



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Suffolk Constabulary'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 Suffolk Constabulary 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 Police Act 1996 for the police and crime commissioner to publish a copy of their comments on this report and the recommendations for all forces in the national report and forward these to the Home Secretary.

Domestic abuse in Suffolk⁷

Calls for assistance



In Suffolk, domestic abuse accounts for 3% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls 34% were from repeat victims

Crime

7%

Domestic abuse accounts for 7% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

15%

Suffolk recorded 164 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 25 were domestic abuse related. This is 15% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Assault with injury

33%

The force also recorded 3,402 assaults with injury, of these 1,108 were domestic abuse related. This is 33% 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 the forces use of domestic abuse markers on IT systems.

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

Harassment

48%

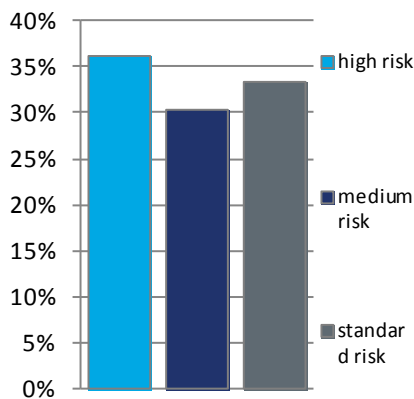
The force recorded 532 harassment offences, of these 257 were domestic abuse related. This is 48% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

9%

The force also recorded 724 sexual offences, of these 63 were domestic abuse related. This is 9% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



On 31 August 2013 Suffolk had 296 active domestic abuse cases, 36% were high risk, 30% were medium risk, and 33% were standard risk.

Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 75 arrests in Suffolk. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Outcomes



Suffolk recorded 2,861 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 28% resulted in a charge, 13% resulted in a caution and, 3% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

The public in Suffolk can generally have confidence that the police provide a good service to victims of domestic abuse, and in doing so, help to keep them safe.

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the force, and staff demonstrate a high level of commitment and awareness; they exercise appropriate discretion and work well with partners.

There are just three independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVAs) in the county. This is insufficient for them to be able to properly support victims of domestic abuse. Other similar forces have far more IDVAs, some as many as ten. The police and crime commissioner (PCC) is working with partner agencies to increase the number of IDVAs in Suffolk.

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

Identifying victims

Most domestic abuse calls are dealt with by staff in the force control room who were found to be competent, confident and empathetic in dealing with domestic abuse victims. They are trained to gather as much relevant information as possible by questioning the caller. They also carry out background checks of the police databases for any previous police involvement. This enables them to assess the risk and send the right level of police response. This information helps the officers attending build a picture of the threat of harm to a victim and their children.

Domestic abuse incidents are given priority response and will either be attended as an emergency or within an hour depending of the threat of harm to the victim.

The force has good systems within its control room to identify repeat callers and anyone who may be vulnerable. While the force does not define repeat victimisation, common sense is applied by all staff and where it is apparent that a victim has been subjected to domestic abuse on a previous occasion they are recognised as a repeat victim.

We also found good supervision and oversight of the initial response in the control room.

Keeping victims safe

Domestic abuse is regarded as an important priority for the force.

Officers have received domestic abuse risk assessment training and some have had additional training, covering coercive control, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence. They are encouraged to use their own discretion to think beyond the formal risk assessment process, and increase the category of risk, if they think this is appropriate. Victims are assessed as one of three categories, high risk (of serious harm or murder), medium risk and standard risk.

A good deal of thought is given by officers to the safety of the victim and children at incidents of domestic abuse, and measures are put in place to protect them.

However, the collection of evidence at domestic abuse incidents is patchy, and is not always gathered, to help build a case against perpetrators. For example, photographs of a scene or of injuries are not always taken.

Supervisors listen on the radio and are available to help officers. They review risk assessment forms to ensure they are properly completed. All domestic abuse crime investigations are reviewed by a detective sergeant, prior to being closed, to make sure that all available evidence has been collected.

Investigations are generally allocated to staff, based on the seriousness of a crime, rather than the level of risk to a victim. This can mean that relatively inexperienced officers could be responsible for dealing with so-called lower levels of crime investigations, where in fact the actual risk to the victim is extremely high.

When cases are passed between teams and departments within the constabulary, victims may not be contacted, or may be contacted by a number of different people, which can be equally concerning (as victims may lose confidence in the police response if they are repeatedly asked similar questions by different staff).

Management of risk

The force works hard to make victims safer from the first point of contact. The force employs dedicated domestic abuse officers who work from multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH). These hubs are where police officers and staff from other partnership organisations are located permanently, and where they work alongside one another to manage the majority of safeguarding actions for high risk victims.

All domestic abuse cases assessed as high or medium risk by the attending officers are reviewed by specialist officers; however those which are standard risk are not. While these may be examined by the victim support service there is concern that repeated standard risk incidents may not be identified as repeated abuse and patterns of escalating abuse may not be picked up.

Control room and all frontline staff dealing with victims displayed a good understanding of how important their role is in making victims safer, and they take this responsibility seriously.

The force multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process is regarded as working well and there are good relationships with partners which means that information is exchanged promptly, risk assessed, and co-ordinated action is taken by partners to reduce risk and keep victims safe.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

Suffolk Police has some good systems and a comprehensive approach to managing victims' safety, but there are some areas for improvement.

The police and crime commissioner (PCC) is keen to improve services for domestic abuse victims and is working with police and partners to do this. However, we found it is not always clear who is responsible for updating victims when perpetrators are released from custody and who will re-assess risk as a result of this. This could result in a victim being contacted by a number of people, or not contacted at all, and the force and partner agencies being unaware of increased risk.

'Operation Comfort' identifies the highest risk cases of domestic violence and informs local neighbourhood officers of how they can help to reduce the risk and deal with the perpetrators. Local officers were aware of some high risk cases in their areas through this operation, but they may not be aware of all of them.

The force has a robust process for learning lessons from domestic homicide reviews nationally. It will routinely review its own processes in light of the reviews and where necessary improve them in line with the national recommendations.

Findings

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

Most domestic abuse calls are dealt with by staff in the force control room who were found to be competent, confident and empathetic in dealing with domestic abuse victims. They are trained to gather as much relevant information as possible by questioning the caller. They also carry out background checks of the police databases for any previous police involvement. This enables them to assess the risk and send the right level of police response. This information helps the officers attending build a picture of the threat of harm to a victim and their children.

Domestic abuse incidents are given priority response and will either be attended as an emergency or within an hour depending of the threat of harm to the victim.

The force has good systems within its control room to identify repeat callers and anyone who may be vulnerable. While the force does not define repeat victimisation, common sense is applied by all staff and where it is apparent that a victim has been subjected to domestic abuse on a previous occasion they are recognised as a repeat victim.

We also found good supervision and oversight of the initial response in the control room.

Domestic abuse incidents are reported to the police in different ways. A victim may attend a police station or may be referred from other agencies, such as the health service or social care, through a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). It is more common for a telephone call to come in via force command and control room either from the victim, or a neighbour.

There are good processes and well trained and skilled staff in the control room. This enables the force to identify domestic abuse, access information and manage risk to the victims at this first point of contact. Control room staff are trained to ask questions of callers to identify whether they are at immediate risk, and if they have experienced domestic abuse before. The approach does not rely on a series of prompts or a drop-down menu of questions to ask the caller, the intention being to allow the operator to develop a rapport and therefore better understand the risk presented. This works well and staff are able to elicit good levels of information, and establish a rapport with the victim.

The safety of the caller is paramount and the control room staff may give advice to them, for example, to go into another room away from the perpetrator and

close the door. Where callers do not speak English there is easy access to interpreters through a quick dial into a language line.

HMIC listened to a sample of recent calls and found control room staff asked questions which established whether the caller or any other person, for example a child, was at immediate risk of harm. In some cases where a perpetrator was still present the caller might be kept on the line talking until police officers had arrived. In one case this helped gather evidence, as shouting and abuse could be heard as well as children crying, giving a more complete picture of what was happening.

Gaining as full a picture as possible of the incident and any previous police involvement is vital to enable the control room staff to properly assess the risk, send the right level of police response, and relay this information to the attending officers, so that they too can make an informed assessment when they arrive at the scene.

When a call is received the control room staff check the police systems to see whether there is any information available. The systems hold information such as previous calls to the address; information about the caller and the alleged perpetrator; information held relating to children in the house, who may be at risk; and whether anyone at the address holds a firearm. We found that this information is passed to attending officers in most cases, unless there are other more pressing issues the operator must deal with. This can mean that on occasions, officers may not have the most complete information available when they attend an incident. Additional checks are carried out should the officers request further information. All calls which relate to domestic abuse are treated as priority calls by the force and an officer will always be sent to the incident.

Supervisors and managers working in the control room check the calls and ensure the right action is being taken. The information gathered is passed to officers over the radio as they travel to the incident. Officers are sent either immediately, where there is believed to be a risk to life or safety; or, when the victim is thought to be safe, officers will visit them within an hour.

The decision on how quickly the police should attend is based on the assessment of harm, threat and risk faced by the victim. However, those working within the control room stated that there were times when they did not have available officers, or officers were not available quickly enough to send to calls. This means that on occasion, a domestic abuse case might not have police attendance within the timescales set.

The control room will always send more than one officer to an incident of domestic abuse, where this is possible, so that, when they arrive, they can separate those involved in the incident to ensure each is able to give their

account out of earshot of the other (usually in a different room). This helps officers get a clearer understanding of what has happened, and victim safety issues can be properly addressed.

Staff within the control room receive training as part of their initial course when they start working for the police. An element of this is specifically about domestic abuse. Guidance has been given to help them to deal with reports of stalking and harassment, and some staff have received formal training. Coercive control is recognised by staff as a form of domestic abuse, and again, some had received training about how to recognise this, and how best to deal with a call where they suspect this may be an issue. There has also been some training provided which gave staff an understanding of so-called honour-based violence. We found staff to be confident and empathetic when dealing with callers who were experiencing different types of domestic abuse.

Repeat victimisation is not defined by the force, but staff have a clear understanding, that any case where the victim has reported domestic abuse to the police or another agency, or where the victim states they have been subjected to abuse in the past is a 'repeat case' and this will influence any risk assessment that is made. There is a good understanding among those who deal with victims and they are prioritised by both investigators and the domestic abuse team.

Vulnerable and repeat victims are automatically identified by the computer system on which the force record calls for assistance if they call from the same address, telephone number or give their name. This means that when a call is received the control room staff can look at previous calls for assistance and better understand the risk that may be present. If someone has previously been identified as vulnerable, then this is also made clear and again this can help them manage the risk posed to the caller and help them prioritise cases.

There is very good management and supervision in the control room. Incidents of domestic abuse identified as being high risk, prior to police arrival, are monitored by control room supervisors and the inspector, to ensure that immediate and appropriate action is taken. The force sets out to supervise all domestic abuse calls but this is not always possible. Supervisors in the control room listen to their teams' calls and carry out a dip sample to ensure that they are asking the right questions, to establish that risk is being accurately assessed.

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

Domestic abuse is regarded as an important priority for the force.

Officers have received domestic abuse risk assessment training and some have had additional training, covering coercive control, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence. They are encouraged to use their own discretion to think beyond the formal risk assessment process, and increase the category of risk, if they think this is appropriate. Victims are assessed as one of three categories, high risk (of serious harm or murder), medium risk and standard risk.

A good deal of thought is given by officers to the safety of the victim and children at incidents of domestic abuse, and measures are put in place to protect them.

However, the collection of evidence at domestic abuse incidents is patchy, and is not always gathered, to help build a case against perpetrators. For example, photographs of a scene or of injuries are not always taken.

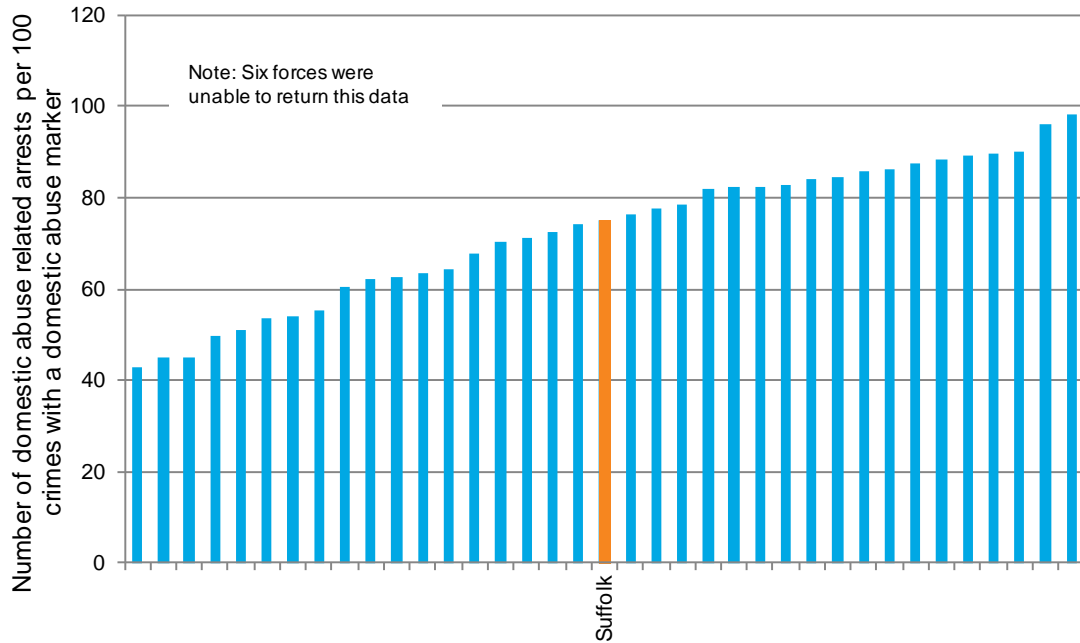
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When cases are passed between teams and departments within the constabulary, victims may not be contacted, or may be contacted by a number of different people, which can be equally concerning (as victims may lose confidence in the police response if they are repeatedly asked similar questions by different staff).

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 75⁸ arrests in Suffolk for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

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



The force works with partner agencies such as the health service and social care at both a strategic and operational level to deal with violence against women, girls, men and boys. There is however, a need for the force and partners to formally meet at a management level, to ensure that this strategic intent is translated into working practices, and that programmes of work to improve police and partnership response to domestic abuse are delivered. The force recognises this and the joint working structure is currently under review.

Those officers attending domestic abuse incidents have received initial training which gives them an understanding of domestic abuse. Officers are required to formally assess the risk posed to the victim at every domestic abuse incident using the nationally recognised domestic abuse stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool. The force has run DASH risk assessment training in the past two years. More recently, some training has been delivered to help officers to recognise and deal with victims who may be suffering from coercive control, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence. However this training had not reached all officers and staff, but the force have scheduled training for all frontline staff, which will be a day spent focussing on domestic abuse, stalking and harassment. Staff displayed an understanding of domestic abuse coercive control, stalking and harassment.

Officers and staff who fill out the DASH risk assessment form understand why they are asking the questions on the form. They are able to increase the assessed level of risk using their own professional judgement, should they feel that a victim is at greater risk than the assessment tool has indicated. (Officers cannot reduce assessed risk-based on their own judgement.) Those attending incidents have a good understanding of how they need to establish any threat, harm and risk to victims, and that their role is to do whatever they are able to, in order to reduce this.

There is a clear commitment displayed by staff in the call centre, attending officers and specialists to understanding the risk to everyone connected to domestic abuse incidents, in particular children and any vulnerable adults. Where a child is part of a family where there has been domestic abuse, then the local authority's children's social care are informed. When children are in a family where there is a high risk of violence then the case will be discussed with social workers, in order to properly protect them. Officers attending a domestic abuse incident where children have been present in the past, or where children have been identified as being at risk, are informed of this by the control room. This helps them establish the current level of risk and take any action necessary to protect the children.

Wherever possible, two officers are sent to incidents of domestic abuse. This means that they are able to speak to each party separately, and gain an understanding of what has taken place. Officers' main priority is the safety of the victim and anyone else who may be at risk. They are expected to make an arrest where an offence has been committed, and take action to secure the safety of those present. Officers are expected to make victims safer through safety planning before they leave an incident. The management of the risk present is the responsibility of the attending officer until it is passed to the specialist domestic abuse team, if it has been assessed as a high or medium risk case. Unfortunately, the specialist team work limited hours, between 8.00am and 4.00pm, Monday to Friday. This means that at night, during weekends and Bank Holidays, risk may not be as well managed or overseen, as the specialist team will not be able to take over risk management of higher risk cases. This is of some considerable concern to HMIC.

Supervisors review all officers' completed risk assessment forms for completeness and accuracy. Immediate action taken by officers is supervised by their sergeants and inspectors; however supervisors cannot monitor or attend every domestic violence call, so there needs to be a level of reliance on the action of individual attending officers. There is a policy within the force that officers will take 'positive action' at every domestic abuse incident. This may be by arresting the perpetrator if appropriate or other action to make victims safer, for example, speaking with neighbours to ask them to call the police if they see the perpetrator near the house or hear any concerning noise from the address.

There is scope to improve how domestic abuse cases are investigated. The investigation process starts when the first officer attends the scene. The initial collection of evidence at the scene of domestic abuse is patchy with potential evidence not always being gathered. In some cases, enquiries of neighbours to establish if they saw or heard anything, or photos taken of injuries to the victim or damage at the house, are not being completed. The force is aware of the issues of evidence not being gathered from the scene of crimes generally and is giving training and guidance to help address this.

After an arrest has been made the case is often dealt with by the custody investigation unit (CIU). The CIU deals with a large volume of domestic abuse cases and regards itself as having developed a level of expertise. This is due to be further enhanced by specific training in domestic abuse, stalking, harassment, coercive control and honour-based violence. If the offence is serious, then the criminal investigation unit (CID) may deal with it. If the crime committed is not serious, the response officer may deal with the case. Of some concern to HMIC, is the fact that cases are not allocated based on threat and risk to the victim. This means that a case where a so-called minor crime is committed, but where 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.

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

Detective sergeants review all domestic abuse cases including those where no further action is being taken. If the investigation is of poor quality then the officer completing the investigation will receive feedback and instructions about improving the thoroughness of the investigation. HMIC reviewed a small number of files and found that in some cases lines of enquiry were not followed, for example, where a neighbour had reported a loud argument at an address, yet no statement was taken from her. This file had been through the supervisory process and this had not been addressed.

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

The force works hard to make victims safer from the first point of contact. The force employs dedicated domestic abuse officers who work from multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH). These hubs are where police officers and staff from other partnership organisations are located permanently, and where they work alongside one another to manage the majority of safeguarding actions for high risk victims.

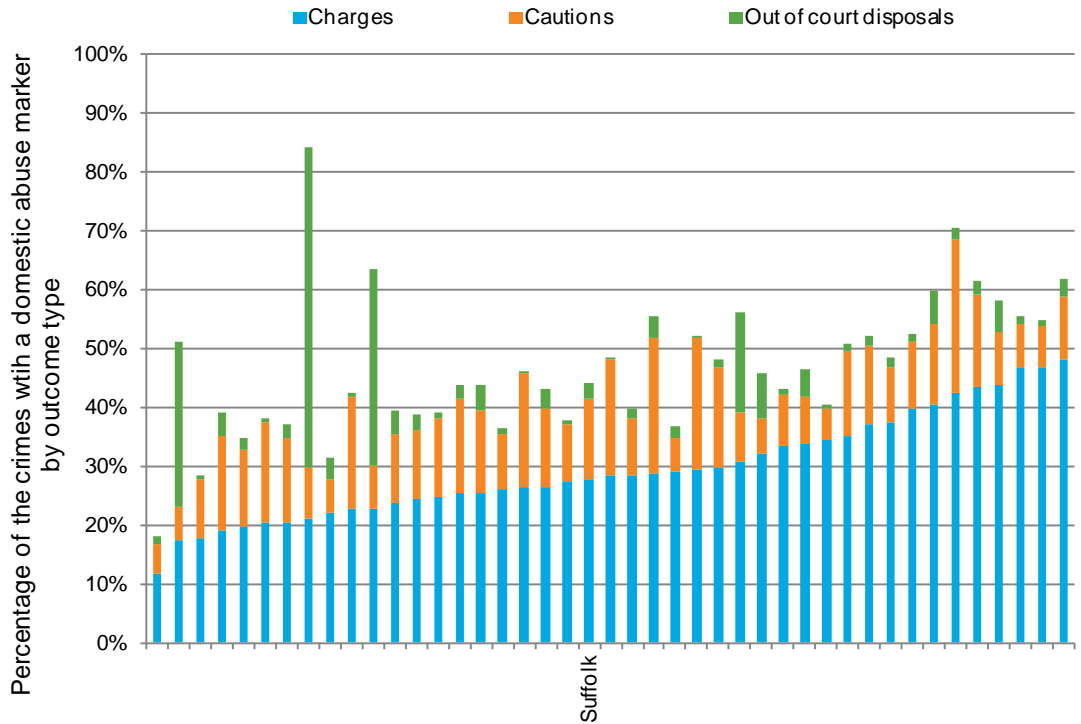
All domestic abuse cases assessed as high or medium risk by the attending officers are reviewed by specialist officers; however those which are standard risk are not. While these may be examined by the victim support service there is concern that repeated standard risk incidents may not be identified as repeated abuse and patterns of escalating abuse may not be picked up.

Control room and all frontline staff dealing with victims displayed a good understanding of how important their role is in making victims safer, and they take this responsibility seriously.

The force multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process is regarded as working well and there are good relationships with partners which means that information is exchanged promptly, risk assessed, and co-ordinated action is taken by partners to reduce risk and keep victims safe.

Suffolk recorded 2,861⁹ domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 28 percent resulted in a charge, 13 percent resulted in a caution and 3 percent had an out-of-court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Figure 1: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013

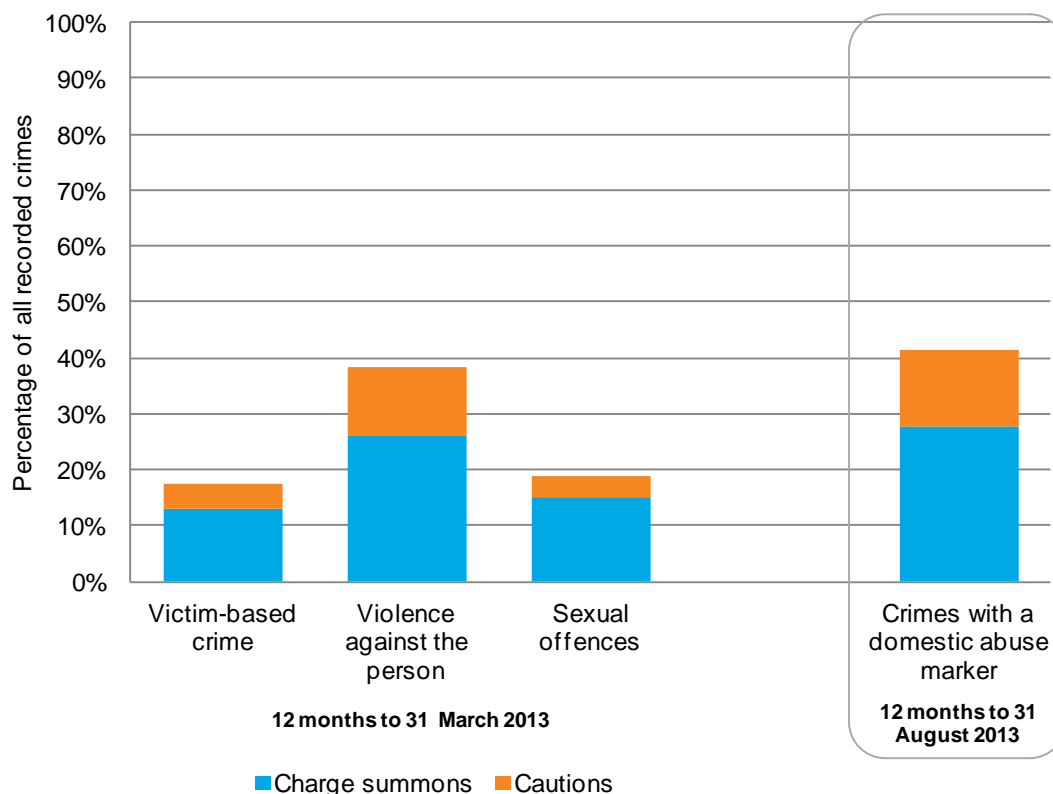


Source: HMIC data collection

Suffolk Constabulary 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.

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

Figure 2: 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 ¹⁰



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

The specialist domestic abuse team reviews all DASH risk assessments graded high or medium and use additional information from partner agencies to help them develop a more complete picture of the risk a victim may face. This means that a victim facing higher levels of risk, should receive appropriate support and actions to reduce risk, for example, help to have locks changed or a mobile phone to contact the police in an emergency. Domestic abuse cases that are graded as standard are not reviewed by specialists and are not dip sampled to ensure accuracy. This means that the quality of these assessments is unknown to the force. HMIC is concerned that as specialists are not reviewing standard forms, a number of repeated incidents which, in isolation, may not appear to be a threat to the victim, may in fact be a potentially dangerous pattern of

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

escalation. Failure to review standard risk cases may mean that warning signals are being missed by the force.

Specialist officers do not receive any additional training for their role although a number of them are very experienced and have been working in the domestic abuse arena for a number of years. They are responsible for providing support to victims and helping to make them safer, through safety planning and partnership working. Staff work within the 'safeguarding hubs', where other parts of the police and partner agencies work jointly to protect vulnerable people. Unfortunately, uniformed officers do not really understand what these specialist teams do. This means that they make inaccurate assumptions about who will make sure a victim is updated about their case and, as a result, victims may not be contacted.

There are examples of how skills and awareness in domestic abuse are being developed across the force. The CIU deals with a variety of crime within the county; a large proportion of which is domestic abuse. They have an action plan to tackle domestic abuse which includes a training schedule; sharing information with partner agencies; and looking into why cases failed to get to court. They also hand out a leaflet to perpetrators, designed by the charity Respect, which encourages them to behave differently. This increased awareness will undoubtedly enhance the service they are able to provide to victims of domestic abuse, but they do not deal with all perpetrators of domestic abuse as explained earlier.

HMIC is concerned that there is a lack of clarity about who is dealing with the victims of domestic abuse throughout the investigation and criminal justice process. The role of the domestic abuse team is unclear to many staff, who do not understand if they take statements, or concentrate solely on victim care. There is also potential for confusion when a sexual assault forms part of a domestic abuse incident. The domestic abuse element of the incident may not receive the necessary attention. While the independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs) have a good working relationship with the domestic abuse team, there are no formal arrangements in place to ensure that both elements of a sexual offence are considered.

The force provides TecSOS mobile phones to victims, giving them an easy way to contact the police in an emergency. There have been six activations this year. Officers attending incidents produce a fast action response plan to reduce risk to victims. This might include ensuring that any call to an address is treated as an emergency, by placing a warning marker on the police systems.

Safety plans are reviewed and updated by the domestic abuse team for high and medium risk cases. Any change in circumstances, for example where a

perpetrator is released from police custody, should lead to safety plans being updated by the officer who is dealing with the case. However, where the officer is not on duty this responsibility may not be passed to someone else and the victim may not be provided with vitally important information. This is of concern to HMIC and needs to be addressed.

There are good working relationships between partners including health, housing and local authorities. This means the force is able to share information effectively and have a more complete picture around risk levels. The multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process in Suffolk is regarded as working well. The meetings are well run and there is good attendance by partners including the voluntary sector. MARAC meetings work well in reviewing the level of risk allocated, and, to an extent, in ensuring each organisation takes appropriate responsibility for relevant actions.

However, HMIC has concerns that some actions to help reduce risk are not accepted by some partners at the meeting, as instead they insist on a formal referral outside the meeting. This defeats the object of holding a MARAC meeting, going against the spirit of co-operation and joint responsibility across the partners. It could result in missed opportunities, in terms of taking immediate action to keep victims safe. In addition, large private landlords are not represented at the MARAC, despite them owning and controlling a significant proportion of the housing stock across the county.

There has not yet been any evaluation of the success of the MARAC process, but the force is now commissioning this, through Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA). This will help the force understand how the process is working and where it can be improved.

HMIC has very substantial concerns as to the extremely low numbers of independent domestic abuse advisers (IDVAs) in the county. This is one of the lowest levels of IDVA provision in the country, and compares unfavourably to neighbouring Norfolk which has seven full-time IDVAs. The role of the IDVA is to support victims, contribute to their safeguarding, help them rebuild their lives and assist them through any court proceedings. They are not managed or controlled by the police. IDVAs were part funded by government grant but this money is being withdrawn in 2015. The PCC is aware of the low number of IDVAs in the county. He is looking to improve the position and the force intends to work with partner agencies to provide additional IDVAs in 2014.

There are good working relationships with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and decisions about domestic abuse prosecution cases can be challenged if officers disagree with the CPS on particular cases. Officers are seldom able to speak to a lawyer who has specialist understanding of domestic

abuse, as they generally deal with CPS Direct, who may not have this additional knowledge. There is little information about force performance and the proportion of domestic abuse cases that fail to achieve a conviction. This feedback would help inform the force about where improvements may be needed.

Police officers and staff working for Suffolk Constabulary display a commitment to reducing threat, harm and risk to victims of domestic abuse. They tend to understand their role in this although, as mentioned earlier, there is some lack of clarity about what the specialist team is responsible for. Some domestic abuse perpetrators that present a particularly high risk to victims are brought to the attention of frontline and neighbourhood staff, through a project known as Operation Comfort. These teams can then be given specific tasks to manage the risk and protect victims, for example through carrying out more visible patrols around where they live.

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

Suffolk Police has some good systems and a comprehensive approach to managing victims' safety, but there are some areas for improvement.

The police and crime commissioner (PCC) is keen to improve services for domestic abuse victims and is working with police and partners to do this. However, we found it is not always clear who is responsible for updating victims when perpetrators are released from custody and who will re-assess risk as a result of this. This could result in a victim being contacted by a number of people, or not contacted at all, and the force and partner agencies being unaware of increased risk.

'Operation Comfort' identifies the highest risk cases of domestic violence and informs local neighbourhood officers of how they can help to reduce the risk and deal with the perpetrators. Local officers were aware of some high risk cases in their areas through this operation, but they may not be aware of all of them.

The force has a robust process for learning lessons from domestic homicide reviews nationally. It will routinely review its own processes in light of the reviews and where necessary improve them in line with the national recommendations.

The force has generally effective systems and a comprehensive approach to managing victim safety, but there are areas which it could strengthen to better manage future risk. The first relates to responding to changes in level of risk when a perpetrator is released from prison. There is a lack of clarity about who

is responsible for informing a victim when a perpetrator is released from prison, having served a sentence. It is essential that victims are updated prior to a release from prison and that their levels of risk are re-assessed in light of this. In some cases, the domestic abuse team will receive this information and update victims, in others, the officer who dealt with the case may do this – but there is no clear policy. As a result it is possible that some victims may not be updated at all before a perpetrator is released. In addition, there may not be a proper understanding of the victim's risk once the perpetrator is released, and new safety measures may not have been put in place. Because of this lack of clarity on who is responsible, a victim might also be contacted by a number of people, which could again be an issue for them.

When a perpetrator is charged with an offence and the case is waiting to be heard in a court, then the victim may be updated by the IDVA; however, in Suffolk there are only two IDVAs for the county, which means that this is unlikely to happen. Should a perpetrator be bailed by a court, then the victim may not be updated, as the police themselves may not be made aware of the release. If the victim is not updated their level of risk will not be reassessed at this critical time and there will be no opportunity to put in place any measures to reduce the risk and keep the victim safe.

The second area that needs strengthening is routine follow-up with victims who are no longer contacting the police. Where there have been no further calls from victims who have historically been victims on a number of occasions, there is no mechanism enabling the force to understand why they have stopped calling.

The force has started tackling domestic abuse perpetrators more systematically. Operation Comfort identifies those perpetrators who are assessed as presenting the greatest risk to victims, based on information available to police and the probation service. It provides a briefing for staff about the perpetrators, including what officers could do to help manage this individual, and provides intelligence to better understand the risk they pose. This was piloted in the force and is now being rolled out but is not yet fully operational in all areas. Operation Comfort concentrates on a small number of high risk cases, but this may mean that the awareness of other high risk cases is limited.

Neighbourhood officers and staff are given briefings by their supervisors which includes reference to high risk domestic abuse perpetrators in their area. This is generally focused on those perpetrators identified in Operation Comfort. While this process is helpful, it does not cover all high risk cases and some perpetrators and victims living in the county may not be known to local officers unless those officers are required to attend an incident.

The superintendents who lead for protecting vulnerable people in Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies meet on a regular basis to discuss opportunities for implementing best practice, training and recommendations from domestic homicide reviews consistently across the two forces. An example of the force changing its practice include intelligence checks by call takers to establish whether there is anybody at the address of a domestic abuse incident who holds a firearms certificate.

The PCC's target for reducing repeat victimisation for domestic abuse in the police and crime plan is measured as part of the performance processes within the force. The inclusion of domestic abuse in performance management arrangements is being developed with Norfolk Constabulary. This will include a detailed analysis of domestic abuse offending. It is important that the force has appropriate information, on which it can base its decisions on where to allocate staff. Offender profiles should be available in the near future which will help neighbourhood officers understand who the high risk offenders are in their area. Currently the force monitors how many arrests are made; how many cases are detected; and whether a perpetrator is charged. Although one of the most important measure for the force is how victims feel about the service they have received, there has been no work to date which gives the force a good understanding of this.

Recommendations

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

1. The force should review the training currently provided to staff to ensure all staff understand coercive control, stalking, harassment and so-called honour-based violence.
2. The force should review how investigations are allocated in order that the most experienced and best-equipped investigators are assigned the investigations with the highest risk of harm, rather than simply the most serious crimes.
3. The force should consider how multiple contacts with victims, by different officers or police staff and other agencies can be streamlined to provide a better service for the victim.
4. The force should review the investigative process for domestic abuse to ensure that officers collect all available evidence to help build strong cases against perpetrators.
5. The force should review a number of standard risk incidents to confirm that they are graded appropriately.
6. The force should review the process by which repeat standard risk cases are identified, and put in place arrangements for monitoring, to ensure risk assessments accurately reflect the level of risk, and consider how to identify better early warning signs of escalation.
7. The force should review the means by which victims are updated if a perpetrator is released from custody and ensure that risk assessments and safety plans are reviewed at this stage.
8. The force should work with the PCC and partner agencies to increase the numbers of independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) available to work with victims in the county.
9. The force should publicise the role of the specialist team in order that all staff understand what it does and how it can help make victims safer. The force should clarify the role of the ISVA, where sexual violence has been part of a domestic abuse incident, and clarify who is responsible for dealing with the domestic abuse element of the crime.

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.