



# Northamptonshire Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-364-1

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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 test the reality of each force's approach with frontline officers. Our inspection teams were supplemented by expert peers, which included public protection

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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)

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 Northamptonshire Police and at the end of the report we set out some recommendations. These recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for all forces made in the national report.<sup>6</sup> A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

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<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 Northamptonshire<sup>7</sup>

### Calls for assistance



In Northamptonshire, domestic abuse accounts for 6% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls 20% were from repeat victims.

### Crime

# 8%

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

### Assault with intent

# 20%

Northamptonshire recorded 176 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 35 were domestic abuse related. This is 20% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

### Assault with injury

# 34%

The force also recorded 3,657 assaults with injury, of these 1,261 were domestic abuse related. This is 34% of all assaults with injury 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.

## Harassment

# 63%

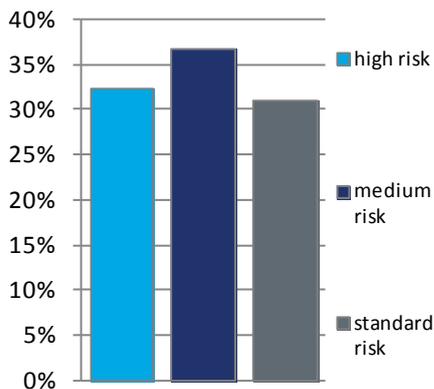
The force recorded 390 harassment offences, of these 245 were domestic abuse related. This is 63% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 13%

The force also recorded 763 sexual offences, of these 99 were domestic abuse related. This is 13% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



On 31 August 2013, Northamptonshire had 68 active Domestic Abuse cases, 32% were high risk, 37% were medium risk, and 31% were standard risk.

## Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 43 arrests in Northamptonshire. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

## Outcomes



Northamptonshire recorded 3,685 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 12% resulted in a charge, 5% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the chief constable. Officers and staff understand the importance of their role in safeguarding victims of abuse and are particularly aware of the need to ensure that any children belonging to the family are safeguarded.

Although Northamptonshire Police's response to tackling domestic abuse is effective in some respects, and there are pockets of good practice, there are some important areas where improvement is needed in order to reduce the risk to victims. The force has the lowest arrest rate for domestic abuse related crimes in the country, which is a concern.

High risk (of serious harm or murder) victims are well served by the police and their partners. Domestic abuse forums now provide an opportunity for early intervention in medium risk cases, to put in place measures, with partners, to prevent escalation in risk. However, leadership and supervision needs to improve for the force to be completely confident that they are providing a good service to all victims. There is also a fragmented approach to dealing with crimes which are assessed as medium or 'low' risk<sup>8</sup> whereby they may be dealt with by a number of people, and either not updated by anyone, or updated by a number of people.

The force works well with partner agencies and has a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) which is well regarded and shares information promptly; particularly about children involved in domestic abuse.

This report outlines a number of areas where the force could further strengthen its response.

### Identifying victims

Northamptonshire Police is generally effective at identifying domestic abuse victims at the first point of contact. It has robust processes and intelligence systems in place and thorough checks are made in the control room to identify any previous police involvement at the address or with the people concerned. This is important as it enables the police to ensure that they can identify potentially high risk repeat victims and respond appropriately. The control room also gives the officers attending the incident the full picture of any previous

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<sup>8</sup> 'Low risk' is a term used by the force for standard risk cases, this type of language can minimise the attention cases are given.

history of abuse, helping them to make a proper assessment of the situation when they arrive.

There is still some room for improvement however, as the effectiveness of the initial identification and risk assessment relies entirely on the skills and expertise of the call handler and the quality of their supervision. Some staff in the control room have not received sufficient training in identifying victims of domestic abuse and there is a general lack of understanding as to how the force defines a repeat victim, and of the factors that may make a victim particularly vulnerable. There is also a lack of real-time supervision of the control room activities.

## **Keeping victims safe**

Domestic abuse is regarded as important by the force. It is a priority for both the PCC and for the chief constable. The PCC and the force have a good level of awareness and understanding of the issues involved in effectively tackling domestic abuse and safeguarding victims.

The force is particularly effective in ensuring that the children involved in domestic abuse incidents are referred to the local authority and other partners so that they receive appropriate protection and care. Training is being given to all frontline officers and staff to better equip them to assess risk and deal with vulnerable victims. Officers are encouraged to use professional judgement as well as a formal risk assessment tool to determine what follow-up action and safeguarding is needed.

Officers give a good deal of thought to the safety of the victim and children at incidents of domestic abuse and measures are put in place to protect them.

However, the lack of supervision of the risk assessment and safety planning process in medium and standard risk cases is a weakness in Northamptonshire, and the force cannot be sure that all victims are adequately safeguarded. There are also weaknesses in the supervision of the overall investigation and evidence gathering process which may mean that offenders cannot ultimately be brought to justice and victims are not consistently well served.

## **Management of risk**

The force works hard to make victims safer from the first point of contact. All cases assessed as high or medium risk using the domestic abuse stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment are reviewed by specialist officers; however those which are 'low risk' are not. The absence of any supervision of medium and standard risk cases is of concern. The force cannot be certain that all victims are receiving the service they need.

The domestic abuse unit is highly regarded by partners and has been instrumental in improving partnership working across the county. The innovative domestic abuse forums are a good approach to sharing information about domestic abuse cases and enabling early partner intervention to avoid the escalation of risk to the victims.

The MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) is regarded as working well for those very high risk cases it deals with, however the practice of so-called 'gatekeeping' adopted by the force, prevents some high risk cases from being considered through the multi-agency approach. This is of concern.

## **Organisational effectiveness at keeping people safe**

The force has recognised that there are some areas for improvement in the way it manages domestic abuse and future risks to victims. Both the force and the PCC are keen to improve services for victims and are working with partners to do this.

The establishment of the local domestic abuse forums provides an opportunity to intervene at an early stage and prevent the future escalation of risk to victims. Recent work to understand victims' needs and the nature of domestic abuse as a crime, gives the force a good basis from which to develop improved processes and systems. There are however, some weaknesses in the leadership and performance management of domestic abuse.

There is a lack of focus on supervision, which means that the force cannot be certain that victims are consistently getting the service they need.

Officers and staff throughout the organisation take their role in making victims of domestic abuse safer very seriously and have a broad understanding of the complex factors involved in domestic abuse. The force is strong on considering the impact of domestic abuse on children.

## Findings

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

Northamptonshire Police is generally effective at identifying domestic abuse victims at the first point of contact. It has robust processes and intelligence systems in place and thorough checks are made in the control room to identify any previous police involvement at the address or with the people concerned. This is important as it enables the police to ensure that they can identify potentially high risk repeat victims and respond appropriately. The control room also gives the officers attending the incident the full picture of any previous history of abuse, helping them to make a proper assessment of the situation when they arrive.

There is still some room for improvement however, as the effectiveness of the initial identification and risk assessment relies entirely on the skills and expertise of the call handler and the quality of their supervision. Some staff in the control room have not received sufficient training in identifying victims of domestic abuse and there is a general lack of understanding as to how the force defines a repeat victim, and of the factors that may make a victim particularly vulnerable. There is also a lack of real-time supervision of the control room activities.

Victims of domestic abuse can ask for the help of Northamptonshire Police either directly by telephoning on the emergency 999 number or the police 101 enquiry line; or a third party may call the police if they suspect someone may be a victim. Alternatively a victim may go in person to a police station for help or may be referred to the police by other agencies, such as the health service or local council social services.

The majority of incidents and crimes are reported by telephone to the police control room, where they are dealt with by the police call handlers. Police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) have a good level of awareness and are trained in recognising potential domestic abuse cases in their local areas. They are skilled in identifying and providing a good first response. All telephone calls and other referrals are routed to the force control room, where an initial risk assessment is carried out and the necessary police response is determined and deployed.

There is a high level of awareness among staff in the control room of the potential risks of domestic abuse to victims and their families and they are alert to the need to recognise risk and respond appropriately. Recent improvements in the way the force deals with child protection have highlighted to all staff the

risks and impact of domestic abuse, particularly where there are children in the family. There has been some additional training provided to staff in dealing with vulnerable victims which includes domestic abuse – although not all staff in the control room have received this training.

Staff within the force control room are trained to ask questions of callers in order to provide enough information on which to make a decision as to: the urgency with which the police need to respond; and the level of resources needed. Call handlers assess the nature of the call and apply a generic risk assessment process to grade the police response. In all but very exceptional circumstances a domestic abuse incident must be graded as either an immediate response (G1) or a priority response (G2). In the case of a G1 response, officers will be sent as a 'blue-light' emergency aiming to arrive within 15 minutes. A G2 response will normally be attended within one hour. The force has a policy that all domestic abuse incidents will receive a police visit and only rarely will this be slower than a G2 response.

The force now has a policy of tracing and attending all 999 calls where the caller cannot be spoken to as they have discontinued the call. There are two senior police officers overseeing the deployment of resources in the control room. They ensure that the right level of response is provided and quality assure the grading assigned to each incident. A domestic abuse incident cannot be downgraded to a slower response than a G2, without the authorisation of the most senior officer.

The force has robust and effective information systems in place which are accessible to control room staff. Northamptonshire Police's intelligence system allows the staff in the control room to readily check for previous history against the names of the people involved and the address and telephone number. The force has established intelligence development officer (IDO) posts in the control room. The two IDOs on duty on each shift are able to support the call handlers and dispatchers in carrying out intelligence checks as calls are received. Staff can also add a warning marker on the information system against a name or an address, which will alert staff in the control room to a particular concern in case of future incidents. For instance, where a person has been a previous victim and the police and other agencies have been involved in the past, an automatic message can be added to the system which will make the call handler immediately aware that any further incidents should be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

All of this serves to ensure that the victim gets the right level of response and that the police officers who are attending can be adequately prepared to deal with the situation. For example if the caller reports the presence of weapons, or

intelligence checks reveal that there is a firearms licence holder at the address; the control room staff will ensure that suitably equipped officers are sent to respond.

Staff in the control room receive training as part of their induction when they start working for the police. An element of this is about domestic abuse. In addition, as part of the force's recent work to improve its approach to safeguarding children, a bespoke two-day training course has been developed by the protecting vulnerable people team. Although aimed primarily at improving police practice in child protection, it includes an element of domestic abuse training. The training is new and has begun to be rolled out. The intention is that all frontline staff will be trained over the coming year. In addition, staff are expected to undertake online training packages in stalking and harassment, although many we spoke to had not done this. They felt that such online training packages had limited value, as they were not given sufficient time to complete them. These subjects are also covered in the risk and vulnerability training.

The approach the force has adopted to questioning callers does not rely on a prescribed set of questions, the intention being to allow the operator to use professional judgement, develop a rapport with the caller and therefore better understand the risk presented. However the effectiveness of this approach relies on the skills and expertise of the call handler and the quality of their supervision. Although most call takers are highly skilled and experienced, and some have had recent training in dealing with vulnerable victims, some have not had any specific training in domestic abuse.

There is room for improvement in supervision and quality control. A random sample of all calls is listened to by supervisors each month to assess quality. The senior officers overseeing the control room monitor the initial grading, and authorise the closure of an incident. However, there is very limited real-time supervision from the control room as calls are being dealt with and incidents attended. The control room does not routinely make the supervisors of the officers dispatched to domestic abuse incidents aware that their officers are being sent to incidents. There is a risk therefore, that high risk incidents may not be properly supervised and that the victims may not get the most appropriate response from the police.

The force has a definition of a repeat victim. Staff have a clear understanding that any case where the victim has reported domestic abuse to the police or another agency or where the victim states they have been subjected to abuse in the past is a repeat case. Their information systems enable the police to readily identify previous history. Similarly, there are a number of factors which may make a domestic abuse victim particularly vulnerable and require a particular

response from the police and partner agencies. For example, a victim who is frail and elderly, or who is suffering from mental ill health may be at greater risk from abuse and may find it more difficult to engage with police officers. There is no widely understood approach to vulnerability and no specific questioning of callers to identify any vulnerability. This means victims who are potentially most at risk are not consistently identified, and therefore, may not be provided with the best available service at the earliest opportunity.

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

Domestic abuse is regarded as important by the force. It is a priority for both the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and for the chief constable. The PCC and the force have a good level of awareness and understanding of the issues involved in effectively tackling domestic abuse and safeguarding victims.

The force is particularly effective in ensuring that the children involved in domestic abuse incidents are referred to the local authority and other partners so that they receive appropriate protection and care. Training is being given to all frontline officers and staff to better equip them to assess risk and deal with vulnerable victims. Officers are encouraged to use professional judgement as well as a formal risk assessment tool to determine what follow-up action and safeguarding is needed.

Officers give a good deal of thought to the safety of the victim and children at incidents of domestic abuse and measures are put in place to protect them.

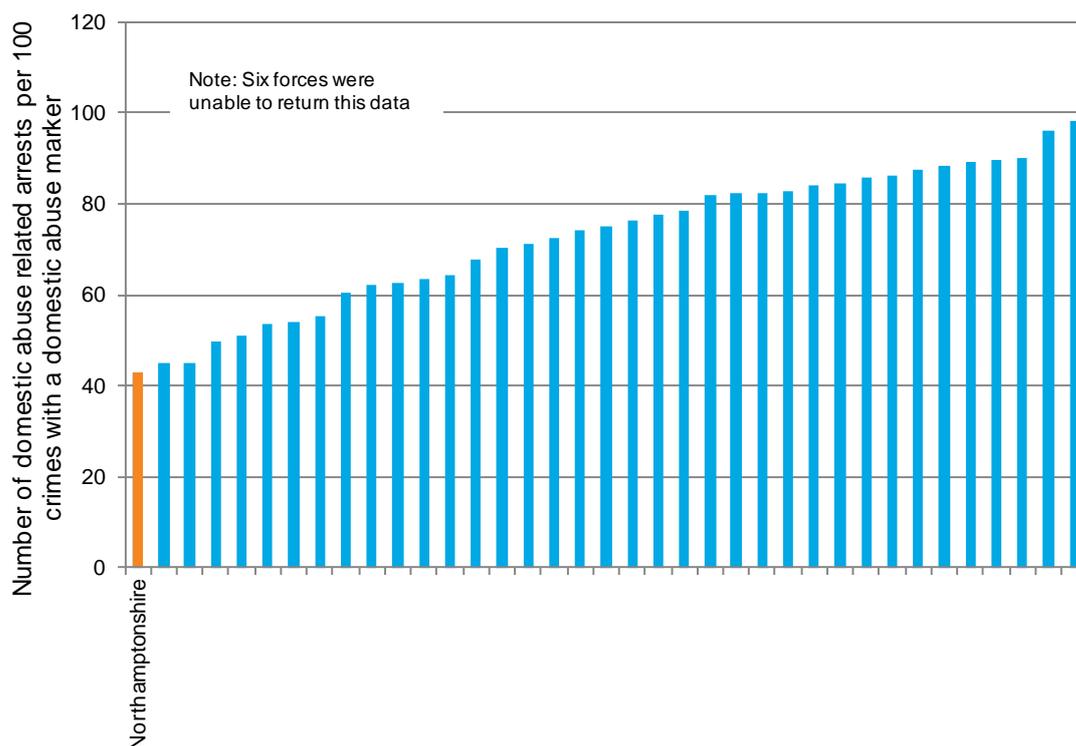
However, the lack of supervision of the risk assessment and safety planning process in medium and standard risk cases is a weakness in Northamptonshire, and the force cannot be sure that all victims are adequately safeguarded. There are also weaknesses in the supervision of the overall investigation and evidence gathering process which may mean that offenders cannot ultimately be brought to justice and victims are not consistently well served.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 43<sup>9</sup> arrests in Northamptonshire. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90. The low arrest rate compared to other forces indicates that this is an issue the force may want to review.

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<sup>9</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>10</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection.

Tackling domestic abuse and safeguarding victims and their children is, on paper, a clear priority for Northamptonshire Police. A strategic direction has been set by the PCC, with an ambitious target to reduce violent crime in Northamptonshire by at least 40 percent and make Northamptonshire the safest county to live in. Within this aim is a specific reference to combating domestic abuse. The PCC has also placed a strong emphasis on putting the victim first. He commissioned a recent research project to enable a better understanding of the needs of victims of crime in Northamptonshire. The findings have now been published in a report entitled *Victims' Voice*.<sup>11</sup> This provides a comprehensive summary of issues from the victim's perspective and includes some useful

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

<sup>11</sup> *Victims' Voice: Report of the Northamptonshire Victims' Commissioner*, Northamptonshire Police and Crime Commissioner, September 2013, <http://www.northants.police.uk/images/mediapool/news/24-09-13-Victims-Voice-Report.pdf>

insights for the police and their partners into areas for development in dealing with domestic abuse victims.

The force's control strategy sets a police priority to identify and support victims. Tackling domestic abuse is an explicit priority in the force's current violent crime strategy, which aims to encourage the early reporting of incidents, reduce the level of repeat victims and ensure that robust investigative processes are in place for reported domestic abuse offences, with a strong emphasis on high risk or repeat victims.

As a consequence of improvements being implemented to the way child protection issues are dealt with, the force has developed a bespoke training programme focused on dealing with risk and vulnerability. The two-day training course is to be delivered to all 1,550 frontline officers and staff over an 18 month period which started in October 2013. At the time of the inspection nearly 350 officers had undergone the training. The training incorporates domestic abuse, as well as child protection, vulnerable adults, so-called honour-based violence and forced marriage.

The force expects that as a minimum, all response officers attending a domestic abuse incident will: carry out a risk assessment; draw up a safety plan to minimise the risk to the victim and make a referral to social services in all cases where children are present; and take positive action with regard to the perpetrator. There is a good level of awareness among frontline staff that taking positive action to deal with domestic abusers and safeguarding victims and their families is what the force expects of them. However, data provided by the force suggests that so-called positive action is not translating into the routine arrest of the perpetrator.

Partner agencies recognise that there has been a marked improvement in the way the force deals with domestic abuse over recent years. This is evidenced by the significant increase in the numbers of children and vulnerable adults, exposed to domestic abuse, who are being referred, by the police, to Northamptonshire County Council's social services.

Frontline officers have a good understanding that domestic abuse encompasses a wide spectrum of issues beyond the more obvious physical violence, including coercive control, and emotional abuse.

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents in Northamptonshire are expected to carry out the initial assessment using the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool. This is a series of 27 questions for the victim, aimed at providing officers with sufficient information to make an informed decision about the level of risk of serious harm

posed to the victim from the offender. Officers are encouraged to use professional judgement in arriving at an overall risk assessment, but are expected in all cases to undertake and document the DASH risk assessment. The outcome of the risk assessment then informs the officers' judgement and determines the action that the police take.

Officers have a good level of understanding of the DASH risk assessment and are confident in using professional judgement, informed by the tool, when making their risk assessment. However, there are concerns among senior officers that DASH risk assessments are not being carried out, or are not being fully completed in all cases. There is no supervision of the risk assessment or safety planning process by frontline supervisors. Where an officer assesses a victim to be at high or medium risk, the incident record is passed to specialist domestic abuse officers in the protecting vulnerable people division. They review the risk assessment and safety plan in the light of all known factors, take follow-up action, and may reassess the risk. However, for those cases assessed as 'low risk' by the attending officer, there is no supervision or further checking of the risk assessment and safety plan at all. This lack of supervision is a weakness and poses a risk that if the DASH assessment has not been fully completed; or if the attending officer has missed warning signs; the victim in those cases may not be properly safeguarded.

There are also weaknesses in the supervision of the overall incident investigation; particularly with regard to the initial stages of the investigation, where there is no force policy on the involvement of supervisors in domestic abuse incidents. Supervision is at best ad hoc and inconsistent.

Furthermore there are weaknesses in the quality of the handover of the investigation from the initial response team, to the officers who deal with any ongoing criminal investigations and court proceedings once an offender is arrested and taken into custody. Where an arrest has been made and the prisoner is to be dealt with by a different officer or team, papers are completed containing all the information and evidence for the case. The vast majority of these are not supervised. This means that if there are omissions or weaknesses in the quality of the initial evidence gathering which go unnoticed, then it may be more difficult for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to secure a conviction and seek justice for the victim. Again this weakness is particularly acute in the case of a 'low risk' incident, where, in Northamptonshire, there will be no involvement from a specialist domestic abuse officer. Any investigation will be handled by the prisoner processing unit, who take over responsibility for dealing with the offender, but have limited or no involvement with the victim. This means that the service to standard risk victims of domestic abuse may not be good enough.

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

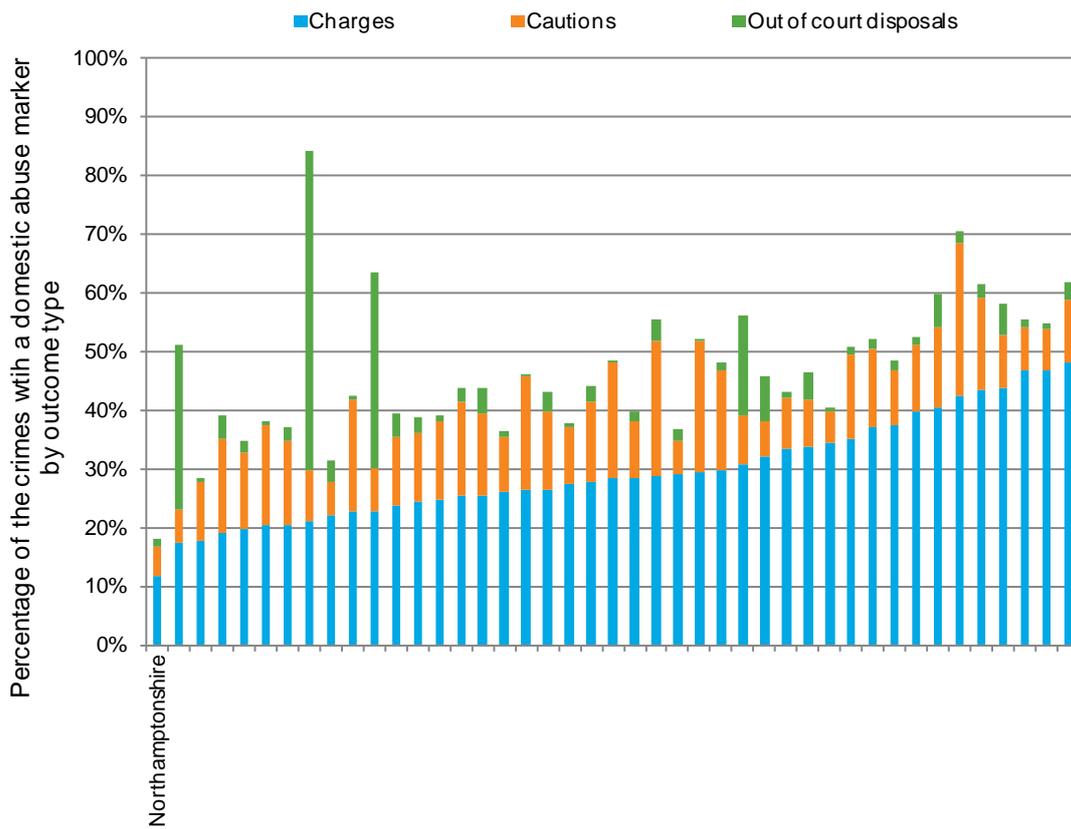
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**Figure 2 : Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>12</sup>**

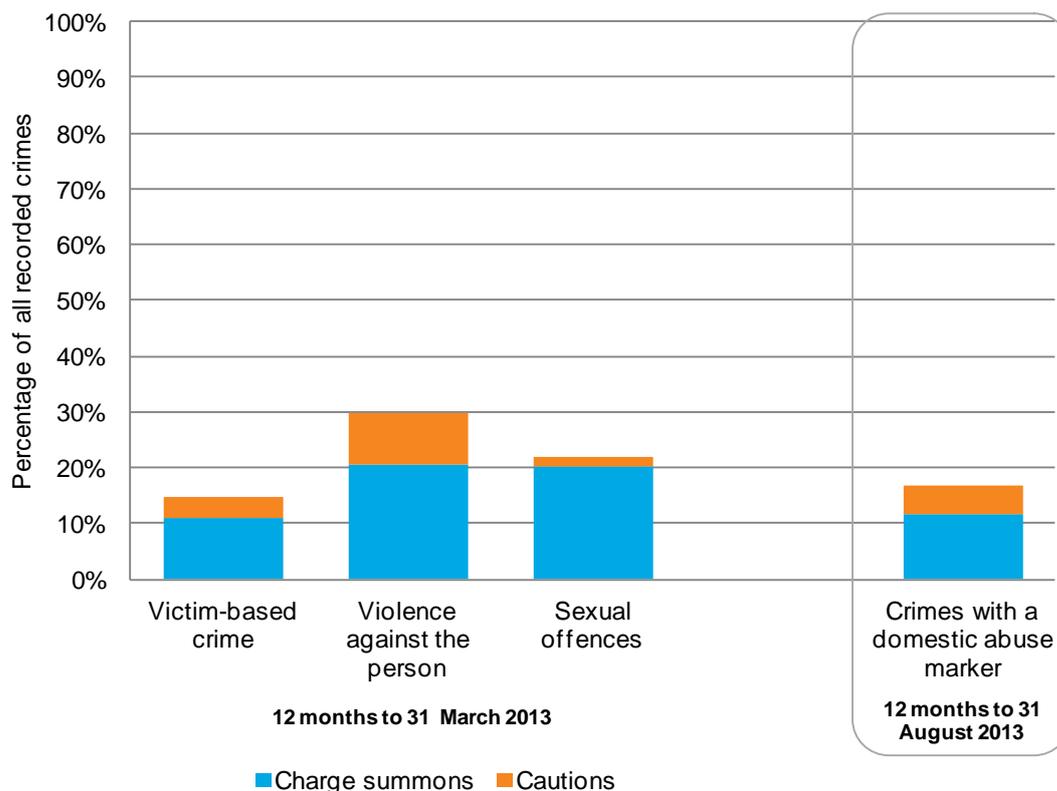


Source: HMIC data collection.

Northamptonshire Police charges a similar proportion of crimes with a domestic abuse marker than recorded victim-based crime.

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

**Figure 3 : Percentage of charge summons and cautions used for victim-based crime, violence against the person, sexual offences and all crimes with a domestic abuse marker**<sup>13</sup>



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

There is oversight of medium and high risk victims through the specialist domestic abuse unit. The most high risk victims receive a sound service through the police and partners. Northamptonshire Police has a team of specialist detectives in the domestic abuse unit who take over both the investigation and responsibility for victim safeguarding of all high risk cases from the initial response officer. They are all trained investigators with specialist experience in dealing with domestic abuse. This means that a victim facing higher levels of risk should receive appropriate support and actions to reduce risk and secure a good outcome.

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

In addition the force also has a team of domestic abuse officers who work with partner agencies to share information and support victim safeguarding and provide safety planning support and advice to the non-specialist police officers who are dealing with medium risk investigations. The force has identified a nominated uniformed officer in each local area team to act as the single point of contact for the domestic abuse officers and enable effective liaison. All high and medium risk cases are reviewed by the domestic abuse unit, which checks the DASH risk assessment and the safety plans. It decides which cases need to be referred on to partner agencies. In most cases safety plans are completed and are effective, however some tend to be fairly brief and generic rather than bespoke.

Capacity within the domestic abuse unit is limited and there are occasions during periods of peak workloads when high risk cases that would ordinarily have been dealt with by the specialist officers are passed back to the response teams or the prisoner investigation team (PIU) officers. There is a risk that these victims may not get the same level of service or safeguarding as those dealt with by specialist officers. The domestic abuse unit does not review those cases assessed as 'low risk' which means that, since these risk assessments have not been checked by a supervisor either, the quality of these assessments is unknown to the force. It cannot be certain that there are not some domestic abuse victims – for example, where a 'low risk' victim may have been subjected to repeated but escalating incidents of abuse – who need, but are not getting, additional safeguarding; or who would benefit from partner agency involvement.

The police and other partners also currently provide funding for a team of specialist independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) who provide invaluable additional, independent support services to high risk victims, helping to keep victims and their families safe. IDVAs can support them through the process, assisting, for example, with finding emergency refuge accommodation and supporting victims during any court hearings. The IDVA service is operated by the Sunflower Centre, a voluntary organisation, it is hosted by the police and IDVAs work extremely closely and constructively with the domestic abuse officers, providing a highly valued service. However the future of the funding for the current 8.4 IDVA posts beyond March 2014 is uncertain. There is a risk that the continuing uncertainty is likely to impact on the staff in post.

Northamptonshire County Council has agreed to pay the existing deficit for the financial year ending April 2015 to maintain IDVA numbers and a group is working to ensure long term funding for these important posts.

Success in effectively tackling domestic abuse and safeguarding victims is dependent on effective joined-up working across all of the agencies involved, both public sector and the third sector. The domestic abuse unit is highly

regarded by partners and is seen as having been instrumental in improving the quality of joint working on domestic abuse across the county. There have been particular improvements in information sharing and a very positive focus on earlier intervention to prevent domestic abuse cases escalating to become high risk.

The multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process is a pivotal element in partnership working within domestic abuse and is attended by police, local authority children's and adults' social services, health services, the IDVA service, and Women's Aid. The multi-agency conferences enable all relevant partner agencies with a role in protecting and supporting victims, to share information and agree on a joint working approach to each individual high risk case. In Northamptonshire, MARACs are held fortnightly and have a finite time available to deal with cases. The nationally accepted practice is that all high risk domestic abuse cases are referred to a MARAC. However, Northamptonshire Police have taken the decision to refer only the very highest risk cases to the MARAC process. They have fixed an arbitrary criterion of 17 ticks on the DASH risk assessment for automatic referral. The remaining high risk cases are considered by the inspector in the domestic abuse unit in conjunction with an IDVA, and a decision is made on whether to include or omit the case from the MARAC. This practice of 'gate keeping' referrals to a MARAC, presents a risk to some high risk victims, that they may be denied the level of service and multi-agency response that would enhance their safety, simply because the meeting does not have the time to hear their case.

Although the force view is that this enables the cases that are heard to receive a quality response, the IDVA service is opposed to this practice. The approach adopted by Northamptonshire Police is not considered nationally to be good practice. It is of concern to HMIC.

Northamptonshire Police has introduced an innovative new approach to sharing information at a local level for medium risk victims which enables partner organisations to share information and engage with the victim, and occasionally the offender, at an earlier stage. They have established five domestic abuse forums (DAFs) which meet monthly, covering the force area and linking up with district council boundaries. The DAFs were established to meet a perceived gap in the police's ability to share information and secure partner engagement in lower risk domestic abuse cases, which did not meet the referral criteria for consideration by the MARAC. Any agency can nominate a case to a DAF, although the great majority are currently police referrals. It enables timely sharing of information and allows the police to build a picture of risk and engage partners in early intervention for medium risk and repeat victims, which may prevent further escalation of the risk to the victim. With the exception of social

services there is good representation on the DAFs; however the absence of representation from the county council's children's and adults' services, currently limits their ability to deliver an effective joined-up multi-agency response for victims.

It is unclear who is responsible for dealing with the victims of domestic abuse throughout the investigation and criminal justice process. Uniformed officers do not really understand what the specialist teams do. This can mean victims may be contacted by too many people, too frequently, often asking questions that the victim has answered before. This slightly fragmented approach could cause victims to lose confidence in how the police are dealing with their case, which in turn could lead to victims deciding that they no longer wish to support the police investigation.

The force produces regular reports for local teams which highlight who in their area are the highest risk and most prolific domestic abuse perpetrators. This is useful information; however, it is not consistently passed on to local officers by the borough commanders. This is of concern.

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

The force has recognised that there are some areas for improvement in the way it manages domestic abuse and future risks to victims. Both the force and the PCC are keen to improve services for victims and are working with partners to do this.

The establishment of the local domestic abuse forums provides an opportunity to intervene at an early stage and prevent the future escalation of risk to victims. Recent work to understand victims' needs and the nature of domestic abuse as a crime, gives the force a good basis from which to develop improved processes and systems. There are however, some weaknesses in the leadership and performance management of domestic abuse.

There is a lack of focus on supervision, which means that the force cannot be certain that victims are consistently getting the service they need.

Officers and staff throughout the organisation take their role in making victims of domestic abuse safer very seriously and have a broad understanding of the complex factors involved in domestic abuse. The force is strong on considering the impact of domestic abuse on children.

The force recognises that there are some important areas for improvement in the way it manages domestic abuse and future risks to victims. The establishment of the local DAFs provides an opportunity to intervene at an early stage and prevent future escalation of risk to victims. The force is working with the PCC to address the findings of the *Victims' Voice* study. In addition the force has recently commissioned some work to better understand the scale and nature of domestic abuse in Northamptonshire, this is known as a 'problem profile'. The profile has only recently been completed, so is not yet widely understood within the force, but may offer the opportunity to better tailor police services to match future demand. For example, the problem profile has identified that there is under-reporting of domestic abuse from black and minority ethnic communities in Northamptonshire. The force is intending to carry out some work to understand why this under-reporting occurs, and to put in place actions to encourage people from these and other communities to seek police assistance and report abuse.

It is essential that victims are updated prior to a release of the offender from prison, and that their level of risk is re-assessed in light of the release. Northamptonshire has a process in place which ensures that victims are updated when an offender is to be released from prison or custody, and safety plans are reviewed to take account of the risk that this may pose to the victim. However, there are sometimes delays in updates from the courts where an offender is being released on bail. This means that there may not be an opportunity to alert the victim and reassess the risk they face at this critical time. Currently in Northamptonshire the waiting time for a criminal prosecution case to be heard by the courts, is very long. It is typically taking up to four months to get a court hearing. This means that victims are more likely to withdraw and cases that should be brought to justice, may not.

Local uniformed teams can play a vital role in managing offenders and helping to make victims safer. The specialists in the domestic abuse unit work closely with the single point of contact within the safer communities teams (SCTs), the daily management meetings in the SCTs routinely monitor high risk cases where the offender is still to be caught and arrested. There is no work currently in place to tackle serious and serial perpetrators and there are very limited programmes aimed at domestic abuse perpetrators in general. The two pilot perpetrator programmes currently underway are likely not to be continued as a result of the funding ending in March 2014.

Understanding current and past performance in dealing with domestic abuse can help to highlight to the force areas where future performance needs to improve in order to achieve better outcomes for victims.

There are some key weaknesses in the way performance is managed in Northamptonshire. The force has identified nine high level indicators of domestic abuse performance which it monitors routinely and reports on to senior leaders through the performance and monitoring meetings. However the current performance reports are confusing and do not present performance information in a way which enables effective management. The charts in the latest report showed an increase in repeat incidents of domestic abuse, while the narrative spoke of a reduction in repeats and senior leaders are under the impression that the numbers of repeat incidents are declining. Senior managers were unable to fully explain or understand the performance information they were receiving. Without transparent and meaningful performance reporting it will not be possible for senior managers to understand current performance and drive improvements in outcomes.

There is inconsistent leadership of domestic abuse performance across the force. The force and PCC have set a clear strategic direction and prioritised tackling domestic abuse. Although there is strong and effective leadership in the protecting vulnerable people division, where the specialist staff are based, this is not reflected across the operational command areas. For example, there are inconsistencies in the way the five DAFs are operated. Although commanders receive performance information they do not consistently consider it or use it to drive improvement. There is a general lack of rigour in the supervision of domestic abuse performance within the basic command units.

## 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 force should review its processes at first point of contact to ensure that call handlers are all appropriately trained to identify domestic abuse victims. 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 a consistently appropriate service.
2. The force should review the supervision by front-line managers of all domestic abuse incidents, to ensure: that there is appropriate oversight and quality control of the risk assessment and safety planning at the initial attendance; and that the quality of initial evidence gathering and handover can be assured.
3. The force should improve its understanding of, and engagement with, black and minority ethnic communities and any other hard-to-reach communities where there is under-reporting of abuse, so that services can be designed and developed to ensure that they are appropriate to victims in these communities.
4. The force should review the current criteria for the referral of cases to a MARAC to ensure that it is compatible with nationally acknowledged good practice, and that it is not excluding some high risk victims from access to the full range of services to safeguard and support them.
5. The force should review the current level of resourcing for investigating high risk domestic abuse cases and supporting victims to ensure that all victims receive an appropriate level of service.
6. The force should work closely with the PCC to provide clarity over the future of the IDVA service and ensure that victims can be provided with a sustainable service.
7. The force should ensure that all performance monitoring information is provided to managers and partners in a way that can be clearly understood and used to drive improvements in outcomes.
8. The force should review the terminology being used to describe standard risk cases. 'Low' can minimise the level of risk being experienced.

# 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.