some areas. There is a need to interrogate systems to provide more qualitative information to support accurate interpretation and understanding of risk areas.

The dashboard information is available at a local level but currently not integrated into local management meetings which reinforces the perspective that domestic abuse performance is owned by the PPB. There is no accountability for domestic abuse performance management at the local level where the majority of incidents, crimes and victims are dealt with.

NCRS<sup>14</sup> compliance (incident to crime conversion) is recognised as an area of risk by the constabulary. NCRS compliance figures reflect no significant change since January 2013. This creates a risk that if incidents are not being accurately recorded as crimes; significant numbers of domestic abuse victims are not receiving appropriate investigative and safeguarding support.

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<sup>14</sup> The National Crime Recording Standard sets out guidance for all police forces in the recording and classification of crimes.

## 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 constabulary-specific recommendations should be considered in conjunction with recommendations to all forces set out in HMIC national report on domestic abuse.

1. The constabulary should review its processes at first point of contact to ensure callers and risk levels are assessed consistently. In particular, to clarify and apply definitions of 'repeat victim' and 'vulnerable victim' to ensure that they can better identify those most at risk and provide an appropriate service.
2. The constabulary should strengthen its supervision of domestic abuse incidents to ensure immediate action taken and closure of incident logs is appropriate.
3. The constabulary should streamline its governance structures to ensure appropriate partnership and operational oversight to drive performance and improvement.
4. The constabulary should consider a domestic abuse communication strategy to:
  - promote constabulary policy and guidance;
  - clarify roles and responsibilities of various functions in relation to domestic abuse investigation and keeping victims updated; and
  - articulate a clear message that domestic abuse and making people safe is everyone's responsibility.
5. The constabulary should conduct a training needs analysis and develop a training development plan to include all those involved in dealing with domestic abuse.
6. The constabulary should review its risk assessment and safety planning processes to introduce more robust compliance and supervision.
7. The constabulary should undertake work to better understand the high level of cautions in relation to domestic abuse crimes.

8. The constabulary should clarify roles and responsibilities of the various teams in relation to:
  - domestic abuse investigation;
  - safety planning; and
  - keeping victims updated.
9. The constabulary should consider a greater role for neighbourhood teams in victim safety planning and safeguarding.
10. The constabulary should clarify who is responsible for keeping victims informed when perpetrators are imprisoned to ensure risk is reviewed upon release.
11. The constabulary should improve performance management of domestic abuse, agreeing success outcomes and introducing qualitative measures, holding all those involved to account.
12. The constabulary should disseminate domestic abuse performance information to support local area teams in the management of high-risk victims and perpetrators where appropriate.
13. The constabulary should carry out work to better understand NCRS compliance and develop an action plan to include training and active performance management.

## 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.