



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest

# South Wales Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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## Introduction

The extent and nature of domestic abuse remains shocking. A core part of the policing mission is to prevent crime and disorder. Domestic abuse causes both serious harm and constitutes a considerable proportion of overall crime. It costs society an estimated £15.7 billion a year.<sup>1</sup> 77 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2012/13.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, one in four young people aged 10 to 24 reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood.<sup>3</sup> Forces told us that crime relating to domestic abuse constitutes some 8 percent of all recorded crime in their area, and one third of their recorded assaults with injury. On average the police receive an emergency call relating to domestic abuse every 30 seconds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013). *Focus on violent crime and sexual offences 2012/13 – Chapter 4: Intimate Personal Violence and Partner Abuse*. Retrieved from: [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_352362.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We inspected all police forces in England and Wales, interviewing senior and operational leads in forces, holding focus groups with frontline staff and partners, and carrying out visits to police stations (which were unannounced) to 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 South Wales 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 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 South Wales<sup>7</sup>

### Calls for assistance



In South Wales, domestic abuse accounts for 6% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls 24% were from repeat victims.

### Crime

# 8%

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

### Assault with intent

# 25%

South Wales recorded 971 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 246 were domestic abuse related. This is 25% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

### Assault with injury

# 36%

The force also recorded 7,715 assaults with injury, of these 2,748 were domestic abuse related. This is 36% 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 on forces' definition of calls for assistance, 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

# 61%

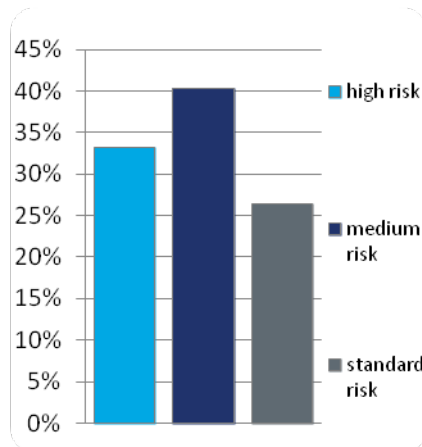
The force recorded 1,271 harassment offences, of these 781 were domestic abuse related. This is 61% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 11%

The force also recorded 1,264 sexual offences, of these 139 were domestic abuse related. This is 11% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



On the 31st Aug 2013 South Wales had 557 active Domestic Abuse cases, 33% were high risk, 40% were medium risk, and 26% were standard risk.

## Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 96 arrests in South Wales. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90 for the 12 months to the end of August 2013.

## Outcomes



South Wales recorded 6,370 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 47% resulted in a charge, 7% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

HMIC found that there are good services for tackling domestic abuse and keeping victims safe in South Wales, with some areas for improvement. Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the police and this is understood by staff at all levels. The force has continued to invest in teams of specialist domestic abuse staff and there is a well-developed and effective response to the very highest risk victims of domestic abuse.

It is less clear that victims assessed as facing lower risk are getting as good a service. The heavy workload of the specialist staff, together with the very complex partnerships across the seven different local authorities in the force area, presents some significant challenges to providing a consistent service to victims.

### Identifying victims

HMIC found that the force has good systems within its Public Service Centre (PSC), where most domestic abuse incidents are received, to identify domestic abuse incidents and those victims who have previously reported domestic abuse. Staff are competent and trained to question callers to understand the likely risk to the victim or anyone else who may be present. They can access the force intelligence systems to provide as full a picture as possible to send the right level of police response and prepare the attending officer for the situation they are likely to find themselves managing.

Domestic abuse is a priority for the force and there is a policy of taking positive action to safeguard the victim at every stage in the police response including dealing with the initial call. The police attend all reported incidents of domestic abuse and the PSC operators usually send a uniformed officer immediately as an emergency, or within an hour, dependent on the circumstances reported.

There is good management and supervision in the PSC. It has a dedicated supervisor who conducts regular reviews and gives direct feedback to the call taker.

### Keeping victims safe

Tackling domestic abuse is clearly a priority for the force. Officers who attend domestic abuse incidents understand the importance of their role in safeguarding the victim and take positive action to minimise the risks. The force has introduced a 'ten point plan' which guides officers through the steps they should take when dealing with a domestic abuse incident.



HMIC found that there are some areas for improvement in the way that risk to victims is currently managed. Although in most cases a formal risk assessment is undertaken, the officer at the scene who carries out the risk assessment does not decide on the risk grading, this is done some time later by a specialist risk assessor after a form is submitted by the public protection department to the domestic abuse team. This delay means that although officers use professional judgement and put in place immediate safeguarding measures, the force cannot be confident that victims are consistently getting the initial response from the police that is proportionate to the risk they face.

In addition, there is insufficient capacity in the specialist teams to deal with all domestic abuse incidents, particularly at weekends, when the risk assessing role is covered by other specialist officers, adding to the delay.

## **Management of risk**

All domestic abuse incidents are reviewed and risk assessed by specialist police officers in the domestic abuse teams. On-going support and safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse is provided through a combination of specialist police officers, local police officers and partners according to the risk they face. The victims facing the highest risk are receiving a comprehensive service. It is less clear whether those at lower risk are getting as good a proportionate service. There are often a number of different police officers and other agencies making contact with the victim throughout the investigation, which sometimes confuses the victims, as they are not clear who to contact to respond to their needs.

The force works well with partner agencies to provide support to victims both in the criminal justice system and outside it. However, HMIC is concerned that specialist police capacity is stretched. Their heavy workloads, coupled with working across the seven local authority areas of South Wales, presents some significant challenges to the police in delivering a consistent service to victims across the force area.

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

The force has introduced some effective IT solutions to provide the intelligence to be more proactive in dealing with serial perpetrators and repeat victims of domestic abuse. Some of the new systems are in their infancy but have the potential to provide up-to-date information to tackle domestic abuse more effectively.

Notification of the release of a perpetrator from prison or court should be provided to the victim at the earliest opportunity. The force identified that this was not happening and has improved its internal processes so that more

victims are informed, but occasionally victims are not informed in time and their safety is not reviewed.

The force has developed good systems to ensure that any lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews or other serious case reviews are fed systematically back into the organisation, and where possible shared with partner organisations in order to improve processes.

## Findings

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

HMIC found that the force has good systems within its Public Service Centre (PSC), where most domestic abuse incidents are received, to identify domestic abuse incidents and those victims who have previously reported domestic abuse. Staff are competent and trained to question callers to understand the likely risk to the victim or anyone else who may be present. They can access the force intelligence systems to provide as full a picture as possible to send the right level of police response and prepare the attending officer for the situation they are likely to find themselves managing.

Domestic abuse is a priority for the force and there is a policy of taking positive action to safeguard the victim at every stage in the police response including dealing with the initial call. The police attend all reported incidents of domestic abuse and the PSC operators usually send a uniformed officer immediately as an emergency, or within an hour, dependent on the circumstances reported.

There is good management and supervision in the PSC. It has a dedicated supervisor who conducts regular reviews and gives direct feedback to the call taker.

The majority of domestic abuse incidents are received by the police via calls to the force's public service centre (PSC). The operators that work in the PSC have distinct roles as either 'call takers' or 'call dispatchers'. The call taker speaks directly to the caller and is responsible for gaining as much information as possible from the caller, together with any background information they can get from the police intelligence systems on any previous history of involvement with the victim or the offender. Their role is to get as full a picture as possible of the nature of the incident and the risk posed to the victim and their family. The call dispatcher working alongside them is in direct communication with the police officers on the ground and is able to risk assess the situation the call taker is discovering and decide what level of police response is required, locate the nearest available officers and dispatch them to the scene, relaying as much information as necessary to give the police officers a full picture of the incident before they arrive.

There has been considerable investment in the training of staff who work in the PSC, with the focus on understanding the likely threat, harm and risk to a caller and the identification of any vulnerability they may have. PSC staff have received training covering the many facets of domestic abuse, including violence, stalking, harassment and coercive control. Once the call taker has

identified that the call is domestic abuse related, a set of questions appears on their computer monitor to assist them. However, some prefer to have a free flowing conversation to help the rapport with the caller and not be restricted by the order of the questions. Staff were found to be confident and empathetic when dealing with callers who were experiencing domestic abuse.

The call takers identify any immediate risk to the caller, or anyone else involved and, importantly, finds out where the perpetrator is. This is the start of the risk assessment and helps to identify what response they should provide. All domestic abuse incidents are classified as either grade 1, requiring an immediate response or grade 2 which means officers must attend within one hour. Once a domestic abuse incident has been created the force has a policy that officers will always attend even if the caller states police attendance is no longer required.

The force has a domestic abuse positive action policy which places obligations on staff to take positive action to safeguard the victim at every stage of the police response, including on the staff taking the initial call. The call is logged and sent to dispatchers via the PSC electronic system called NSPIS, while the call is still in progress. All available information on NSPIS is relayed quickly to the attending officers. This includes intelligence and information regarding victims, perpetrators and the location the call is made from. NSPIS identifies the history of all previous incidents within 100 metres of an address; this alerts the call taker to victims who have previously reported domestic abuse from that location. NSPIS has an interface with the force crime and intelligence management system (Niche). On the first occasion a victim reports a domestic abuse incident a unique domestic abuse record is created on the Niche system. This record can be accessed by all staff and is a continual log of events relating to the domestic abuse history of that victim. This record can be used to inform staff of previous incidents and help them better understand the risk posed to parties at the scene. If the incident develops in severity a supervisor can also assist with intelligence development and task an intelligence officer to do further research.

This activity is taking place while the call takers give safety advice and provide reassurance that help is on its way and the call dispatchers identify the most appropriate officers to respond to the call. The attending officers are equipped with the information that informs them of the likely risk of harm to the caller and to themselves.

There are also routine checks on the force systems to see which domestic abuse perpetrators are holders of a firearms licence. The assistant chief constable can authorise the removal of the licence if they are concerned about

the safety of potential victims and there have been occasions where this has taken place.

There is good management and supervision in the PSC. It has a dedicated supervisor who conducts regular reviews and gives direct feedback to the call taker. Further training is progressed if required. This quality assurance supervisor reports to the chief inspector with what is called a public safety welfare (PSW) check. This process is used to continually improve the service in the PSC.

Domestic abuse repeat victimisation is defined by the force as two occurrences in 12 months but all staff understand that any case where the victim has previously reported domestic abuse to the police will influence the risk assessment.

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

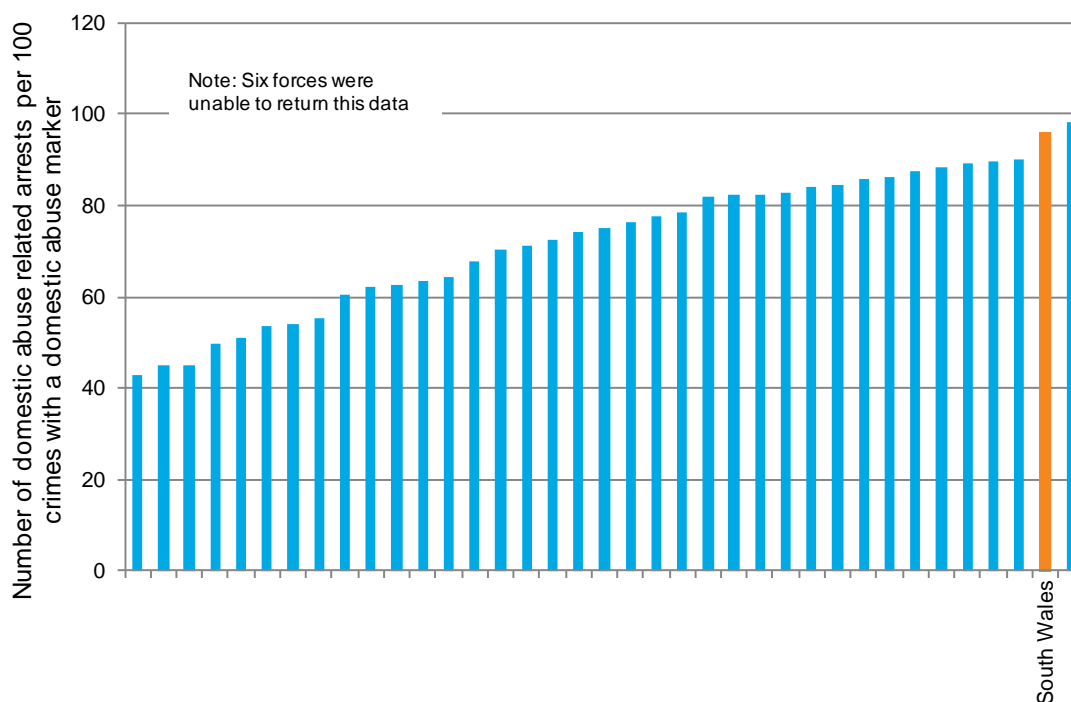
Tackling domestic abuse is clearly a priority for the force. Officers who attend domestic abuse incidents understand the importance of their role in safeguarding the victim and take positive action to minimise the risks. The force has introduced a 'ten point plan' which guides officers through the steps they should take when dealing with a domestic abuse incident.

HMIC found that there are some areas for improvement in the way that risk to victims is currently managed. Although in most cases a formal risk assessment is undertaken, the officer at the scene who carries out the risk assessment does not decide on the risk grading, this is done some time later by a specialist risk assessor after a form is submitted by the public protection department to the domestic abuse team. This delay means that although officers use professional judgement and put in place immediate safeguarding measures, the force cannot be confident that victims are consistently getting the initial response from the police that is proportionate to the risk they face.

In addition, there is insufficient capacity in the specialist teams to deal with all domestic abuse incidents, particularly at weekends, when the risk assessing role is covered by other specialist officers, adding to the delay.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 96 arrests in South Wales. For most forces this 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<sup>8</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

HMIC also found inconsistencies with the management of incidents; different geographical areas operating slightly differently, and cases being allocated to different investigation teams according to the severity of the crime rather than to degree of risk to the victim. This means that victims may not always get a consistent quality of service.

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the force. It is identified as an explicit priority in the PCC’s police and crime reduction plan and the force delivery plans detail how the priorities will be delivered in South Wales. Each head of department is held to account on a monthly basis to review the progress for their area of business. There is a good understanding among staff of the importance of their role and that domestic abuse is a priority.

The force public protection department (PPD) is led by a detective superintendent based at the force headquarters. The team has professional

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

leads for protecting vulnerable people and a champion for tackling domestic abuse whose role is dedicated to improving the police response to victims of domestic abuse.

The force has divided the geographic policing area into four localities called basic command units (BCUs). Each BCU is led by a commander who is responsible for the local policing in that area. They manage the response and neighbourhood officers and the specialist teams who all have a role in safeguarding victims of domestic abuse and in investigating the crimes against them.

The force cannot tackle domestic abuse effectively alone and the senior leaders work closely with partner agencies to develop strategies to keep victims of domestic abuse safe and to prevent it taking place. The force has already identified where improvements could be made with the introduction of a wider overarching domestic abuse forum with participation at a senior level from across all partner agencies.

HMIC found that the majority of staff, regardless of role, have received some training to help them understand domestic abuse, harassment and stalking. However, we found that overall training is inconsistent for officers and staff even though they work in similar roles. Specialist domestic abuse and neighbourhood officers have received different training dependent on the BCU they work in.

The majority of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police are attended by uniformed 'response' officers based within each BCU in the first instance. The response officers cover a 24/7 shift pattern and respond to calls that require immediate service from the police. The force has developed a 'ten point plan' which officers are expected to follow when responding to reports of domestic abuse.

The plan covers the initial action the attending officer should take and provides guidance on how to maximise the evidential opportunities that could help build a case to take the perpetrator to court. The plan explains how to safeguard the victim and anyone else who may be at risk. Once again there is an expectation that positive action must be taken and this would include arresting the perpetrator where the offence permits it.

HMIC found that the guidance in the ten point plan is focused on dealing with the offence and the offender. It lacks a sufficiently strong focus on the victim's needs. For example, one of the points advises officers not to provide opportunities for the victim to withdraw their complaint. While this has been included with good intent, it is not for the police to decide. It is not supporting the victims' needs and could add to the anxiety of their experience.



HMIC found that there are some weaknesses in the application of the risk assessment process at the initial attendance. Attending officers are required to carry out an assessment of the risk that the abuser poses to the victim in order that appropriate action can be taken to protect the victim and deal with the offender. The force uses the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool to aid officers in managing risk. Officers are also required to ensure that any children (or vulnerable adults) at an incident are safe and well and then refer their details to the local authority social services in order that they can take whatever safeguarding action is appropriate in respect of those present. Attending officers should physically check that children are safe and well. If the adult states the child is sleeping the officers will make a professional judgement whether to wake them, to assess their emotional state. However, not all attending officers are checking the children, which could mean that important information is not being collected which would help to protect them.

The officers complete the DASH risk assessment questions after a discussion with the victim. We found that some officers complete the assessment in the presence of the victim; others complete it when they return to the station based on the information obtained from the victim at the scene. This does increase the margin of error in risk grading if the answers to the questions are not recorded accurately. Officers feel there is a balance to be met when building a rapport with the victim and not making them feel they are the subject of a 'tick box' exercise.

The officer is not required to assign a risk rating to the victim even after completing the assessment; this is done by a specialist officer when the risk assessment has been submitted to the domestic abuse team. It is their responsibility to apply a risk grade of high, medium or standard when they have reviewed the risk assessment and any other information available to them. There can be a delay of some days before this is completed. This means that any immediate safeguarding actions are taken without a formal grading of risk. In practice officers do exercise professional judgement but it is anomalous that they are not required to grade the risk at this stage to support and guide their actions. Any supervision or quality assessment of the immediate actions taken will be limited by the fact that the supervisor will not have access to the risk rating and the force therefore cannot be certain that all victims are receiving an initial response that is proportionate to their risk.

The force has a good process to quality assure the initial response to domestic abuse incidents. All completed risk assessments are required to be checked and authorised by a supervisor before being submitted. Any decision by an officer attending a domestic abuse incident not to complete a risk assessment form must also be documented and authorised by a supervisor. The public

protection department also dip sample the completed forms to assess compliance and quality across the force.

Once the officer has completed commenced the initial investigation and taken any immediate action to safeguard the victim, they complete the documentation of the risk assessment and any child referrals and submit them to the specialist domestic abuse team within their BCU. Each domestic abuse team includes recently created posts of dedicated risk assessors. The risk assessors review each incident and any other relevant information the police may hold and assign the risk grading. They can also make telephone contact with the victim and identify and suggest further safety measures for local police teams to implement. They will make the referral to children's social services where children were present. A professional discussion about the children will take place where there are concerns that the children may be at risk of harm.

However, there are not enough risk assessors to deal with the volume of domestic abuse incidents. They do not work over the weekend and providing cover at this time is a challenge for the teams. It is sometimes provided by the other specialist domestic abuse staff but this can have an impact on their capacity to support high and medium risk victims effectively. As a result the assessment can be delayed until the following Monday. This could result in the best resource not being allocated in a timely way to support the victim.

HMIC found inconsistencies in the management of incidents and risk across the force. We found different levels of service to victims in different BCU areas. For example, in some BCUs there were crime prevention community support officers who issued personal alarms to every high risk victim who did not reside with the perpetrator, but in other areas they were only available from the specialist domestic abuse staff and a different criteria and type of alarm was used. This means that some high risk victims may not be receiving as good a service depending where they live in the force area.

The management oversight of domestic abuse incidents also differs across the force as it can depend on the hand over from the previous supervisor and the application of their individual judgment. Supervisors review all officers' completed risk assessment forms prior to submission and check the immediate action taken by officers. There is considerable focus on directing activity to arrest a perpetrator if they are still at large. After an arrest has been made the case is usually dealt with in the BCU investigation hubs. The staff have varied experience and skills. The case is usually allocated according to the seriousness of the crime rather than the risk to the victim. A detective is likely to deal with a perpetrator alleged to have committed a serious assault. The cases are not allocated based on threat and risk. This means that a case where a minor crime is committed but the risk to a victim is high may be dealt with by a

less experienced officer who may not have the skills or confidence to deal with a manipulative perpetrator or a vulnerable victim.

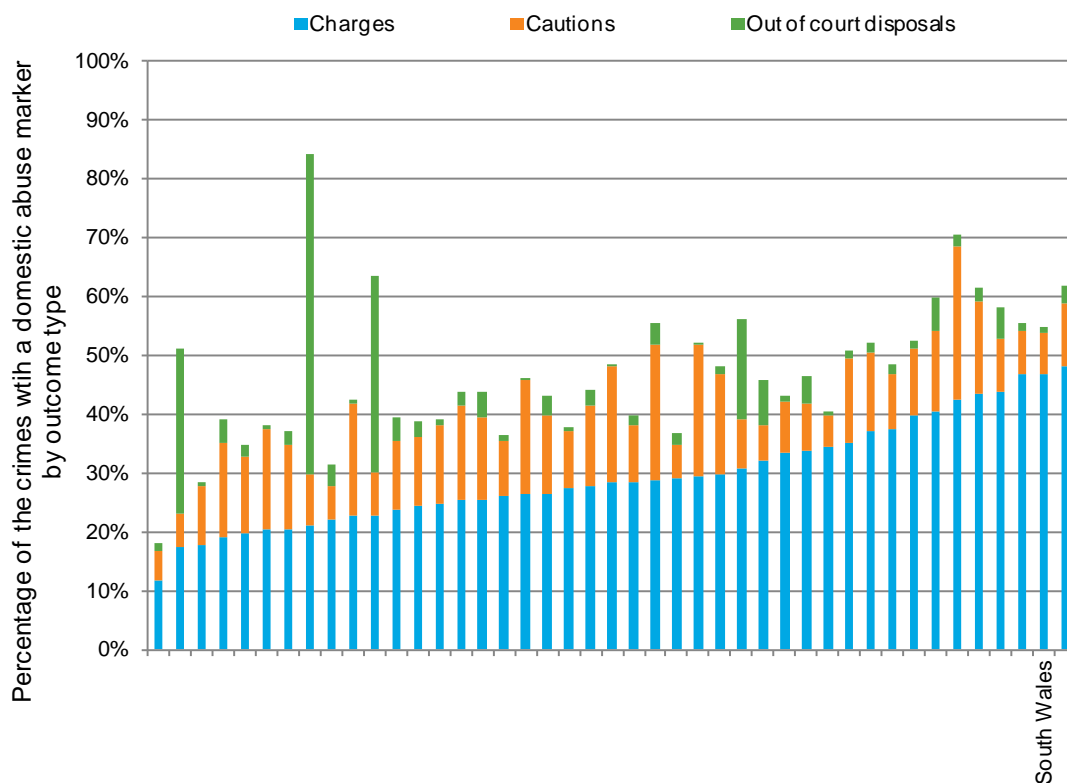
## **How are victims of domestic abuse made safer as a result of the police response and subsequent action?**

All domestic abuse incidents are reviewed and risk assessed by specialist police officers in the domestic abuse teams. On-going support and safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse is provided through a combination of specialist police officers, local police officers and partners according to the risk they face. The victims facing the highest risk are receiving a comprehensive service. It is less clear whether those at lower risk are getting as good a proportionate service. There are often a number of different police officers and other agencies making contact with the victim throughout the investigation, which sometimes confuses the victims, as they are not clear who to contact to respond to their needs.

The force works well with partner agencies to provide support to victims both in the criminal justice system and outside it. However, HMIC is concerned that specialist police capacity is stretched. Their heavy workloads, coupled with working across the seven local authority areas of South Wales, presents some significant challenges to the police in delivering a consistent service to victims across the force area.

South Wales recorded 6,370 domestic abuse flagged crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 47 percent resulted in a charge, seven percent a caution and, one percent had an out of court disposal.

**Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>9</sup>**

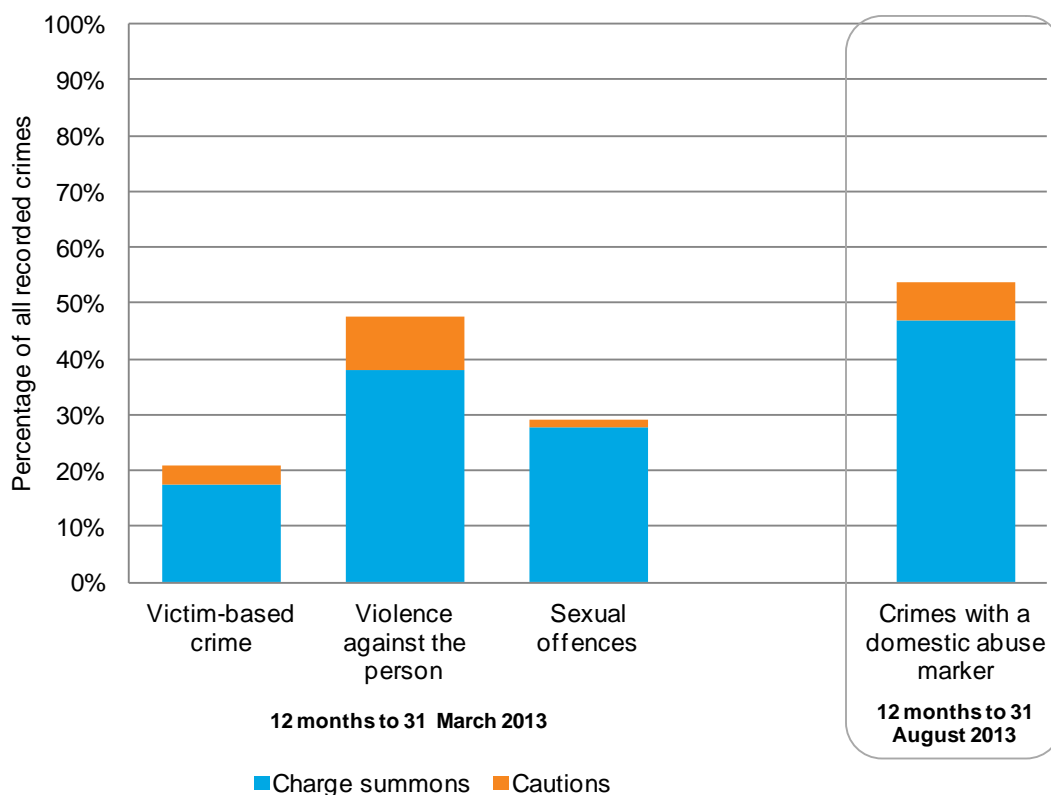


Source: HMIC data collection.

South Wales Police charge 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.

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



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

Ongoing support for victims of domestic abuse is provided through a combination of the local neighbourhood police officers, police specialist domestic abuse teams and local partners. Safeguarding activity is provided according to the victim’s need, which is determined by the risk grading from the DASH risk assessment. Every risk assessment is reviewed by the specialist risk assessors or an officer working in the public protection team.

Following the initial visit from a response officer, all domestic abuse incidents are reviewed and risk assessed by specialists in the domestic abuse team. The investigation of any crime is then passed to a different officer depending on the seriousness of the crime. Safeguarding activity is driven by the risk faced by the

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

victim and their need for support. High and medium risk victims receive support from specialist officers, who may also bring in neighbourhood police teams to provide support and reassurance to victims. High risk victims will also be offered the support of an independent domestic violence adviser. Standard risk victims are managed by the local policing teams. Sometimes the number of officers involved with the victim contact can be confusing for the victim.

The force has introduced a unique electronic log which holds information relating to each victim of domestic abuse and records information chronologically relating to that and previous domestic abuse incidents. This highlights relevant information at a glance to help officers make effective assessments and provide useful material about the previous offending behaviour when dealing with a perpetrator.

The force is consistent in the information it shares with partners to protect children. The details of all incidents are shared with the health service where there are children under five years of age or if the victim is pregnant. Children's services receive referrals where children are involved. The Victim Support Service is provided with details of domestic abuse victims and will make contact with the victim unless the victim does not want them informed.

The force works closely with other agencies to help find solutions to reduce the risk of harm to domestic abuse victims. HMIC spoke to representatives from some of these agencies. They said that they have strong links with the police and value their service.

The force covers the seven local authority areas in South Wales; this leads to a complex array of partnerships across the area. Working effectively in all seven areas and achieving a consistent level of service to victims across the region presents a challenge for the police. The assistant chief constable chairs the multi-agency crime and safeguarding board which is a force-wide group. At a local authority level, the local children's safeguarding boards and strategic domestic abuse meetings are attended by the partnership superintendents from the relevant BCU. The force recognises that working with so many different local authorities can mean the provision of services available to victims of domestic abuse is not consistent. For example, there are different levels of provision of independent domestic violence advisers (IDVA) service across the seven local authority areas. IDVAs provide an invaluable support role to high risk victims of domestic abuse and are able to support them with a range of services including safeguarding and helping them through the court process. However the level of provision is dependent upon local funding sources rather than the demand in each area. To encourage consistent police practices the head of public protection regularly meets with the partnership superintendents to agree a corporate approach. These meetings are replicated with the middle

managers on the BCUs who also attend partnership meetings at their respective levels.

The IDVAs attend the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) where representatives from all the partner agencies that can provide support for victims of domestic abuse, meet and work together, to review high risk cases, share information and co-ordinate activity to reduce the risk of harm to individual victims. There is one MARAC for each local authority area and they are held on a fortnightly basis and chaired by the detective inspectors from the public protection teams in each of the BCUs. Every victim that has been assessed as high risk should be referred to a MARAC. Victims can be referred by any agency and there are a high number of referrals from other agencies. This is encouraging, indicating that partners are engaging well in the process.

HMIC found inconsistencies in the way MARACs are managed in each of the BCUs. This is due to the capacity to deal with the large volume of referrals and in some areas decisions are taken to exclude some high risk cases from the conference. In some areas the decisions to exclude are made jointly with partner agencies, but in others, the police and an IDVA will make the decision. Some of the excluded cases are listed for mention in the MARAC, so that at least partners are made aware of the incident but others are not. The different processes have not been formally agreed by the force or at any strategic partnership forum. The rationale is that reducing the number of cases heard at each meeting ensures a manageable agenda and enables the highest risk case to receive proper discussion. This type of 'gatekeeping' is not seen as good practice nationally. It means that some high risk victims are at risk of being denied the level of service and joined-up support that they need to ensure their safety.

There is a good relationship between the police and criminal justice partners. Regular meetings are held to discuss the performance of investigations considered and taken to court. Ways of improving the services are discussed between the police and crown prosecution service (CPS), agreed and progressed.

Domestic abuse victims often find it very difficult to go to court and give evidence against their abuser, even with the support of an IDVA and witness care services. Many prosecutions fail because the victim is unable to continue with the process. Where victims are required to provide evidence at court the force has a policy which automatically categorises them as vulnerable or intimidated witnesses which gives them access to additional support and services. They can be offered the use of screens in court or a live-link to court to prevent them having to face the perpetrator. Where it is possible and appropriate to achieve a prosecution based on police and other evidence,

without the need for the victim to provide a statement, the police and CPS are increasingly using this route.

The force does consider cases of domestic abuse differently to other crimes. It does not use restorative justice as an option for domestic abuse related crimes. Any decision to use a caution rather than a criminal charge would only be taken after discussion with CPS where there is no possibility of charging the offender so that they go to court.

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

The force has introduced some effective IT solutions to provide the intelligence to be more proactive in dealing with serial perpetrators and repeat victims of domestic abuse. Some of the new systems are in their infancy but have the potential to provide up-to-date information to tackle domestic abuse more effectively.

Notification of the release of a perpetrator from prison or court should be provided to the victim at the earliest opportunity. The force identified that this was not happening and has improved its internal processes so that more victims are informed, but occasionally victims are not informed in time and their safety is not reviewed.

The force has developed good systems to ensure that any lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews or other serious case reviews are fed systematically back into the organisation, and where possible shared with partner organisations in order to improve processes.

The force has actively pursued solutions to improve their service and make victims of domestic abuse safer. The force PPU has identified gaps in systems and with the support of senior managers new processes are being implemented.

Domestic abuse perpetrators can be held in prison either serving their sentence after a court conviction or on remand awaiting a court hearing. When the perpetrator is released from prison it is important that the victim is notified and their safety reviewed. There is a joint CPS and police witness care unit who notify victims of changes in bail. A problem was identified of victims not being informed when the situation had changed outside normal office hours. In response, the force has recently improved its system so that the investigative hubs and specialist domestic abuse staff on the BCUs are notified during times that the witness care unit is not available. They are responsible for keeping the victim informed of the changes and reviewing any safety plan if required. The



information is recorded on the police information system and accessible by all officers and staff.

Where releases from prison are planned they are discussed at the force daily tasking meetings, this includes details of the perpetrator's residence and if they are coming out for weekend release. In these circumstances safety plans can be reviewed, though this is not mandatory.

An electronic programme that produces a daily 'repeat callers of domestic abuse' report has been introduced. There is a facility to extract the details of domestic abuse incidents from the previous 24 hours and add them to the database which holds details of callers from all domestic abuse incidents. This can display the data geographically divided by BCUs and shows how many times a victim has been linked to a domestic abuse incident in the past week, month, three months and one year. This intelligence can be accessed by officers and will identify the victims that call the police the most and whether there is an escalation in the abuse. This information can be used to identify whether some victims are more vulnerable and additional support can be provided.

On a monthly basis the top ten serial perpetrators of domestic abuse, and the incidents they have been involved in, are placed on the BCU and PPU intranet sites. Local officers can access this information which will help them understand which families are at greatest risk of domestic abuse. The force is developing more sophisticated use of the data available to reduce the likelihood of harm to victims. These processes are in the early stages of implementation and it is too early to assess how far this monitoring will improve the outcomes for victims.

The force monitors the trends of all reported crimes which include domestic abuse and how many of those crimes are successfully investigated by collecting enough evidence to bring the perpetrator to justice. The performance framework currently in place concentrates on domestic violence along with other crimes of violence. There is limited performance management focus on those wider aspects of domestic abuse which do not result in physical violence, such as stalking, emotional abuse and coercive control.

The force has its own major crime review department. Between 2009 and 2013 they have been involved in a total of 11 domestic homicide reviews. There are some good processes in place to ensure that any lessons learned from these reviews are fed quickly back into changed procedures. The force has undertaken a number of training seminars delivering the learning from these reviews to community safety partnership leads. They deliver bespoke training to partners new in post and chairs of domestic homicide reviews. The PPU Detective Chief Inspector sits on all serious case reviews and domestic

homicide reviews and brings the learning from these into a detailed action plan which is monitored by the force head of specialist crime.

HMIC found that the force has good systems within its Public Service Centre (PSC), where most domestic abuse incidents are received, to identify domestic abuse incidents and those victims who have previously reported domestic abuse. Staff are competent and trained to question callers to understand the likely risk to the victim or anyone else who may be present. They can access the force intelligence systems to provide as full a picture as possible to send the right level of police response and prepare the attending officer for the situation they are likely to find themselves managing.

Domestic abuse is a priority for the force and there is a policy of taking positive action to safeguard the victim at every stage in the police response, including dealing with the initial call. The police attend all reported incidents of domestic abuse and the PSC operators usually send a uniformed officer immediately as an emergency or within an hour, dependent on the circumstances reported.

There is good management and supervision in the PSC, they have a dedicated supervisor who conducts regular reviews and gives direct feedback to the call taker.

Tackling domestic abuse is clearly a priority for the force. Officers who attend domestic abuse incidents understand the importance of their role in safeguarding the victim and take positive action to minimise the risks. The force has introduced a 'ten point plan' which guides officers through the steps they should take when dealing with a domestic abuse incident.

HMIC found that there are some areas for improvement in the way that risk to victims is currently managed. Although in most cases a formal risk assessment is undertaken, the officer at the scene who carries out the risk assessment does not decide on the risk grading, this is done some time later by a specialist risk assessor after the incident file is submitted to the domestic abuse team. This delay means that although officers use professional judgement and put in place immediate safeguarding measures, the force cannot be confident that victims are consistently getting the initial response from the police that is proportionate to the risk they face.

In addition there is insufficient capacity in the specialist teams to deal with all domestic abuse incidents, particularly at weekends, when the risk assessing role is covered by other specialist officers which is adding to the delay in deciding the risk grading.

HMIC also found inconsistencies with the management of incidents; different geographical areas operating slightly differently, with cases being allocated to

different investigation teams according to the severity of the crime rather than to degree of risk to the victim. This means that victims may not always get a consistent quality of service.

All domestic abuse incidents are reviewed and risk assessed by specialist police officers in the domestic abuse teams. Ongoing support and safeguarding for victims of domestic abuse is provided through a combination of specialist police officers, local police officers and partners according to the risk they face. The victims facing the highest risk are receiving a comprehensive service. It is less clear whether those at lower risk are getting as good a service. There are often a number of different police officers and other agencies making contact with the victim throughout the investigation, which sometimes confuses the victims as they are not clear who to contact to respond to their needs.

The force works well with partner agencies to provide support to victims both in the criminal justice system and outside of it. However, HMIC is concerned that specialist police capacity is stretched and the heavy workloads, coupled with working across seven local authority areas of South Wales, presents some significant challenges to the police in delivering a consistent service to victims across the force area.

The force has introduced some effective IT solutions to provide the intelligence to be more proactive in dealing with serial perpetrators and repeat victims of domestic abuse. Some of the new systems are in their infancy but have the potential to provide up to date information to tackle domestic abuse more effectively.

Notification of the release of a perpetrator from prison or court should be provided to the victim at the earliest opportunity. The force identified that this was not happening and has improved its internal processes so that more victims are informed, but occasionally victims are not informed in time and their safety is not reviewed.

The force has developed good systems to ensure that any lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews or other serious case reviews are systematically fed back in to the organisation, and where possible shared with partner organisations in order to improve processes.

## 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 the national report.

1. The force to undertake a training needs analysis process to review the training already received by staff and establish the domestic abuse training required relevant to role.
2. The force to change the instruction of point ten in the force ten point plan and replace with guidance that is more supportive for those victims who may not wish to continue with the criminal prosecution.
3. The force to mandate officers to check physically on the welfare of children present in households where domestic abuse is reported and review their compliance.
4. The force to internally market the awareness of the roles and duties of the specialist domestic abuse staff and risk assessors.
5. The force to deploy domestic abuse risk assessors and specialist domestic abuse staff, equitably, to match demand.
6. The force to introduce a maximum time period within which the victim risk grading should be defined and recorded.
7. The force to conduct a review of the force-wide alarm provision and implement a policy to support the consistent provision of alarms to victims.
8. The force to review the MARAC capacity across the force area and agree a process with partners that does not disadvantage victims of domestic abuse.
9. The force to review the MARAC support with partners across the force area and provide equitable support to provide better outcomes for victims.

# Glossary

## **Bail conditions**

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

## **Body worn camera**

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

## **CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse)**

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

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

## **CCTV**

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

## **Clare's Law**

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

brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

### **Code of Practice for Victims of Crime**

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

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

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

### **Coercive control**

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

### **Control room**

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

## **Counter-allegation**

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

## **Crime Scene Investigator**

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

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

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

## **Domestic Homicide Review**

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

## **Domestic Violence Prevention Notices (DVPN)**

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

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

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

- the individual has been violent towards, or

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

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

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

### **Frontline**

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

### **Golden hour**

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

### **Harassment**

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

### **House-to- house**

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



## **High risk**

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

## **IDVA – independent domestic violence adviser**

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

## **Incident**

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

## **Intimate Partner Violence**

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

## **MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)**

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

## **MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub**

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

## **Medium risk**

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

## **National Domestic Abuse helpline**

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

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

## **Partnership**

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

## **Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)**

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

[www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions)

### **Positive action**

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

### **Problem-solving**

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

### **Refuge**

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

### **Risk assessment**

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

## **Safeguarding**

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

## **Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)**

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

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

## **Standard Risk**

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

## **Victim Personal Statement**

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

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

## **Vulnerable**

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

## **What Works Centre for Crime Reduction**

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

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