



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Northumbria Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-365-8

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We inspected all police forces in England and Wales, interviewing senior and operational leads in forces, holding focus groups with frontline staff and partners, and carrying out visits to police stations (which were unannounced) to test the reality of each force's approach with frontline officers. Our inspection teams were supplemented by expert peers, which included public protection experts from over 15 forces and those working with victims of

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

domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This report details what HMIC found in Northumbria 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 report⁶. A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

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

Domestic abuse in Northumbria⁷

Calls for assistance



In Northumbria, domestic abuse accounts for 6% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 22% were from repeat victims.

Crime

7%

Domestic abuse accounts for 7% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

18%

Northumbria recorded 261 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 48 were domestic abuse related. This is 18% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Assault with injury

32%

The force also recorded 5,757 assaults with injury, of these 1,848 were domestic abuse related. This is 32% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

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

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

Harassment

63%

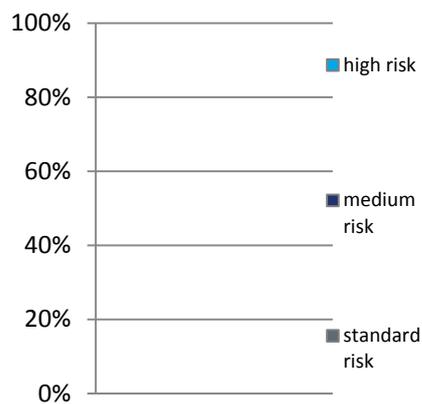
The force recorded 792 harassment offences, of these 500 were domestic abuse related. This is 63% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

5%

The force also recorded 975 sexual offences, of these 52 were domestic abuse related. This is 5% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



Northumbria was unable to provide data relating to the number of active high, medium and standard risk cases they had.⁸

Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 86 arrests in Northumbria in the 12 months to end of August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

⁸ The force did provide the number of cases above standard risk and of these 24% were high risk and 76% were medium risk.

Outcomes



Northumbria recorded 4,871 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 43% resulted in a charge, 16% resulted in a caution and, 2% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

HMIC found that tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority for Northumbria Police and this is recognised by officers and staff throughout the organisation.

Most staff had received training commensurate with their needs; however a review of the recent changes in the use of the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment should be undertaken to understand what difference they have made and whether victims are still being properly risk assessed.

There is good work with partner agencies to deliver services to victims to help make them safe, and good information sharing between agencies, for example, with local authorities.

The force recognises there is need for improvement and this report outlines a number of areas where the force could further strengthen its response.

Identifying victims

Victims of domestic abuse generally are identified by the force through calls to one of the force's two communication centres. Staff are trained, and question callers to collect information to establish risk levels before deciding the most appropriate response. HMIC found that staff research police data bases to gather available information about a caller, perpetrator, family or address to help officers attending the incident to assess the threat of harm to a victim and their children. This information routinely is passed to attending officers which helps to inform their risk assessment. The force has good systems to identify repeat and vulnerable callers. The force has defined what makes a victim of domestic abuse a repeat or vulnerable victim. Call handlers use these definitions to identify vulnerable and repeat victims at the first point of contact, which informs how the call is managed, the initial risk assessment and the level of scrutiny given to the incident by supervisors in the communication centres.

HMIC were concerned that front enquiry office staff at police stations have not received any training about domestic abuse and may fail to identify victims at the earliest opportunity and provide them with necessary support.

Keeping victims safe

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the force. All officers in 24/7 response and neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) have received training in the DASH risk assessment process and are aware of their responsibilities in safeguarding victims. Officers attending incidents of domestic abuse understand the need to ensure the safety of the victim and children with the necessary measures put in place to protect them. However, HMIC found that officers felt they had to

remove one of the parties whenever they attend an incident. This has caused confusion and needs to be clarified. Investigations are allocated to staff based on the level of risk to the victim and are regularly reviewed by supervisors to ensure positive action has been taken. This means that high-risk incidents are dealt with by the most experienced investigators and is positive. The force has run numerous media campaigns to ensure the public are aware of the issue of domestic abuse.

Management of risk

All domestic abuse victims' risk levels are reviewed by specialist officers. Currently specialist staff also deal with all high-risk victims, and with suspects in cases of offences committed against high risk victims. Staff throughout the force take responsibility for making victims safe and understand their role in doing this. The six multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) are regarded as working well and there are good relationships with partners, which means that information is exchanged promptly; risk assessed; and safety plans put in place to reduce risk. However, their high caseload is a concern and needs to be reviewed to ensure they continue to be effective.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

The force has made some improvements to the way contact is maintained with victims where a perpetrator is imprisoned, but more needs to be done to ensure that victims are routinely updated when a perpetrator is released and their risk level assessed. HMIC found some work being done to identify and manage serial and serious perpetrators, although again this is an area for development. An initiative has recently been introduced which adopts a greater problem solving approach to repeat perpetrators with progress monitored and managed at both force and area level meetings. Local officers and commanders understand which families are at greatest risk in their area.

Recommendations for improvements following domestic homicide reviews are incorporated into the force's domestic abuse action plan with progress monitored and managed. However, the force needs to review the role of the two detective chief inspectors (DCIs) (protecting vulnerable people) who are currently undertaking these reviews to ensure they are the most appropriate and independent individuals to effectively fulfil this role.

Domestic abuse is embedded in the force's performance management processes and regularly reviewed to ensure that officers are safeguarding victims and dealing appropriately with perpetrators.

Findings

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

Victims of domestic abuse generally are identified by the force through calls to one of the force's two communication centres. Staff are trained, and question callers to collect information to establish risk levels before deciding the most appropriate response. HMIC found that staff research police data bases to gather available information about a caller, perpetrator, family or address to help officers attending the incident to assess the threat of harm to a victim and their children. This information routinely is passed to attending officers which helps to inform their risk assessment. The force has good systems to identify repeat and vulnerable callers. The force has defined what makes a victim of domestic abuse a repeat or vulnerable victim. Call handlers use these definitions to identify vulnerable and repeat victims at the first point of contact, which informs how the call is managed, the initial risk assessment and the level of scrutiny given to the incident by supervisors in the communication centres.

HMIC were concerned that front enquiry office staff at police stations have not received any training about domestic abuse and may fail to identify victims at the earliest opportunity and provide them with necessary support.

Victims of domestic abuse are identified by Northumbria Police through calls to their communication centres; by attendance at stations; or when identified by other agencies, such as health and children services, at a MARAC. The majority of incidents and crimes are reported through the communication centre. The identification of victims of domestic abuse is the responsibility of the call handlers who will answer the call, assess the urgency of the response and grade the call accordingly.

Call handlers are assisted in deciding the most appropriate response by using an automated checking mechanism which searches the force computer systems, using the address where the incident is happening and a combination of the caller's surname, date of birth and telephone number. Any previous incidents or warnings about the address or people involved are automatically updated in the incident log. These checks will highlight if a victim has already been identified as a vulnerable or repeat victim and will assist in determining the appropriate initial response and risk assessment.

Call handlers assess domestic abuse incidents that are 'happening now' as a grade 1 response (attendance within ten minutes in urban areas, 20 minutes in rural areas). Otherwise the incident is given a grade 2 response (attendance as soon as possible but within 60 minutes).

The force has defined what makes a victim of domestic abuse a repeat or vulnerable victim. Call handlers use these definitions to identify vulnerable and repeat victims at the first point of contact. The force has a procedure and checklist that call handlers should follow when responding to reports of domestic abuse. This includes details about the victim and previous history (unless the need for an urgent response makes this unrealistic). In the case of a caller being identified as a vulnerable or repeat victim, this is recorded on the force systems in a way that will highlight the issue for future calls.

Once graded the incident is passed to a resource controller who uses an IT system and GPS to identify and despatch the most appropriate and timely resource to the incident. The resource controller also has responsibility for providing background information to attending officers.

HMIC found that resource controllers manage resources proactively and ensure staff are given relevant incident and caller history consistently, usually while they are travelling to the incident. This is important as officers are then able to make informed risk assessments when they are dealing with the incident.

Staff working in both of the force's communication centres have received sufficient training to have an understanding of how to deal with incidents involving domestic abuse with a specific focus on the identification of vulnerable and repeat victims at the earliest opportunity. They have also been given training to help them recognise coercive control, stalking and harassment. HMIC found staff had received appropriate training to enable them to effectively fulfil their role. However, most staff were process driven, understanding what they must do, rather than demonstrating a broader understanding of domestic abuse, and how dealing with it effectively can enhance the confidence of victims and make them safer.

Supervisors within the communication centres actively track and monitor domestic abuse incidents to ensure sufficient detail is recorded on the incident log; that response is correct and timely; and that it is appropriately closed. In the case of incidents involving a high-risk victim, the communication staff will also inform 24/7 response supervisors to ensure the incident is overseen and appropriately managed at a local level. While ownership of incidents is the responsibility of the six area commands (Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Newcastle and Northumberland), the supervisors in the communication centres quality assure domestic abuse incidents to ensure all necessary actions have been taken prior to finalisation, especially in the case of those involving high-risk victims.

HMIC found in the majority of cases that a comprehensive update of the actions taken had been recorded on the log prior to finalisation. There was also evidence of supervisory oversight of incidents involving high-risk victims.

Regular and robust quality assurance processes are in place for staff within the two communication centres utilising the 'ASPIRE' IT system. These processes include supervisors reviewing a sample of domestic abuse incidents in order to quality assure the skills of the contact handlers and assess key elements of the conversation. Findings from these checks are recorded and feedback regularly provided to staff to ensure any development issues are addressed.

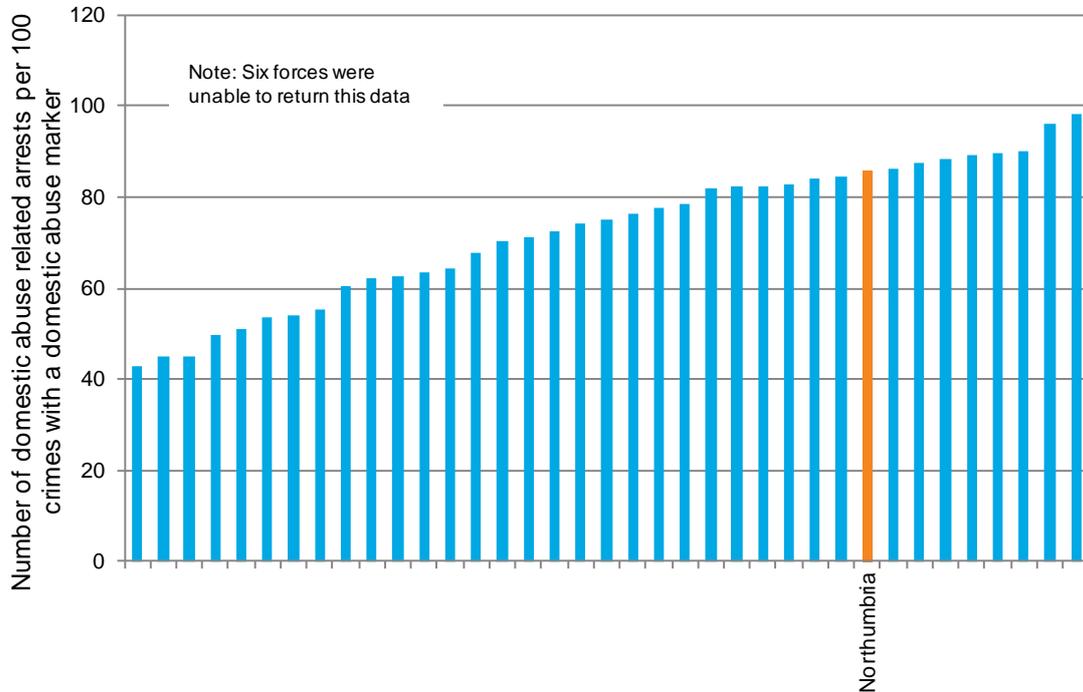
Front enquiry desk staff, working in police stations, are often a first point of contact for victims reporting domestic abuse. However, we found the majority of staff have received little or no training about domestic abuse. Currently they use their professional judgement, taking sufficient details to enable the communication centres to create an incident log and arrange for the appropriate response. This lack of understanding means that victims may not be identified at the earliest stage and receive appropriate support.

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

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the force. All officers in 24/7 response and neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) have received training in the DASH risk assessment process and are aware of their responsibilities in safeguarding victims. Officers attending incidents of domestic abuse understand the need to ensure the safety of the victim and children with the necessary measures put in place to protect them. However, HMIC found that officers felt they had to remove one of the parties whenever they attend an incident. This has caused confusion and needs to be clarified. Investigations are allocated to staff based on the level of risk to the victim and are regularly reviewed by supervisors to ensure positive action has been taken. This means that high-risk incidents are dealt with by the most experienced investigators and is positive. The force has run numerous media campaigns to ensure the public are aware of the issue of domestic abuse.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 86⁹ arrests in Northumbria for the 12 months to end of August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Figure 1: Number of domestic abuse related arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013



Source: HMIC data collection

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for Northumbria Police with both the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and chief constable taking a personal lead on the issue. This is reinforced in the PCC’s police and crime plan 2013–18 and the chief constable’s delivery plan. Progress against these plans is monitored and managed at the force’s strategic management board (SMB) chaired by the chief constable and attended by the PCC and senior managers. HMIC found that staff identified tackling domestic abuse as a force priority and were clear about how they contributed to delivering the aims of the force’s delivery plan.

The force ensures staff have clear direction regarding how they should tackle domestic abuse by publishing detailed procedural documents. Examples of these were seen by the inspection team and related to domestic abuse, stalking

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

and harassment and so-called honour-based violence. They were found to be sufficiently detailed and clear.

Since 2012, the force has carried out various reviews into the way it deals with domestic abuse which have resulted in action plans. A consolidated domestic abuse action plan has been compiled to improve areas such as effective investigation, victim support, the reporting of domestic abuse and accountability. The plan is used by the assistant chief constable responsible for domestic abuse, to ensure actions are progressed and those responsible for completing them are held to account.

The force has made a significant investment in training staff, especially staff dealing with victims, to understand domestic abuse, coercive control, stalking, harassment and so-called honour-based violence. Recent training has had a greater focus on the psychological effect of domestic abuse on victims with presentations provided by the protecting vulnerable people (PVP) domestic abuse investigation unit (DAIU).

Domestic abuse incidents given a grade 1 response will usually be attended by 24/7 response officers (within ten minutes in urban areas and 20 minutes in rural areas), and grade 2 incidents within an hour attended by 24/7 response or NPTs, if available. Their initial and immediate action is to reduce the risk to the victim by improving their safety and where necessary arrest the perpetrator.

All officers in 24/7 response and NPT have received training in the DASH risk assessment process. HMIC found that this training is updated at least twice a year.

Domestic abuse has been part of student officer and detective training for a number of years with the aims, objectives and content changing over time to reflect legislation and good practice.

Domestic abuse incidents are risk assessed using DASH. This is completed by the officer at the scene of the incident based on information provided by the victim. The process also takes account of risk to any children in the house, irrespective of whether the children are present at the time of the incident.

The DASH form is entered onto the force IT systems which generate a grading relating to the level of risk to the victim, officers are able to override this grade based on their professional judgement. In cases involving children, staff must complete a child concern notification (CCN). The purpose of a CCN is to notify both the child abuse investigation unit (CAIU) within Northumbria Police and also children's services of the concern or identified risk.

HMIC found that staff understood the risk assessment tool and confirmed their ability to apply discretion and professional judgement at any stage of the process.

In the case of a victim assessed as standard-risk they will be referred to a support agency but only usually with their consent. For those assessed as medium risk they will usually be dealt with by staff from the NPT. They will have responsibility for completing an investigation plan and a safety plan for the victim, both these will be recorded on the force IT systems. High-risk victims will be dealt with by PVP DAIU who will complete and manage investigation and safety plans. Referral to an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) is automatic with or without victim consent.

However, HMIC found a lack of clarity regarding force procedures for dealing with a domestic abuse incident. Staff believed force procedures required them to ask one of the people involved in the incident to leave the household or premises regardless of the circumstances. Staff felt they were not able to use their discretion and the practice was causing unnecessary conflict. Force procedures need to be reviewed to ensure staff understand what is required of them.

HMIC found that the response to domestic abuse incidents, risk assessments and safety plans are monitored and managed by supervisors in 24/7 response, NPT and PVP DAIU. Each day, the senior management team, in each of the force's six area commands, will hold a management meeting. As part of this meeting they make sure that safety plans are in place for victims and that perpetrators are actively being sought.

Officers conduct investigations to a satisfactory standard and keep victims updated. All contact with victims is recorded on the force's IT system and regularly reviewed by the officer and their supervisor to make sure that victims are being told what is happening with their case.

Investigation plans are regularly reviewed by supervisors to ensure positive action has been taken, such as ensuring all efforts have been made to arrest a perpetrator wanted in connection with the incident.

HMIC found prosecutions being pursued even if the victim was not willing to support proceedings (often due to the victim being too frightened). Officers were capturing other evidence to support the investigation, for example, by using digital cameras, body-worn cameras and smart phones. This is positive as more evidence gathered, particularly at the early stages of an incident, provides powerful and compelling to prosecute perpetrators.

Domestic abuse has been raised with the public through various media campaigns and initiatives. For example, during Christmas 2012 and New Year 2013 the PCC in partnership with the force ran a domestic violence campaign called 'Walking on egg shells.' The force worked with support agencies and victims, to encourage victims to report domestic abuse and send a message to perpetrators about the harm domestic abuse causes. The campaign is an annual event in recognition of the historic rises in domestic abuse over this period.

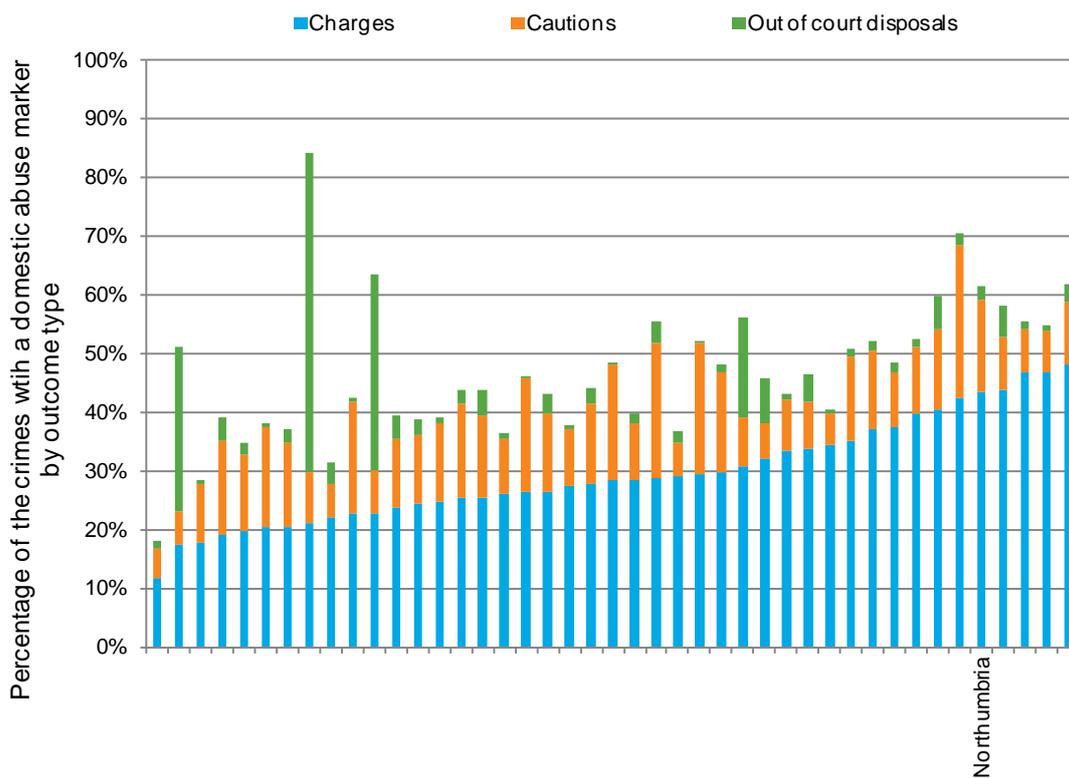
How are victims of domestic abuse made safer as a result of the police response and subsequent action?

All domestic abuse victims' risk levels are reviewed by specialist officers. Currently specialist staff also deal with all high-risk victims, and with suspects in cases of offences committed against high risk victims. Staff throughout the force take responsibility for making victims safe and understand their role in doing this. The six multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) are regarded as working well and there are good relationships with partners, which means that information is exchanged promptly; risk assessed; and safety plans put in place to reduce risk. However, their high caseload is a concern and needs to be reviewed to ensure they continue to be effective.

Northumbria recorded 4,871¹⁰ domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 43 percent resulted in a charge, 16 percent resulted in a caution and, 2 percent had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

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

Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013¹¹

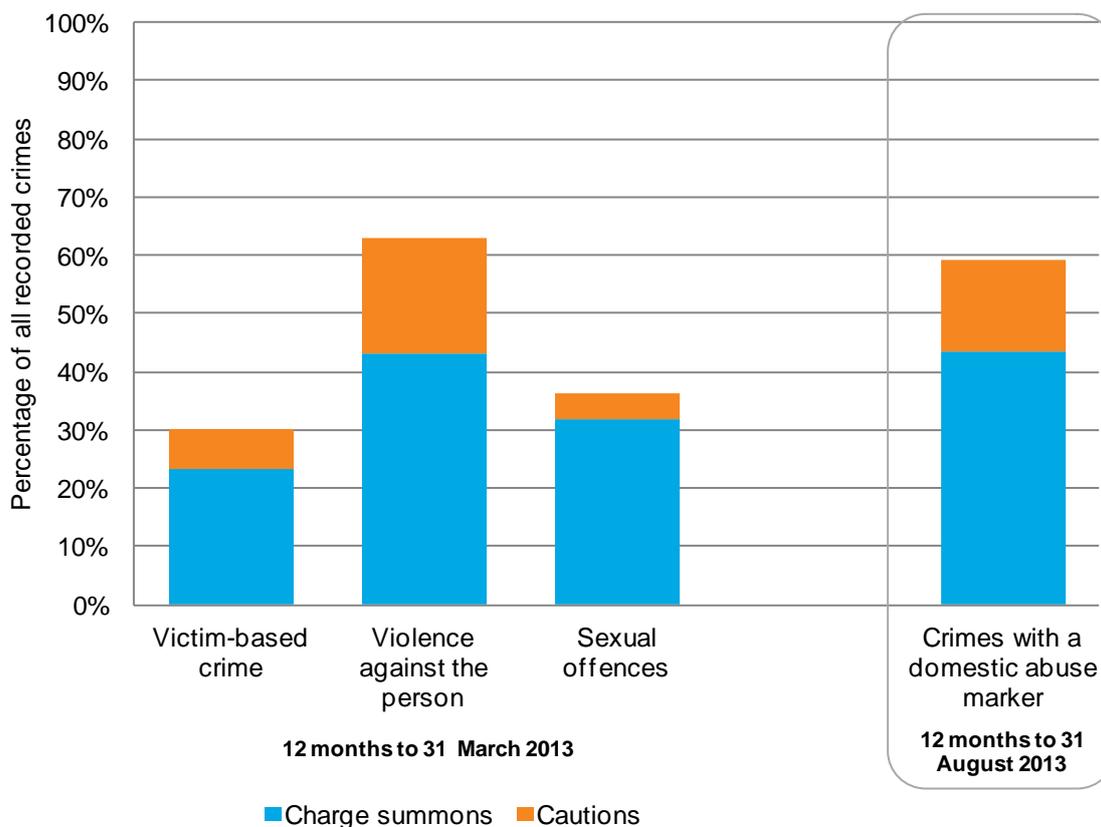


Source: HMIC data collection

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

¹¹ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse marker on the IT recording 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 marker¹²



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

We found that staff throughout the force take responsibility for making victims safe and understand their role in the risk assessment and management process. This is the case whether they work in the communication centres, front enquiry offices, 24/7 response, NPT or the DAIU.

In 2011, the PVP section was created within the force’s crime department. The section is divided into two teams – North and South of the river Tyne. Each team is led by a detective chief inspector, who has 40 detectives divided into two teams. One team (DAIU) works on cases of domestic abuse and rape/serious sexual assault, the other works on cases of child abuse. The PVP offices are staffed from 8am to midnight, seven days a week. Outside of these hours, staff are available on a callout basis.

¹² Based on forces’ own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse marker on the IT recording systems.

Every victim of domestic abuse is subject of the risk assessment process. Staff within the central referral unit (CRU) carry out a risk assessment quality assurance process after the initial assessment has been created by attending officers. They are located with staff from the DAIU and are therefore able to seek specialist advice should a risk grading need reviewing.

The risk assessment process, which must be conducted within 48 hours of the incident, assists in prioritising services to victims of domestic abuse, specifically to victims identified as high risk who will be considered for referral into the MARAC process.

The risk assessment process has three objectives:

- To gather detailed and relevant information from victims, that can be shared with other agencies.
- To identify those who will need more intensive support in order to save life and prevent further harm.
- To make agencies aware of the most dangerous offenders.

The majority of those working in the DAIU are fully trained detectives; a small number of staff are officers on temporary attachment from other areas. All staff have received specific domestic abuse training as well as working through a personal portfolio to develop skills and awareness. HMIC found that staff felt they had received sufficient training to fulfil their role.

DAIU staff deal with suspects in cases of all offences committed against high risk victims. This means that the most experienced officers are dealing with the highest risk victims and perpetrators. This is positive. However, due to the increased number of high risk cases staff are struggling to meet demand and there is a need to review staffing levels and responsibilities.

The force recognises the importance of working with partner agencies to tackle domestic violence. HMIC saw numerous examples of DAIU and NPTs working in partnership with local authorities; the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); probation; health; and the voluntary sector to reduce the risk to victims. On a day-to-day basis, the MARACs drive partnership activity to tackle domestic abuse. Information sharing with partners is essential in domestic abuse, so that officers and staff develop the best possible understanding of the level of risk a victim is facing.

The force currently has a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) in North Tyneside with others due to start in Sunderland and Newcastle. The hubs consist of co-located police and children's services to address children at risk of harm. At present they are not involved with adult victims of domestic abuse.

However, the PCC is exploring opportunities to establish multi-agency safeguarding hubs to include victims of domestic abuse.

Further support is provided through the IDVA services which exist for high, medium and standard risk victims across the force area. The 20 IDVAs in the county are employed by a variety of domestic abuse support organisations. The IDVA services are all well-established: Victim Support Service; Women's Aid Newcastle; Gateshead Safer Families; and Wearside Women in Need are some of the organisations providing these services.

IDVAs are funded locally through various funding streams but predominantly through the local authorities. This has led to a lack of consistency and security for the service which the PCC, force and partner agencies are trying to address at both a local and national level. This is a risk for the force as the lack of certainty about the future of these roles may lead these important staff to look for employment elsewhere and leave a gap in available support for victims.

We spoke to representatives from partner agencies. They were positive about how the force worked with them particularly to reduce the risk to victims.

The victim's risk level is reviewed regularly. This process will depend on the level of risk but is carried out by staff in the PVP CRU, Domestic Abuse Investigation teams or NPTs. High-risk victims' risk levels are reviewed four weeks after the incident, and medium-risk victims' are reviewed after 12 weeks. The purpose of the review is to establish whether the risk level can be reduced. Standard-risk victims are not subject to a risk level review. The appropriate elapsed time since an incident automatically flags 'review' on the force IT system which alerts those in charge of police areas that a review of a victim's risk level is needed.

There are clear roles and responsibilities regarding who deals with victims of domestic abuse with DAIU dealing with high risk victims and NPT predominantly dealing with medium and standard risk victims.

Safety plans for medium-risk victims are developed and reviewed by the NPTs with supervision of plans provided by sergeants and inspectors. These plans are also dip-sampled by senior managers to ensure the consistency and quality of plans. Safety plans for high-risk victims are completed and reviewed by staff in the DAIU and scrutinised by their supervisors.

MARACs operate in each local authority area (Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Newcastle and Northumberland). Their purpose is to bring relevant agencies together to share information and provide a co-ordinated response to victims of domestic abuse. All victims assessed by the police or partner agencies as high-risk victims are discussed at MARAC.

Victims, who suffer a further episode of violence within 12 months of the date of the MARAC, are also discussed.

MARACs are held fortnightly and chaired by a PVP detective inspector, ensuring consistency of approach and decision-making. The six MARACs are well established, information is shared effectively, actions are agreed and those responsible for delivering them are held to account. Attendance is good and governance is managed via community safety partnerships and local safeguarding children's boards. The research for the meetings, agendas and minutes including action logs are done by four full time MARAC co-ordinators who are based within the CRU.

HMIC found that MARAC caseload is increasing. In the Newcastle MARAC, caseloads are already high. Often, over 25 cases are listed for review. The introduction of the revised DASH and the increase in officers using their professional judgment has increased the number of victims being categorised as high risk. Should the increases continue, the current approach will not be sustainable.

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

The force has made some improvements to the way contact is maintained with victims where a perpetrator is imprisoned, but more needs to be done to ensure that victims are routinely updated when a perpetrator is released and their risk level assessed. HMIC found some work being done to identify and manage serial and serious perpetrators, although again this is an area for development. An initiative has recently been introduced which adopts a greater problem solving approach to repeat perpetrators with progress monitored and managed at both force and area level meetings. Local officers and commanders understand which families are at greatest risk in their area.

Recommendations for improvements following domestic homicide reviews are incorporated into the force's domestic abuse action plan with progress monitored and managed. However, the force needs to review the role of the two detective chief inspectors (DCIs) (protecting vulnerable people) who are currently undertaking these reviews to ensure they are the most appropriate and independent individuals to effectively fulfil this role.

Domestic abuse is embedded in the force's performance management processes and regularly reviewed to ensure that officers are safeguarding victims and dealing appropriately with perpetrators.

The force has made some improvements to the way contact is maintained with victims where perpetrators are imprisoned to ensure victims are kept informed about release dates; but more needs to be done. These improvements have been made following the force reviewing lessons learned from domestic related homicides and similar high profile cases in other forces. Victims need to be risk assessed at this critical stage to ensure that any necessary safety plans are put in place to reduce risk; the force must ensure this happens on every occasion.

Where a perpetrator is released on bail, the risk level to the victim is reviewed by either the DAIU or the NPTs depending on the level of risk posed to the victim. Safety plans will be updated to reflect any change in circumstances and risk. These are scrutinised by supervisors.

There is some evidence of serial and serious perpetrators being identified and managed by the force; although improvement is needed. Recently the force has introduced an initiative which adopts a problem-solving approach to repeat perpetrators. Each of the policing areas have identified ten domestic abuse perpetrators based on risk; repeat MARAC referrals; and how often they feature in the previous six months on the force IT system QlikView.

Each nomination is fully researched to ensure the most appropriate interventions are put in place with the aim of reducing their offending behaviour. Progress is monitored and managed at both force and area level meetings. The DAIU is consulted as part of the process to ensure any proposed interventions do not increase the risks to the victim. This approach is supported by other partnership initiatives, for example a number of the areas have perpetrator programmes (Newcastle, South Tyneside, Sunderland and Gateshead), although these are often reliant on self-referrals and have not been evaluated.

Repeat victims are reviewed where there have been no further calls. This is done in the case of high-risk victims by the DAIU and medium-risk victims by the NPTs. Supervisors will check that all actions contributing to victim safety plans have been completed. This is important as it ensures the police understand why there have been no further calls, which is not always because the abuse has stopped.

HMIC found that local officers and commanders understand which families are at greatest risk in their area. Information is brought to their attention in various ways such as through local briefings and regular meetings with partner agencies, for example the local authority housing departments.

The force ensures that corporate learning is maintained and embedded following domestic homicide reviews (DHR). Recommendations for improvement are incorporated into the force's domestic abuse action plan with progress monitored and managed through a comprehensive meetings

framework. The assistant chief officer (corporate services) chairs the force's critical incident review board, which has recently been re-established, to ensure that lessons learned from critical incidents including domestic homicides are reflected in future training for staff. HMIC were shown recent examples where findings had influenced the force's domestic abuse training programme bringing about improvements in risk assessment and safety planning.

Currently the two PVP DCIs are responsible for managing the force's contribution to all domestic homicide reviews (DHRs). The DCIs have the additional responsibility of preparing the overview section of the final report which incorporates all the reports from other agencies. Due to the current volume of DHRs (at the time of inspection, North PVP DCI had eight and South PVP DCI, three), the force needs to satisfy itself that at a time of increased demand being placed on the PVPs that the two DCIs are the most appropriate and independent individuals to effectively fulfil this role.

Domestic abuse is embedded in the force's performance management processes. Scrutiny and accountability for performance relating to domestic abuse is evident at both the force and the area command level with a particular focus on reducing the number of vulnerable and repeat victims. The force reviews performance in tackling domestic abuse through a wide range of forums including the monthly SMB, chaired by the chief constable and operational performance review meeting chaired by the deputy chief constable. The current performance management regime is enhanced by the force IT system 'QlikView' which provides performance data at a force level down to data relating to an individual's performance.

At area command level, the assistant chief constables conduct monthly performance meetings with area commanders and their senior management teams, where performance relating to domestic abuse is managed. In addition to this each senior management team holds monthly performance meetings with sergeants and inspectors. On a daily basis, the area commands hold meetings to co-ordinate police activity to tackle domestic abuse. These meetings are attended by senior managers, supervisors and detectives. They review domestic abuse incidents with a strong focus on actions to deal with incidents involving medium and high risk victims. This focus includes a review of safety planning arrangements and the tasking of resources to arrest perpetrators.

HMIC attended area command daily management meetings and found scrutiny and management of domestic abuse related issues with the co-ordination of resources to tackle them.

A problem profile for domestic abuse is currently being researched for the force and partner agencies. The profile will cover the whole force area and all partner agencies working to tackle domestic abuse. The profile is expected to be ready in April 2014 and will include the identification of serial perpetrators, serial victims, location hotspots, and the mapping of demand and services provided by the police and partner agencies. The proposal is for this to lead to a partnership prevention and enforcement strategy to tackle domestic abuse in a more co-ordinated approach. This will help the force have a clearer picture of domestic abuse and help to inform how they and their partners work together to tackle it.

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 provide domestic abuse training to front enquiry office staff.
2. The force should review the DASH risk assessment process to ensure it is effective.
3. The force should provide clarity to staff regarding force procedures for dealing with domestic abuse. Specifically to address a belief by staff that these procedures require them to always require one of the people involved to leave the household or premises regardless of the circumstances, often causing unnecessary conflict and putting staff at additional risk.
4. The force should review the roles and responsibilities of officers working in the DAIU to ensure they can meet current demand.
5. The force should work with partner agencies to ensure the caseload for the six MARACs is in line with national guidance.
6. The force should review the way the force contributes to DHRs to ensure the two PVP DCIs, who currently undertake the majority of work, are the most appropriate resource.

Glossary

Bail conditions

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

Body worn camera

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

CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse)

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

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

CCTV

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

Clare's Law

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

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

Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

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

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

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

Coercive control

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

Control room

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

Counter-allegation

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

Crime Scene Investigator

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

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

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

Domestic Homicide Review

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

Domestic Violence Prevention Notices (DVPN)

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

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

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

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

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

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

Frontline

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

Golden hour

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

Harassment

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

House-to- house

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

High risk

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

IDVA – independent domestic violence adviser

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

Incident

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

Intimate Partner Violence

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

MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

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

MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

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

Medium risk

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

National Domestic Abuse helpline

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

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

Partnership

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

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)

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

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

Positive action

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

Problem-solving

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

Refuge

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

Risk assessment

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

Safeguarding

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

Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

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

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

Standard Risk

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

Victim Personal Statement

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

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

Vulnerable

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

What Works Centre for Crime Reduction

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

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