



# **The Metropolitan Police Service'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”.*

<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 the Metropolitan Police Service 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 Police Act 1996 for the Police and Crime Commissioner to publish a copy of their comments on this report and the recommendations for all forces in the national report and forward these to the Home Secretary.

# Domestic abuse in the Metropolitan Police<sup>7</sup>

## Calls for assistance



In the Metropolitan Police, domestic abuse accounts for 4% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 3% were from repeat victims.

## Crime

# 7%

Domestic abuse accounts for 7% of all recorded crime.

## Assault with intent

# 69%

The Metropolitan Police recorded 3,661 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 2,533 were domestic abuse related. This is 69% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Assault with injury

# 31%

The force also recorded 51,639 assaults with injury, of these 15,808 were domestic abuse related. This is 31% 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

# 37%

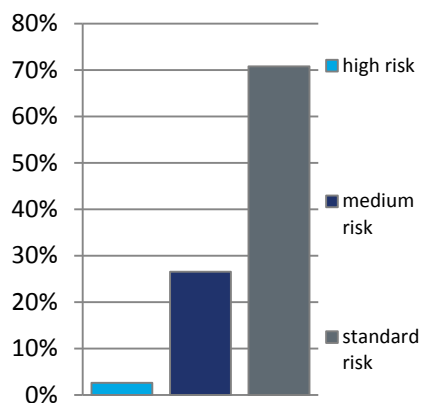
The force recorded 20,410 harassment offences, of these 7,609 were domestic abuse related. This is 37% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 11%

The force also recorded 10,247 sexual offences, of these 1,162 were domestic abuse related. This is 11% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



On 30 October 2013, the Metropolitan Police had 418 active domestic abuse cases; 3% were high risk, 27% were medium risk, and 71% were standard risk.

## Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 83 arrests in the Metropolitan Police. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

## Outcomes



The Metropolitan Police recorded 50,263 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 26% resulted in a charge, 19% resulted in a caution and less than 1% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

HMIC found the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) provides clear leadership in its response to domestic abuse. This leadership was translated into activity at a borough level, with an understanding that it needs to improve continually. At times a conflict between domestic abuse and other priorities set via 'Crime fighter' forums occurs.

The MPS uses the terminology domestic violence and this, together with a lack of training for key staff, has led the force to concentrate on the violence element of domestic abuse.

The MPS recognises the need to identify repeat and vulnerable victims, but this is not assisted by the current computer systems.

### Identifying victims

Most victims of domestic abuse first contact with the MPS is when they call the police for assistance. When someone calls for help they are dealt with initially by call takers at the MPS central command centre (CCC). HMIC found that call takers dealt skilfully and effectively with callers, gathering as much information as they can about the incident to assess the risk faced by the victim, and ensure the right level of police response. HMIC found that there were weaknesses in the training provided to staff in the CCC, and while they had a broad understanding of domestic abuse, they tend to focus on physical violence, with less awareness of the less obvious forms of domestic abuse such as coercive control. This is reinforced by the fact that the MPS uses the term domestic 'violence' rather than abuse.

It is important that the police have as full a picture as possible of the circumstances of the incident and any previous history of abuse so that they can make an accurate assessment of the risks to the victim and take appropriate action to safeguard them. The MPS databases do not easily allow repeat victims to be identified, if the callers do not identify themselves as a previous caller to the MPS. This means officers attend domestic incidents not fully aware of previous history and relevant intelligence.

### Keeping victims safe

HMIC found that incidents of domestic abuse are attended promptly by the MPS. An immediate police response is made to all domestic abuse incidents, unless there are very good reasons why a slower response is appropriate. Attending officers undertake an initial assessment of the risks posed to the victim and know that they are required to take positive action to safeguard victims. HMIC found that there was little training for response officers, to inform



their understanding of the impact that taking positive action has for a victim. As a result, we found that they lacked an awareness of the important reasons for taking positive action, such as arresting the perpetrator.

We also found inconsistencies in the level and quality of supervision of this first attendance in spite of a new force-wide initiative requiring supervisors to attend all domestic abuse incidents. The initial investigation is conducted by response officers with dedicated community safety unit (CSU) officers taking responsibility for subsequent case and offender management as well as victim safety planning. There is limited involvement from the local policing team (LPT), who are well placed to add value to both safeguarding victims and managing offenders in their areas.

## **Management of risk**

HMIC found that there are clear roles and responsibilities for ensuring victim safety. Risks to domestic abuse victims are initially managed by the response officer who attends in the first instance. Responsibility for ongoing safety planning, contact with the victim and managing any criminal investigation then passes to officers in the CSU. The officers in the CSUs understood their responsibility to provide ongoing safety but raised concerns that the number of officers who worked reduced hours, flexible working patterns or were on maternity leave, made this task difficult. It was reported that this staffing profile was not equitable with other departments.

High-risk victims are additionally supported through the services of an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA), with each case referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) to enable police and partner agencies to agree a co-ordinated set of actions to minimise the risk to victims.

Partnership working at the operational level is good and constructive with a well-established MARAC process in place in each borough. Partners did have some concerns that CSU officers are under-assessing risk through a lack of understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse and felt some additional training is needed.

There is a high-level strategic partnership group, chaired by the MPS, known as the Diamond Group. A domestic abuse survivors' group has been formed which feeds its views into the Diamond Group, and has been able to influence the development of the how the MPS responds to domestic abuse. This is a positive and an innovative approach to ensuring that the victims' perspective can influence the development of the MPS in this area of policing.

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

The MPS uses the term 'domestic violence' and this leads officers to concentrate on violence to the detriment of other forms of domestic abuse such as controlling behaviour. The MPS performance focus places an emphasis on a reduction in seven key neighbourhood crimes in line with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) plan. Domestic abuse is not specifically identified as a key neighbourhood crime. Domestic abuse does contribute significantly to the number of 'violence with injury' crimes included as a key neighbourhood crime. This underlines the belief that violence is the main aspect of domestic abuse to the detriment of other forms of abuse.

The MPS has recognised that there are areas for improvement in its approaches to tackling domestic abuse and has established a continuous improvement initiative, known as Operation Dauntless, through which it has developed an action plan for improved services. This will include action to better identify and target serial domestic abuse offenders, and better manage the risk to victims when their abusers are released from prison after serving their sentence. It is too early to evaluate the impact of the implementation of Operation Dauntless.

## Findings

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

Most victims of domestic abuse first contact with the MPS is when they call the police for assistance. When someone calls for help they are dealt with initially by call takers at the MPS central command centre (CCC). HMIC found that call takers dealt skilfully and effectively with callers, gathering as much information as they can about the incident to assess the risk faced by the victim, and ensure the right level of police response. HMIC found that there were weaknesses in the training provided to staff in the CCC, and while they had a broad understanding of domestic abuse, they tend to focus on physical violence, with less awareness of the less obvious forms of domestic abuse such as coercive control. This is reinforced by the fact that the MPS uses the term domestic 'violence' rather than abuse.

It is important that the police have as full a picture as possible of the circumstances of the incident and any previous history of abuse so that they can make an accurate assessment of the risks to the victim and take appropriate action to safeguard them. The MPS databases do not easily allow repeat victims to be identified, if the callers do not identify themselves as a previous caller to the MPS. This means officers attend domestic incidents not fully aware of previous history and relevant intelligence.

Most requests for police help in dealing with domestic abuse across the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) force area are received via telephone calls into the central command centre (CCC). The operators who take the calls are expected to identify the incident as domestic abuse, make an assessment of the risk posed to the victim and decide what level of police response is needed. They are also required to enter the details on the IT system ensuring it is recorded as a domestic abuse incident.

HMIC found that operators in the CCC correctly logged the call and dispatched the police response in line with the MPS policy. Operators also dealt skilfully and effectively with callers, gathering relevant information, and providing immediate safety advice and, where appropriate, kept the caller on the line to ensure that they monitored their safety and provided reassurance until a police officer arrived at the scene.

We found that while staff understood the wider definition of domestic abuse, there is a tendency to focus on the more obvious physical violence with less awareness of other forms of domestic abuse such as coercive control, and emotional, psychological and financial abuse. Again, this is reinforced by the

fact that the MPS uses the term 'domestic violence', rather than the wider term, domestic abuse. In focus groups, this caused officers to predominately talk about violence and assaults with little in-depth understanding of the other types of abuse. The impact of other forms of abuse was not well understood.

The computer systems within the CCC do not automatically identify repeat callers. The MPS recognises that this is an important feature of identifying the risk posed at incidents, and has a separate pool of officers in the CCC, who have more time to carry out checks. These officers use a computer programme designed to search across MPS databases called IIP. Call takers also recognise if they have been a victim of previous abuse, this is likely to increase the risk to the victim; they do ask the caller directly if they have had any previous contact with the police about domestic abuse. Call handlers keep the victim on the line as long as possible and try to identify whether they may be vulnerable.

In practice, we found that the IIP system relies on the same format being used for data that was originally entered onto the MPS database as it is searched for on IIP in order for it to be successfully retrieved. For instance, an eleven digit mobile phone number would not be retrieved if it had been put on to a system as five digits, a space, and then the remaining six digits and the subsequent search on IIP looked for eleven digits with no spaces. We found that the capacity of the staff to carry out these IIP checks can be limited; they are routinely taken off this task to provide cover for those taking calls during periods of high demand. In addition, our call monitoring showed that call takers are not asking the caller about any previous incidents on every occasion. This means that the MPS cannot be confident that they are consistently identifying repeat victims of domestic abuse. Thus, officers can attend a domestic abuse incident with no knowledge of any prior history, which is likely to make their risk assessment and any safety planning at the scene less accurate, and may also put their own safety at risk.

HMIC found that the MPS does place a high priority on sending police officers to attend domestic abuse incidents. The force operates an attendance policy which specifies that all domestic abuse incidents must receive an immediate police response. Staff in the CCC will not downgrade a domestic abuse call to a routine response unless there are justifiable reasons for doing so. The rationale for not responding immediately must be documented on the incident record. The controller in the CCC must also be informed of this decision.

We found that there are weaknesses and inconsistencies in the level of training provided to staff in the CCC. A domestic abuse training package for CCC staff does exist. However, it has not been delivered comprehensively to all staff. It was reported that due to shift patterns, formal training was difficult to deliver and take part in, and a mentoring and coaching scheme was in place for new

joiners. The MPS has not carried out a skills audit of staff in the CCC, and there is no training and development plan in place. The number of staff that had received domestic abuse training could not be identified and it is unclear whether staff identified as mentors and coaches had received the training.

## **How does the force respond to victims of domestic abuse?**

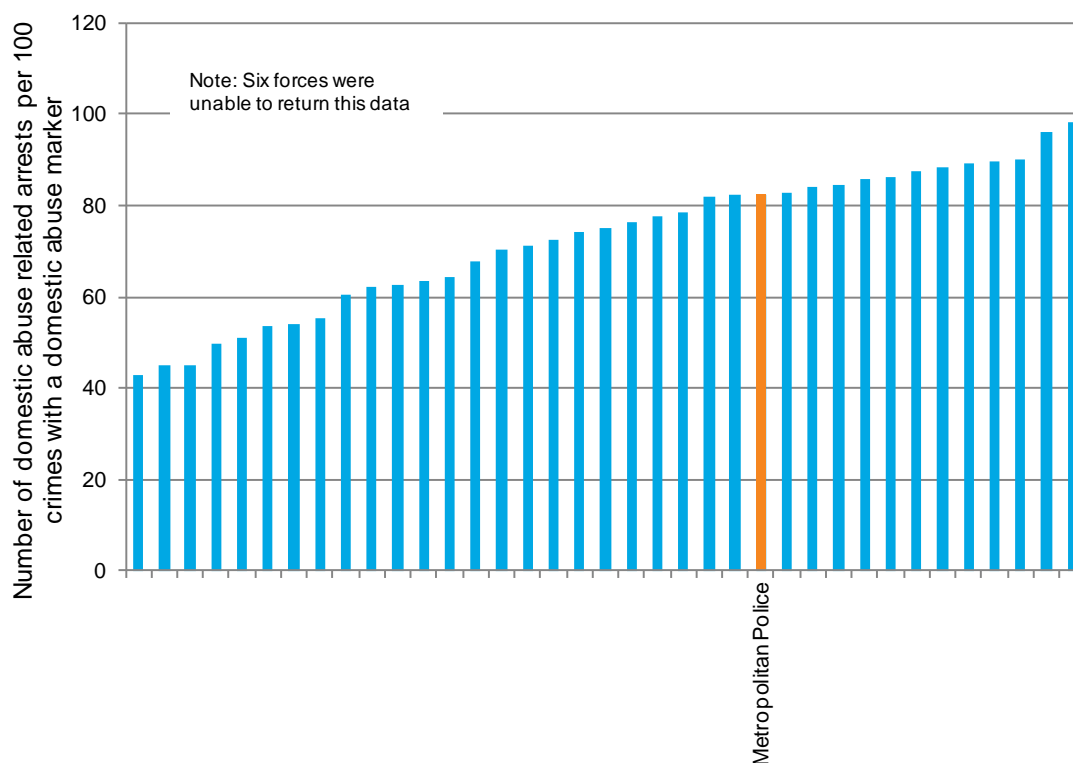
HMIC found that incidents of domestic abuse are attended promptly by the MPS. An immediate police response is made to all domestic abuse incidents, unless there are very good reasons why a slower response is appropriate. Attending officers undertake an initial assessment of the risks posed to the victim and know that they are required to take positive action to safeguard victims. HMIC found that there was little training for response officers, to inform their understanding of the impact that taking positive action has for a victim. As a result, we found that they lacked an awareness of the important reasons for taking positive action, such as arresting the perpetrator.

We also found inconsistencies in the level and quality of supervision of this first attendance in spite of a new force-wide initiative requiring supervisors to attend all domestic abuse incidents. The initial investigation is conducted by response officers with dedicated community safety unit (CSU) officers taking responsibility for subsequent case and offender management as well as victim safety planning. There is limited involvement from the local policing team (LPT), who are well placed to add value to both safeguarding victims and managing offenders in their areas.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 83 arrests in the Metropolitan Police. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.<sup>8</sup>

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

**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>9</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

The MPS is a large and complex organisation; we found that there were inconsistencies between boroughs on the priority given to tackling domestic abuse. The leadership and direction provided by the borough commander influenced the operational response from staff. In some areas it was clear that the borough commanders viewed domestic abuse as a top priority. In these boroughs staff at all levels had a greater understanding of the priority the MPS places on domestic abuse. In one area, a bespoke domestic abuse strategy had been developed by that borough and staff had a good knowledge of what was expected of them in implementing it. This borough also demonstrated commitment to prioritising domestic abuse through a range of measures, including: rigorous quality assurance of the process for recording domestic abuse allegations; a focus on domestic abuse performance at the ‘Grip and Pace’ meetings; and daily updates on domestic abuse performance across a range of measures for the borough commander. However this was not replicated in other boroughs. This means that victims of domestic abuse are

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

likely to get a varying quality of service from the MPS depending upon which borough they live in.

As part of its efforts to make best use of resources, the MPS has undertaken an analysis of core staffing numbers required for the various areas of their work under the local policing model. In addition to the core numbers, borough commanders have been given an additional percentage of their overall staffing numbers for them to allocate to the areas of greatest local need – where they see the biggest threats.

The CSUs based in each borough provide the specialist domestic abuse staff. HMIC found that the staffing levels in the CSUs were adequate, but included a high number of staff working reduced hours, flexible hours and staff on maternity leave. There were also isolated cases where staff had been taken out of the CSU to work on other policing operations that were seen as a greater priority, for example, Operation Bumblebee to tackle burglary.

We found that, as a result, capacity within the CSUs was stretched, causing additional pressure on remaining staff. Several of the CSUs visited had members of staff absent with work-related stress. It was also clear that staff that work in the CSU were extremely passionate about their work and took their responsibility for safeguarding victims seriously. The level of absence through sickness, staff working patterns and abstractions to other duties creates a risk that the volume and risk of domestic abuse could overwhelm the CSUs.

Most domestic abuse incidents are attended in the first instance by the boroughs' response units. Each attending officer is required to undertake a formal assessment of the risk posed to the victim at every domestic abuse incident. The nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool is used to aid the officer's professional judgement. Each case is rated as high, medium or standard risk. The response officer is required to take any immediate action necessary to reduce the risk to the victim. Often this will mean arresting the perpetrator. All domestic abuse cases are then passed to the CSU who take over the management of both the investigation and the safeguarding of the victim. All DASH risk assessments are reviewed by CSU officers and we found that, in the main, there were few occasions where the specialists disagreed with the risk assessment provided by the response officer.

It was found that the safety plan put in place by the CSU did not normally involve other policing units. Apart from response units which attended the original incident, it was not apparent that any team other than the CSU contributed to victim safety.

Local policing teams (LPTs) operate in the community on a daily basis and could provide a vital service to ensuring the safety of the victim and monitoring the behaviour of perpetrators, where there are bail conditions. Without LPTs being aware of the most prolific and dangerous perpetrators and the highest risk victims it is unclear how any intelligence after the initial incident is gathered. If the LPTs were to play more of an active role in safety planning it would not only provide more reassurance to the victim and a better quality service, it would also relieve some pressure from the CSU.

The MPS has recently established a project to improve the quality of its service to tackle domestic abuse; known as Operation Dauntless. Its aim is to ensure a consistently high quality service to victims; and dealing swiftly and effectively with perpetrators. The operation is in the early stages of implementation and it was too early for this inspection to assess its impact.

The MPS has taken the decision that all officers in the CSU should be trained and accredited detectives. We found that all are now either accredited or working towards accreditation. This is a positive step as it will ensure that all officers will be trained in investigation techniques. However, we found that the approach to specific training in dealing with domestic abuse is not as robust, with officers in the CSU having varying levels of training. The MPS runs a one-day course and a further five-day course for CSU staff. Due to the staffing pressures already mentioned, not all CSU staff have attended the training.

HMIC was also concerned that there were weaknesses in the training provided to response officers in domestic abuse. We found there had been only limited training provided which focused more on the process of dealing with an incident, such as completing the appropriate forms, rather than recognising domestic abuse in all its forms and providing safeguarding for victims.

Regardless of the risk level, it is the MPS policy that positive action will be taken in all cases of domestic abuse. Response officers are clearly aware of this policy and reported that they would make arrests wherever the circumstances allowed. The rationale of why positive action, such as arrest, is necessary was not so well understood. This has led some officers to question the restrictions on their discretion. The lack of awareness and understanding, together with a focus in training on procedural compliance, has led to a feeling among some response officers that they are in fear of getting the process wrong, rather than having the confidence in taking the right action.

HMIC found that there were also inconsistencies in the level and quality of the supervision of response officer's actions at the scene of domestic abuse incidents. Operation Dauntless requires that a supervisor will attend all domestic abuse incidents. This has been reported by response supervisors as



being unachievable on most occasions. The level of supervisory scrutiny of the risk assessments, incident forms and the quality of evidence gathered also differed from one borough to another. Some boroughs had clear quality assurance checks in place with the incident forms containing the risk assessments being returned to the officer if something had been missed. This was not universal.

Investigations into any crime related to the domestic abuse are started by the response officers, who gather the crucial initial evidence. This is then passed onto the CSU to complete. On most occasions a statement from the victim and any witnesses was completed. Getting photographic evidence of any injuries sustained by the victim was not as comprehensive and this is seen as a gap. Response officers reported that they do not take photographs, as the camera is stored at the police station, due to the cost of replacing it, if damaged, or that none of the allocated cameras were available. Some officers stated that they used to take photographs using their own mobile phones. This was reported as contrary to MPS policy and has caused many officers to stop this practice and therefore not obtain any photographic evidence. The lack of early photographic evidence is likely to reduce the impact of the interview with the perpetrator and could lead to inconsistencies in charging advice provided by the Crown Prosecution Service.

The CSU have responsibility to update and maintain contact with a victim. HMIC found the officers in the CSU had a good understanding of this, with victim contact found to be compliant with the victim code. The witness care unit (WCU) is responsible for informing victims of key dates in the criminal justice process. While this could cause potential problems with different people updating the victim, the relationship between the CSU and the WCU was good, with the CSU taking responsibility for victim updates if this was more appropriate.

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

HMIC found that there are clear roles and responsibilities for ensuring victim safety. Risks to domestic abuse victims are initially managed by the response officer who attends in the first instance. Responsibility for ongoing safety planning, contact with the victim and managing any criminal investigation then passes to officers in the CSU. The officers in the CSUs understood their responsibility to provide ongoing safety but raised concerns that the number of officers who worked reduced hours, flexible working patterns or were on maternity leave, made this task difficult. It was reported that this staffing profile was not equitable with other departments.

High-risk victims are additionally supported through the services of an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA), with each case referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) to enable police and partner agencies to agree a co-ordinated set of actions to minimise the risk to victims.

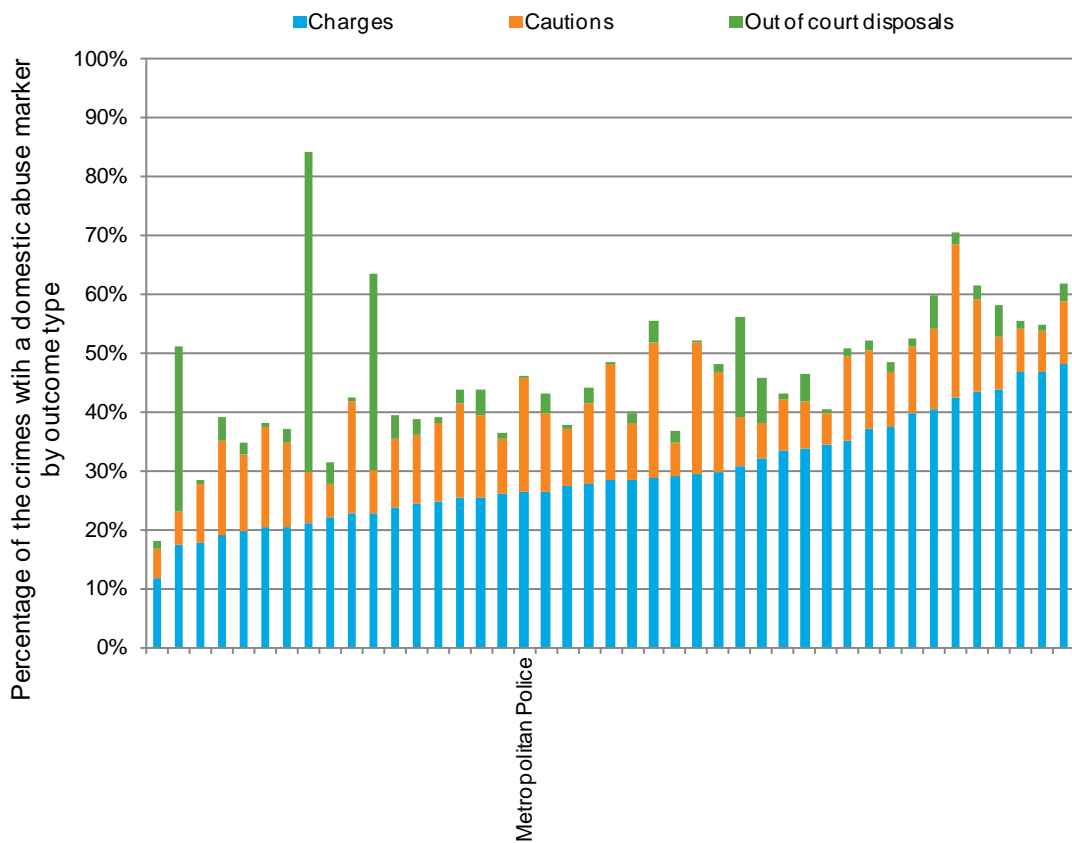
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There is a high-level strategic partnership group, chaired by the MPS, known as the Diamond Group. A domestic abuse survivors' group has been formed which feeds its views into the Diamond Group, and has been able to influence the development of the how the MPS responds to domestic abuse. This is a positive and an innovative approach to ensuring that the victims' perspective can influence the development of the MPS in this area of policing.

The Metropolitan Police recorded 50,263 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 26 percent resulted in a charge, 19 percent resulted in a caution and less than one percent had an out-of-court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.<sup>10</sup>

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

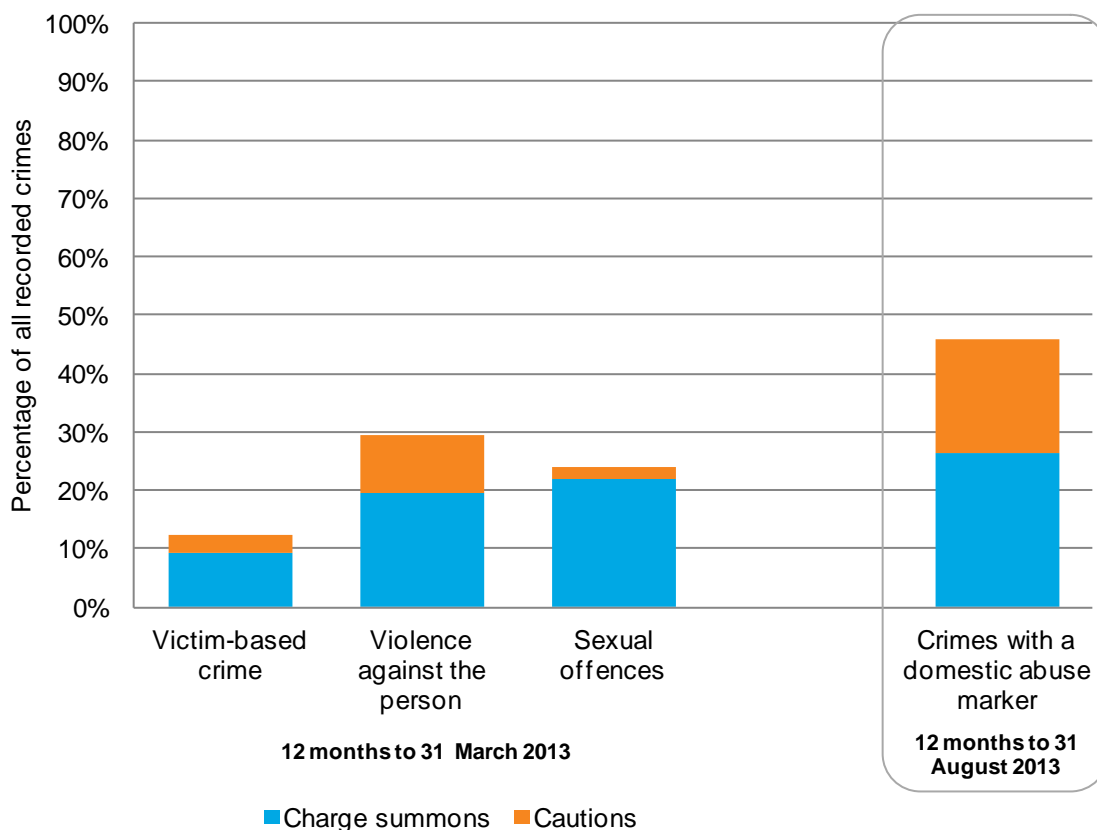
**Figure 2 : Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013**



Source: HMIC data collection

The Metropolitan 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.

**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>11</sup>**



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

Specialist detectives from the CSU deal with all investigations of domestic abuse regardless of the level of risk; this includes the safety planning in support of victims. Risk assessments made by response officers are reviewed by supervisors in the CSU and safety plans put in place. Where a victim has been assessed as high risk their case is referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). A MARAC provides an opportunity for police and partners to meet, share information and discuss high risk cases and agree a co-ordinated approach to minimise the risks to the victim and their families. Partners include local authority children’s social services, health services, probation, housing and voluntary sector victim support agencies.

<sup>11</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

HMIC found that partners had some concern about the understanding of risk among the CSU officers. There was a perception that officers did not understand domestic abuse sufficiently to identify unique risk factors in families. Consequently they felt that risk was being understated and as a result, more cases should be placed before MARACs. Partners identified that training was needed for officers to have a greater understanding of risk.

HMIC found that the relationship between the police and their partners is good. At a strategic level the senior police officer with lead responsibility for domestic abuse has initiated a co-ordination meeting called a diamond group with partners from the statutory and third sectors. This includes the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

The diamond group is assisted by a group of domestic abuse survivors. They are seen as a powerful tool in understanding the impact of policing on victims in this area. This group have provided valuable information to the MPS and this has been used to inform the development of Operation Dauntless, which aims to provide a high level of service to victims. The group further assist the MPS in producing training materials to enhance officers' understanding of domestic abuse and the impact of their actions at the scene of a domestic abuse incident.

At a borough level the stability of partnership working with the same people attending meetings was reported as being good and this is seen as a real strength. It was evident that different levels of funding were made available through the crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) and this leads to an inconsistent approach to domestic abuse partnerships in the MPS.

An information sharing protocol is in place and there is a healthy approach to information sharing between partners. Some partners highlighted that they would wish to have more of the police documentation from domestic abuse incidents and the risk assessments shared with them. At present this is reported as not being part of the protocol.

There is a MARAC for each borough with meetings taking place regularly. Who attends these meetings varies according to the services available locally. The stability of partners, work of the MARAC co-ordinators and independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) has led to strong MARACs. Concerns were raised that some MARACs were overwhelmed with referrals and as a result were only managing the very highest level of risk.

The head of the MPS criminal justice unit is co-located within the head offices of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This allows direct dialogue between the two key prosecution partners. It was clear that there is a drive to support prosecution in cases where the victim is reluctant to give evidence. This is supported by the obtaining of other witness statements at the scene of the

incident, and a policy on what should be recorded in a statement when a victim indicates that they wish to withdraw support for police action.

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

The MPS uses the term 'domestic violence' and this leads officers to concentrate on violence to the detriment of other forms of domestic abuse such as controlling behaviour. The MPS performance focus places an emphasis on a reduction in seven key neighbourhood crimes in line with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) plan. Domestic abuse is not specifically identified as a key neighbourhood crime. Domestic abuse does contribute significantly to the number of 'violence with injury' crimes included as a key neighbourhood crime. This underlines the belief that violence is the main aspect of domestic abuse to the detriment of other forms of abuse.

The MPS has recognised that there are areas for improvement in its approaches to tackling domestic abuse and has established a continuous improvement initiative, known as Operation Dauntless, through which it has developed an action plan for improved services. This will include action to better identify and target serial domestic abuse offenders, and better manage the risk to victims when their abusers are released from prison after serving their sentence. It is too early to evaluate the impact of the implementation of Operation Dauntless.

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) sets the strategic direction for the MPS. In the police and crime plan 2013–16 the priorities are: reduce key neighbourhood crimes by 20 percent, boost public confidence in the police by 20 percent and cut costs by 20 percent. This is referred to as the 20:20:20 challenge. Although domestic abuse is not explicitly included in the plan's seven key neighbourhood crimes known as 'MOPAC 7', the plan clearly stresses that policing should also focus on tackling violence against woman and girls and domestic violence.

Performance is monitored via 'Crimefighters' meetings. These are held for each borough, chaired by borough commanders, who then attend area meetings chaired by the area commander, these area commanders then, in turn, attend an MPS-wide meeting chaired by an assistant commissioner.

While the Crimefighters meetings were not found to be the only way that boroughs prioritised crime, it heavily influenced the direction taken. Domestic abuse is not routinely monitored through Crimefighters forums because these meetings tend to focus on progress towards the 20:20:20 challenge and

performance in the MOPAC 7 crime types. Included among the MOPAC 7 is 'violence with injury' with domestic abuse forming a large percentage of the 'violence with injury' statistics. The result is that domestic abuse that results in physical injuries, receives the most scrutiny. This scrutiny coupled with the 'domestic violence' terminology discussed earlier, further reinforces the perception in MPS that domestic abuse is mainly about violence. Domestic abuse was not reported by all staff as being a priority of the MPS.

The MPS has identified a senior officer to lead on domestic abuse and the leadership shown is seen both within the force, and especially with partners, as positive. The force is now monitoring and analysing a range of performance measures such as response times, charging rates, evidence quality and targeting of offenders and this is beginning to translate into operational change. The measurement of data has the potential to be greatly enhanced through the use of more qualitative information from the victims' perspective through the domestic abuse survivors' group linked to the strategic Diamond Group.

The MPS has recognised that there are areas for improvement in its approaches to tackling domestic abuse and has established a continuous improvement initiative, known as Operation Dauntless, through which it has developed an action plan for improved services.

One of the strands of Operation Dauntless is to target domestic abuse perpetrators and manage their behaviour to reduce reoffending. The top five, highest risk perpetrators will be identified on each borough and tactical plans put in place. This is an operation that is in development and promises to deliver better management of the ongoing risk posed by serial perpetrators.

Operation Dauntless also seeks to better manage the release of perpetrators from the prison system. At present the CSUs are notified of a domestic abuse perpetrator's release. Unless the perpetrator falls under the statutory regime of the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs) the intervention is limited. It is proposed that in future more focus will shift onto conducting pre-release visits and working with partners in the probation service to ensure the safety of the victim is enhanced.

Operation Dauntless also looks to address the current gap with LPTs not having the right level of information about domestic abuse victims and perpetrators in their areas. It will introduce briefings and require actions to be undertaken by the LPTs.

It is important that the police and partners learn the lessons from domestic homicide reviews and other serious case reviews and share the learning across the organisation to ensure that improvements in practice and process can be put in place. The MPS has a system of monitoring recommendations from

homicide reviews via the Diamond Group. While this is a positive, HMIC is unclear how robust the process is to ensuring that actions needed are implemented, monitored and evaluated consistently across the boroughs.



## Recommendations

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

1. The MPS should adopt the term domestic abuse in line with the ACPO definition.
2. A more robust system should be developed to identify repeat victims at the point of call to the central command centre (CCC) and the CCC should pass critical intelligence to response officers prior to their arrival on the scene of a domestic abuse incident.
3. A skills audit should be carried out to identify gaps in skills and capability in relation to domestic abuse in the CCC. Following the audit all staff should undertake domestic abuse training, with priority given to mentors.
4. A staffing profile review of community safety units (CSU) should be undertaken to ensure that levels of flexible hours, reduced hours and staff on maternity leave is equitable with other departments.
5. A training package should be developed to focus on the impact of domestic abuse.
6. A six-month review of Operation Dauntless should be conducted to assess the impact and operational learning, to ensure consistency of processes across the boroughs.

## 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.