



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

South Yorkshire 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.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

⁵ 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 Yorkshire 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.⁶ 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 South Yorkshire⁷

Calls for assistance



In South Yorkshire, domestic abuse accounts for 5% of calls to the police for assistance. The force was unable to provide data on the number of these calls that were from repeat victims.

Crime

6%

Domestic abuse accounts for 6% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

18%

South Yorkshire recorded 539 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 97 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

34%

The force also recorded 6,925 assaults with injury, of these 2,323 were domestic abuse related. This is 34% 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.

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

Harassment

73%

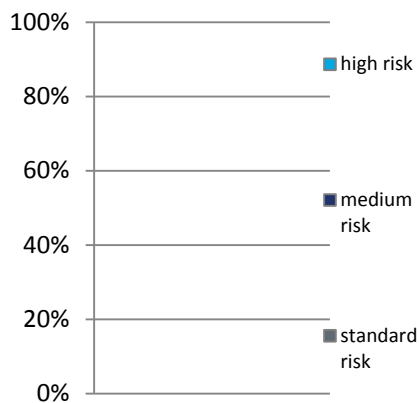
The force recorded 804 harassment offences, of these 588 were domestic abuse related. This is 73% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

11%

The force also recorded 1,026 sexual offences, of these 112 were domestic abuse related. This is 11% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



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

Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 74 arrests in South Yorkshire. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Outcomes



South Yorkshire recorded 5,278 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 34% resulted in a charge, 5% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

HMIC found that, although tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and South Yorkshire Police, and this is recognised by staff at all levels, there are risks that some victims of domestic abuse may not be getting the response or the quality of service they need. The force responds well to the victims facing the highest risks.

However, for those assessed as being at less risk, the service is not as good. There are serious weaknesses in the initial response and risk assessment of all domestic abuse victims, which the force has recognised. Plans are in place to introduce an improved approach. Partnership working is good, but there are inconsistencies in the service victims get across the force area, depending on the district in which they live.

Identifying victims

Call handlers in the force communication centre deal with the majority of requests for police help in dealing with domestic abuse. They are trained to use their professional judgement in risk assessing every incident and deciding on the appropriate police response. In addition to questioning the caller, they check the police databases for any previous history of police involvement in order to get as full a picture as possible in order to decide what the level of response needs to be. Most domestic abuse incidents will be graded as immediate or priority, however HMIC found that the force is not making best use of the technology it has to locate the nearest officer, which means the force is not making the most efficient use of its resources and more importantly, that victims may not get as quick a response as they otherwise might.

Keeping victims safe

Tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority for the PCC and the force, in spite of budget cuts elsewhere, is continuing to invest in specialist officers to deal with domestic abuse. However, HMIC found some key weaknesses in the response and initial action being taken to safeguard victims. Although the attending officer completes a form of risk assessment, they are not themselves required to evaluate the risk facing the victim. They merely collect the information and pass it to a specialist domestic abuse officer who subsequently carries out a risk assessment. This means that at the stage of this initial response the officer is required to take immediate action to safeguard the victim in the absence of a risk assessment. Likewise, supervisors are expected to review the action without any understanding of the risk level and therefore how appropriate the actions taken are. Therefore, the force cannot be confident that all victims are getting the consistent level of service they need at this critical stage.

The force is planning to change its approach to risk assessment and is adopting the use of the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool early in 2014. However, HMIC was concerned that there is no comprehensive training plan in place to ensure that officers are equipped to undertake the risk assessments when they are introduced.

Officers attending incidents of domestic abuse consider all the children in the relationship and their supervisors are involved in monitoring the actions taken to support the victim.

Management of risk

South Yorkshire Police provides specialist domestic abuse staff in each of its four policing districts. These staff risk assess all domestic abuse incidents that have occurred and develop safety plans for those with the highest risk. However, HMIC found that the service level is inconsistent across the force area, with some districts having no capacity over the weekend, this can mean an unacceptable delay in the risk assessment, safeguarding and partner referral of some victims. The force has recognised this weakness and is introducing a new approach to risk assessment in early 2014; the attending officer will carry out the risk assessment and a new central referral unit will process and reassess all domestic abuse incidents, seven days a week. Also we found that some specialist staff have received no training in risk assessment.

The specialist police staff work closely and constructively with the statutory and voluntary partner agencies that provide support services principally for victims but also in some cases perpetrators of domestic abuse. Regular multi-agency risk assessment conferences are held between police and partners where partners discuss high risk cases, share information and agree a co-ordinated response to safeguard victims. High risk victims receive a comprehensive service from the police and partners. It is less clear whether those assessed as medium and standard risk get a consistently good service.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

The force has comprehensive processes in place to manage the future risk of high risk victims but it is less clear whether those victims assessed as being at medium and standard risk are as systematically managed by the police. The public protection unit (PPU) specialist officers work closely with the independent domestic violence advisers IDVA service to manage the risks faced by high risk victims both where there are criminal proceedings and where there are none. The IDVA will continue to provide updates and contact with the victim while the perpetrator is imprisoned and will work with the PPUs to review the risk to the victim when the offender is being released. There has been limited work to date to manage serious domestic abuse perpetrators to prevent reoffending,

although there is a pilot project taking place in Rotherham, to manage offenders of domestic abuse. A police officer, funded by the PCC, will identify serious and serial perpetrators and then try to work to reduce their offending.

Repeat victims who stop calling the police about domestic abuse are not contacted to establish that they are safe or to understand why they have stopped calling.

The force currently monitors data on domestic abuse, this data is used to predict the police resources required to meet demand but we found limited evidence that this data is used to evaluate outcomes or to drive improvements in performance. The force, along with local partner agencies, participates in domestic homicide reviews, which produce actions in an effort to reduce the possibility of another serious incident, but it is unclear whether all the lessons learned from these reviews reach all operational staff.

Findings

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

Call handlers in the force communication centre deal with the majority of requests for police help in dealing with domestic abuse. They are trained to use their professional judgement in risk assessing every incident and deciding on the appropriate police response. In addition to questioning the caller, they check the police databases for any previous history of police involvement in order to get as full a picture as possible in order to decide what the level of response needs to be. Most domestic abuse incidents will be graded as immediate or priority, however HMIC found that the force is not making best use of the technology it has to locate the nearest officer, which means the force is not making the most efficient use of its resources and more importantly, that victims may not get as quick a response as they otherwise might.

Victims of domestic abuse are identified by South Yorkshire Police through calls to their police communications centre; attendance at stations; or by other agencies, such as health and children's services, at a fortnightly multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). The majority of incidents and crimes are reported through the force communication centre where call handlers assess the nature of the call and apply a generic risk assessment process to 'grade' the police response. Through appropriate questioning, call handlers need to gather as much relevant detail from the caller as possible to give them the fullest picture of the incident and the risks that the victim is facing. While staff are not provided with a script of questions, as in other forces, they do have access to comprehensive guidance notes, known as the 'Knowledge Bank' which gives specific advice on how to identify the different forms of domestic abuse and the action to be taken. Staff have been trained in using the national decision model⁸ which provides them with a means to establish the level of risk and harm and decide on the appropriate police response.

Call handlers also check whether there is any previous history of police involvement with the caller or at the address, by searching the force computer systems to gather information to help them in their initial assessment and also to relay to the attending officer, so that they arrive at the incident with as much background information as possible. They check the force intelligence system,

⁸ The National Decision Model is the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) decision-making tool, which has been adopted nationally for use by police forces. It provides a framework of steps to assist an officer in assessing a situation and deciding on appropriate action. Including gather information, assess risk, and identify options.

the police national computer, the force crime management system, and any warning flags that are placed on the force incident system, which can show that the caller has telephoned the force previously or been identified as vulnerable. All this information is then recorded on the incident system and sent to the attending officer's BlackBerry.

HMIC found that, although it is possible for the dispatchers in the communication centre to locate electronically the nearest available officer to the incident, using the technology built into all officers' radios and patrol cars; dispatch staff continued to ask patrols over the radio if anyone was available to attend a call. This can cause delay in sending a patrol and is an inefficient use of force resources. Most domestic abuse incidents were categorised as either immediate or priority calls which means an officer should arrive at the scene within 15 minutes or 60 minutes respectively. The classification initially decided by the call handler can only be downgraded by a despatcher if authorised by a supervisor. When an officer is being dispatched to a domestic abuse incident, they are more often than not provided with the information gathered by the call handler and dispatcher about previous calls or any other relevant information that would assist them on their arrival at the address.

When staff are first appointed to the force communication centre their initial training includes an input on domestic abuse. However, we found the level of training to be inconsistent, with many staff saying that they had not received any training to help them understand the wider aspects of domestic abuse that they might encounter including; stalking, harassment, coercive control and so-called honour-based violence. The only guidance available to staff that they were aware of, was contained in the Knowledge Bank. It is not clear if any of the training the staff receive is evaluated to ensure they have fully understood the issue to the extent required by the force.

The staff spoken to during the inspection did not believe that the force had defined a repeat victim, but most thought that a repeat victim would be someone who had called the force more than once in the last 12 months. A number of staff in the communications centre believed that the force incident system could only recall previous incidents from the last 12 months, so that if a member of the public had called regularly they would not have the full picture of their domestic abuse.

It is important in assessing the risk to a victim to understand if they are in any way particularly vulnerable. This would increase the risk they face and may require a specific response from the police or their partners, for example, if a victim is suffering from mental health problems or other disability. While the force did not define vulnerability, call handlers do understand the need to identify it and do pose questions to the caller to help identify those who are

vulnerable. It is possible to place a marker on the force incident system to highlight if someone had previously been identified as a high risk domestic abuse victim.

Once the details of a domestic abuse incident have been entered on the force incident system, the supervisors in the communication centre authorise the closure of the incident after it has been responded to and check that all appropriate action has been taken. However, we found no evidence that they supervise the ongoing incident, supporting and advising both the despatch staff and the attending officer, even where it is a high risk incident.

Domestic abuse can be reported in person at a police station, it is therefore important that all staff who work on front desks are trained and skilled in identifying domestic abuse in all its forms and dealing appropriately with victims. HMIC found that apart from training in relation to DASH and the domestic abuse disclosure scheme, staff who work in the enquiry offices at police stations have not received any specialist training on the subject of domestic abuse. However, most have dealt with sufficient incidents that they have a general understanding of the subject, including stalking and harassment. The force would benefit from providing face-to-face specialist training to all staff who have contact with the public about the different elements of domestic abuse including so-called honour-based violence, coercive behaviour, stalking and harassment.

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

Tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority for the PCC and the force, in spite of budget cuts elsewhere, is continuing to invest in specialist officers to deal with domestic abuse. However, HMIC found some key weaknesses in the response and initial action being taken to safeguard victims. Although the attending officer completes a form of risk assessment, they are not themselves required to evaluate the risk facing the victim. They merely collect the information and pass it to a specialist domestic abuse officer who subsequently carries out a risk assessment. This means that at the stage of this initial response the officer is required to take immediate action to safeguard the victim in the absence of a risk assessment. Likewise, supervisors are expected to review the action without any understanding of the risk level and therefore how appropriate the actions taken are. Therefore, the force cannot be confident that all victims are getting the consistent level of service they need at this critical stage.

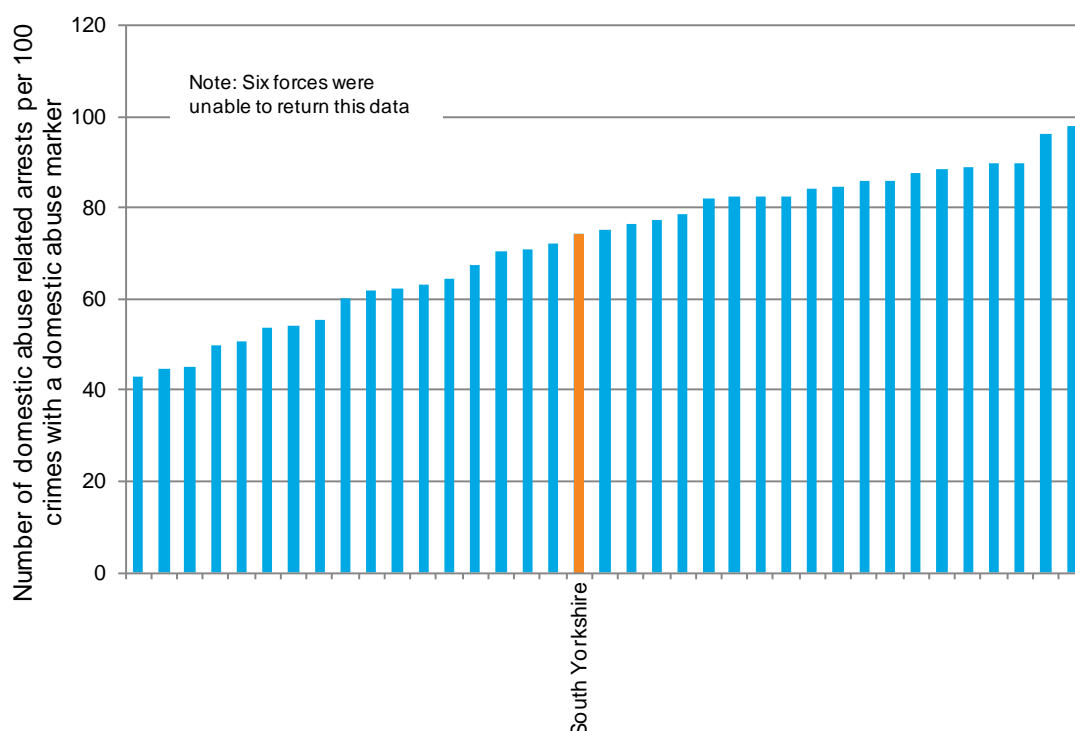
The force is planning to change its approach to risk assessment and is adopting the use of the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool early in 2014. However, HMIC was concerned that

there is no comprehensive training plan in place to ensure that officers are equipped to undertake the risk assessments when they are introduced.

Officers attending incidents of domestic abuse consider all the children in the relationship and their supervisors are involved in monitoring the actions taken to support the victim.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 74⁹ arrests in South Yorkshire. 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

The PCC made protecting vulnerable people one of the three key priorities in his police and crime plan. There are a series of strategic meetings held regularly within the force, and between the force and the office of the police and crime commissioner which reinforce the importance given to domestic abuse. In spite of the current financial austerity and reducing budgets within the police force, South Yorkshire has continued to invest in specialist staff to deal with

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

domestic abuse, who are located in the public protection unit (PPU) of each policing district. It is introducing a central referral unit which will provide additional staff to assess each report of domestic abuse once attended by an officer. This will reduce the demands placed on each district PPU to enable more time to be spent with high risk victims. Staff we spoke to clearly regard domestic abuse as a force priority. It is the subject of discussion at each daily management meeting, and calls for service are routinely responded to as immediate or priority incidents, to be attended swiftly. The deputy PCC and the police strategic lead for domestic abuse are collaborating on a project to provide an improved service for victims of domestic abuse by looking at good practice from around the country.

HMIC found that training frontline staff dealing with domestic abuse is also patchy and inconsistent. A regular training day used to be set aside every ten weeks which was used occasionally to deliver some domestic abuse training; however, we found that now these training days are seldom held, as a result of other workload pressures. The force has circulated a video training package which includes the subject of coercive control, which every officer must have completed by the end of December; but many staff reported that it is of such a poor standard it has little credibility. There had been some limited training on the wider aspects of domestic abuse including stalking, harassment and so-called honour-based violence, delivered to some of the frontline officers, but not consistently across the four districts. Some areas had designated a response officer as the dedicated person on each section to understand and share good practice with their colleagues, but this also does not happen in each district in a consistent way.

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents are expected to complete a risk assessment form by telephoning the crime recording bureau (CRB), either from the scene, or when they return to the police station. Most police forces in England and Wales use the nationally recognised risk assessment tool known as the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment; however, South Yorkshire use an assessment known as SPECSS (separation, pregnancy, escalation, community issues, stalking, and sexual assault). It requires officers to ask the victim a series of questions which highlights the risk indicators faced by the victim and any children in the family. The force does not train or expect the attending officers actually to evaluate the form or assess the risk; this is the role of the domestic violence officers (DVO) based in the district public protection unit (PPU). All of the partner agencies involved in domestic abuse provision use the DASH risk assessment tool. Having overcome some IT issues, the force intends to introduce the DASH risk assessment in early 2014.

This new approach will mean that the initial attending officer will be responsible for undertaking the risk assessment and determining the risk level posed to the victim.

The inspection team were told that some officers were given DASH risk assessment training some eighteen months ago and that there is an intention to refresh this training at the time the new form is introduced. It was not clear whether the force has developed a comprehensive training programme to ensure that all staff will be effectively prepared to undertake the new risk assessment procedure when it is introduced. Concern was expressed by a number of officers that reliance will be placed on emails, a general order and some computer-based training which will not provide frontline officers with the confidence to accurately assess the level of risk faced by domestic abuse victims. The DASH risk assessment tool will be introduced at about the same time as the Central Referral Unit is formed. There are risks to the force as it goes through these transitions on ensuring victims continue to receive a good level of service across the force area.

It was evident during the inspection that officers attending reports of domestic abuse gave a lot of attention to children in the relationship. They ensured that those who witnessed any abuse; were elsewhere in the house or at other locations; were accounted for and their safety attended to. The SPECSS form requires details of all children in the relationship to be recorded and it would be returned to the officer if subsequent enquiries revealed that it had not been completed correctly. If the attending officer felt that there was a potential risk to any children they complete a child referral form which would be passed through the PPU to the appropriate local authority children's services for their attention.

The force expects that on attending a report of domestic abuse officers will take positive action which will include arrest of the offender, if this is necessary and proportionate. It was clear during the inspection that officers understood the need for action to reduce the risk of harm for the victim and that this would often, although not always, result in the arrest of the perpetrator. Across most of the force, once the attending officer has spoken with their supervisor by radio, that supervisor would then telephone the victim to discuss the actions being taken and agree, if no complaint of a criminal offence has been made, that the victim is satisfied with the police action.

In the absence of a risk assessment being formally undertaken at the scene, we are concerned that the force cannot be confident that victims are consistently getting the level of immediate safeguarding measures they need to deal with the risks they face. We found that across the force attending officers regularly reported that they speak with their supervisor while at the scene or shortly afterwards to discuss the domestic abuse incident; what they found; and what

they intend to do for the victim; any children; and where appropriate an offender. Supervisors recognised that as no risk assessment was completed by their staff, it was important for them to ensure that the risk indicators were accurately recorded on the SPECSS form. This would assist the PPU staff conducting the risk assessment when they received the form at a later time.

Officers attending reports of domestic abuse are aware of the valuable evidential support that video from body-worn cameras and photographs of any injuries or damage to property can provide to aid prosecutions, particularly where the victim is unwilling to give evidence themselves. The force has submitted a bid to the PCC for funding to widen the availability of body-worn cameras across the force.

HMIC found that the approach to the investigation of domestic abuse case is fragmented and is driven by the seriousness of the crime committed rather than the ongoing risk that the victim faces. Crimes resulting in serious assaults, for example, are investigated by trained detectives from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Less serious crimes are dealt with by the volume crime team, which typically will be comprised of a number of uniformed constables who have not received additional training to investigate crimes or fully understand the often complex nature of domestic abuse. This means that a case where a minor crime is committed but the risk to a victim is high, may be dealt with by an inexperienced officer who may not have the skills or confidence to achieve the best possible outcome for a victim. CID investigations also receive much greater levels of supervision than those of the volume crime teams based in the custody suites.

If there is a need to arrest an offender, but they are not at the scene and cannot be found by the attending officer before the end of their shift, a handover package is prepared so that other officers can continue to search for the offender and arrest them when they are found. The inspection team found that the quality of the handover packages varied across the force area, and the amount of time spent by the response teams looking for the offender and holding on to the package differed in each district. There is a real need for the force to determine a single process for the arrest of an offender and collation of the evidential package to support the staff in the custody suite when the offender is arrested.

The force has undertaken some work aimed at reducing the bureaucracy involved in officers completing the paperwork associated with prosecution files. This has resulted in a reduction of arrest statements where it is considered to be non-contentious. The risk with this new approach is that in the event of the Crown Prosecution Service requesting a full description from the attending officer of the location where an offence took place, and the demeanour of all

concerned, the police evidence may be considered incomplete, and an offender may not be brought to justice. This is particularly the case where a victim of domestic abuse subsequently decides not to support the prosecution and withdraws their statement. This leaves the case reliant on the police officer's evidence, as there are seldom other witnesses in domestic abuse cases.

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

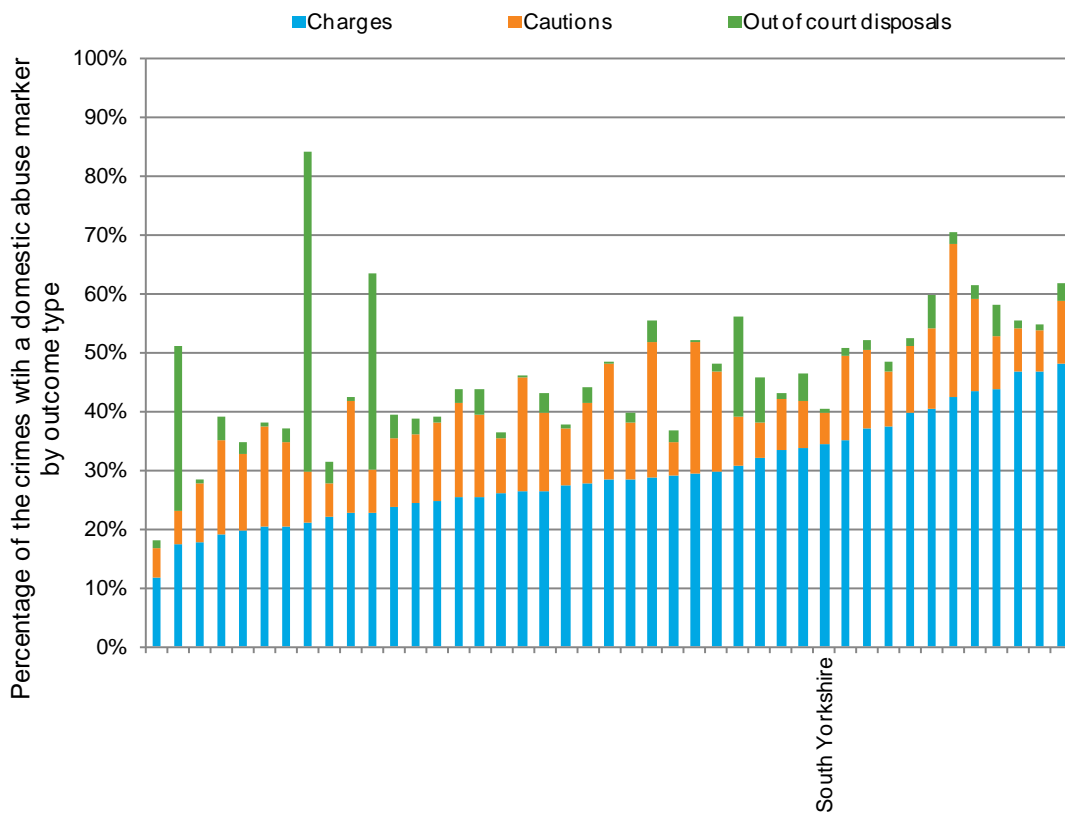
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¹⁰ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

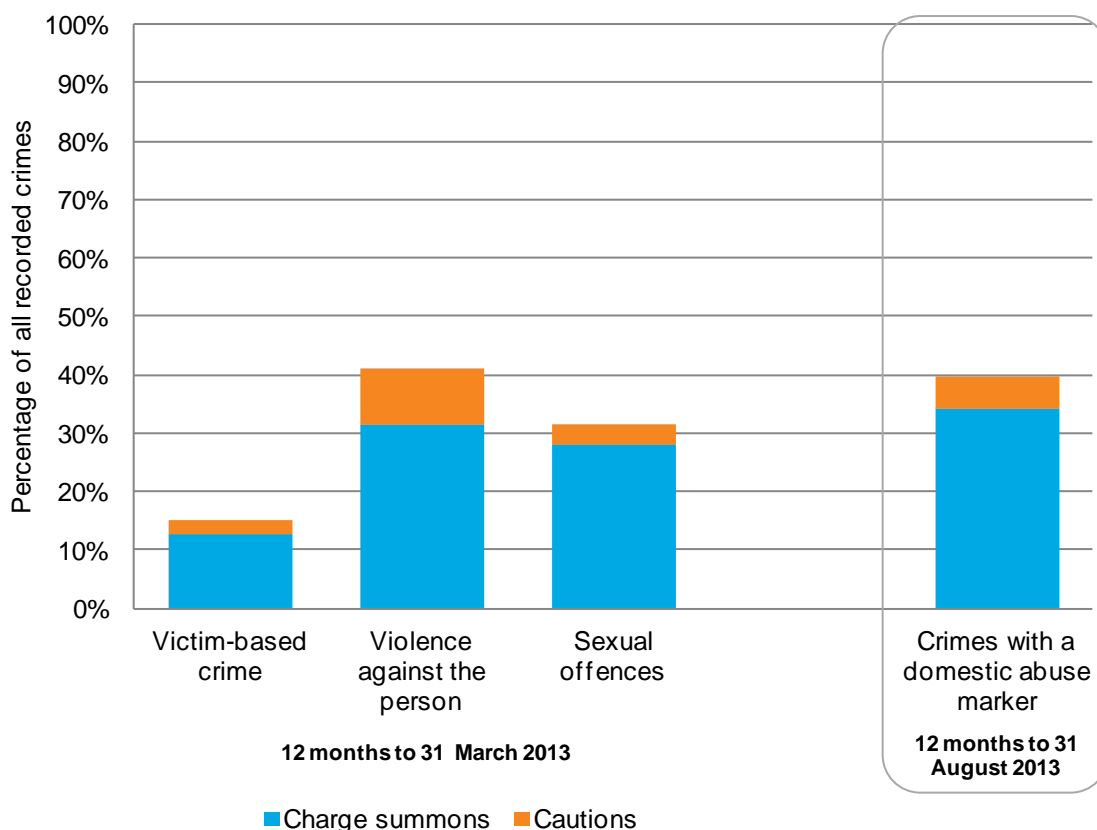
Figure 1 : Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August



Source: HMIC data collection

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

Figure 2 : Percentage of different disposal types used for victim based crime, violence against the person, sexual offences and all domestic abuse marked crimes¹¹



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

As previously described the specialist domestic abuse officers within the PPUs risk assess all domestic abuse incidents where the attending officer submits a SPECSS form. In some districts supervisors perform this role on each day of the week, while in others it is only carried out on weekdays. This means that an incident which occurs on a Friday or over the weekend may not be reviewed in the PPU until the following Monday, which presents an unacceptable delay where a victim is facing high risk. The force has recognised this weakness and is introducing a new approach to risk assessment in early 2014 where the attending officer will carry out a DASH risk assessment. In addition, the force is setting up a central referral unit where all domestic abuse incidents will be processed and reassessed, seven days a week, to release capacity for the

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

specialist domestic abuse officers in the PPU's to focus on safeguarding high risk victims.

HMIC found that although the PPU specialist staff are responsible for undertaking all domestic abuse risk assessments, the level of training for these staff within the PPU's is varied across the force. In some areas they will have received some risk assessment training from partner agencies. In others their development has largely been provided by working alongside a more experienced colleague.

The police work well with their partner agencies in each of the four local authority areas. Statutory and voluntary partners told us that their relationships, particularly with the staff from the PPU's, were good. Partnerships are complex and differ across each of the four areas, and the level of integration between agencies varies, but there is a move to have co-located services in each district which will then work towards a more integrated service.

Concerns were expressed about the volume of domestic abuse incidents faced in each area. This can mean that while high risk victims continue to receive a good service, the provision for medium and standard risk victims is not as strong and is only likely to worsen as the number of cases faced by the police and partners rises.

Across all four districts the high risk victims are supported by staff within the PPU but the capacity in each unit to deal with medium and standard risk victims varies.

For victims assessed as high risk, the PPU staff either develop a safety plan or review those already put in place by the initial attending officer. The safety plan sets out the actions required to make the victim of domestic abuse safer. These plans are regularly reviewed within the PPU to ensure they stay relevant for the victim. In addition the independent domestic violence advisory (IDVA) service provides independent qualified domestic abuse advisers who can work alongside the police to support high risk victims through every stage of the process and actively contribute to keeping them safe. IDVAs provide a valuable service to victims. The provision of IDVAs varies between each of the four districts leading to inconsistencies in the level of service victims in South Yorkshire have access to, depending on where they live.

The safeguarding provision to medium and standard risk victims is less comprehensive. There is some evidence that safer neighbourhood teams assist in follow-up visits to domestic abuse victims but, as in other matters, this is not consistent across the four districts. The staff will regularly be informed of the top ten offenders for domestic abuse along with those of burglary and vehicle crime

but it was not that apparent whether this then leads to specific tasks for neighbourhood staff in respect of domestic abuse.

Each district has a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) which brings together all key partners from the area and includes police, housing, social services, health services, IDVAs and other voluntary organisations. They meet at least twice a month and consider in detail the high risk victims of domestic abuse referred by the police and other partner agencies. The meetings are usually chaired by the detective inspector from the PPU but other partners such as probation are now ensuring that they can provide someone to effectively chair the meetings. Each meeting will typically take all day.

As the volume of cases continues to rise, concerns have been expressed about the ability of each MARAC to consider each case in as much detail. There is a MARAC co-ordinator for South Yorkshire who, until recently, has provided the administration for all of the MARACs that take place across the county. However, local districts are now appointing their own administrators which will ease his workload. The contributors to each of the MARACs felt that the meetings are well attended and provide effective action to improve the safety of domestic abuse victims, but they acknowledge that little is done to fully evaluate their work. Recent independent assessments of the meetings have concluded that they are well run but the final outcome of all of their work is yet to be fully assessed.

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

The force has comprehensive processes in place to manage the future risk of high risk victims but it is less clear whether those victims assessed as being at medium and standard risk are as systematically managed by the police. The public protection unit (PPU) specialist officers work closely with the independent domestic violence advisers IDVA service to manage the risks faced by high risk victims both where there are criminal proceedings and where there are none. The IDVA will continue to provide updates and contact with the victim while the perpetrator is imprisoned and will work with the PPUs to review the risk to the victim when the offender is being released. There has been limited work to date to manage serious domestic abuse perpetrators to prevent reoffending, although there is a pilot project taking place in Rotherham, to manage offenders of domestic abuse. A police officer, funded by the PCC, will identify serious and serial perpetrators and then try to work to reduce their offending.

Repeat victims who stop calling the police about domestic abuse are not contacted to establish that they are safe or to understand why they have stopped calling.

The force currently monitors data on domestic abuse, this data is used to predict the police resources required to meet demand but we found limited evidence that this data is used to evaluate outcomes or to drive improvements in performance. The force, along with local partner agencies, participates in domestic homicide reviews, which produce actions in an effort to reduce the possibility of another serious incident, but it is unclear whether all the lessons learned from these reviews reach all operational staff

The force's witness care unit takes the responsibility for maintaining contact with victims of crimes when their cases have been sent for trial to magistrates or crown courts. This is carried out in conjunction with the district based IDVAs who work with high risk victims of domestic abuse whether or not their case is going to result in a court case. Once a perpetrator is imprisoned, the IDVAs take sole responsibility to provide victim care and updates.

There is evidence that the level of risk faced by high risk victims is regularly reviewed by either domestic violence officers or by the IDVAs who work closely with the police. These reviews will often take place when there is a change in circumstances, for example, a court hearing, change in bail conditions for an offender or at the time of a prison release.

It is important that when a perpetrator is to be released from prison that the victim is updated and there is a reassessment of the risk they face in order to put in place any additional safety measures needed. There is a system in place to give early notification of a prisoner release to the force intelligence unit, which in turn notifies the district PPU, which will then review, along with partners such as the IDVA, the risk level of the victim and alter the safety planning when required. The inspection found that this system appeared to work in almost every case, with the occasional late indication of a prisoner release.

There is no process in force to review repeat victims who have not called for some time to ensure their continued safety. It is common throughout the force for local officers to be told about the top ten domestic abuse offenders, although it is unclear whether they are then tasked with any actions. In Doncaster, safer neighbourhood staff participate in forums with partner agencies to seek to solve the problems faced by those families most at risk of anti-social behaviour, drink, drugs and domestic abuse, but again this is not consistent across the force area.

While there is no comprehensive process to identify and manage serial and serious perpetrators of domestic abuse, Rotherham district is trialling a project

on behalf of the force. A domestic abuse offender manager has been appointed with funding from the PCC, to provide to domestic abuse offenders a similar service to that offered to burglars and vehicle criminals, providing an alternative to offending with support for housing, education, and drink and drug treatment. As the scheme is in its early days there has not been evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach.

Domestic homicide reviews take place and actions follow, some of which are for the police to undertake. While the lessons learned may be passed down to detective inspectors for each PPU and incorporated in future training plans, there is no consistent force-wide approach to ensure that all staff learn the lessons from these reviews.

The force currently gathers data on domestic abuse which includes the number of incidents, numbers arrested and numbers of assessment forms completed. This data is used to predict the police resources required to meet demand, but we found limited evidence that this data is used to evaluate outcomes or to drive improvements in performance. The office of the police and crime commissioner (OPCC) is working with members of the force in developing measures to evaluate the outcomes of incidents both crime and non-crime.

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 staff in the force communications centre must use all the technology available to them to deploy the closest available officer to an incident of domestic abuse regardless of district boundaries.
2. The force should provide detailed and relevant training for all staff including enquiry office, communications centre, frontline, specialists and supervisors, appropriate to their role which includes all aspects of domestic abuse.
3. The force must implement a comprehensive training programme prior to the introduction of the DASH risk assessment form in 2014. In addition to the completion of the form the training must fully inform all of the relevant staff about the assessment of risk so that it can be correctly applied in all cases.
4. As the force moves the responsibility of management of PPU's from the district to the centre and creates a central referral unit (CRU) it should do so in a planned manner which does not increase the risks faced by domestic abuse victims.
5. The force should review the extent to which medium and standard risk victims receive an appropriate service across the force area.
6. The force should satisfy itself that each district multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is running effectively and thereby making victims of domestic abuse safer.
7. The force should ensure that all staff are provided with the lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews.
8. While the performance management framework is in transition the force should ensure that outcomes are measured and that data gathered focuses activity so the victims of domestic abuse benefit from this.

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.