



Sussex Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

© HMIC 2014

ISBN: 978-1-78246-372-6

www.hmic.gov.uk

Introduction

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

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

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

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

“any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

*The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:*⁴

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

¹ Walby, S. (2009). *The cost of domestic violence*. Retrieved from:

www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost_of_domestic_violence_update.doc

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

http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This report details what HMIC found in Sussex 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 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 Sussex⁷

Calls for assistance



In Sussex, domestic abuse accounts for 4% of calls to the police for assistance. The force was unable to provide the number of these calls that were from repeat victims.

Crime

8%

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

16%

Sussex recorded 249 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 39 were domestic abuse related. This is 16% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Assault with injury

37%

The force also recorded 6,651 assaults with injury, of these 2,436 were domestic abuse related. This is 37% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

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

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

Harassment

50%

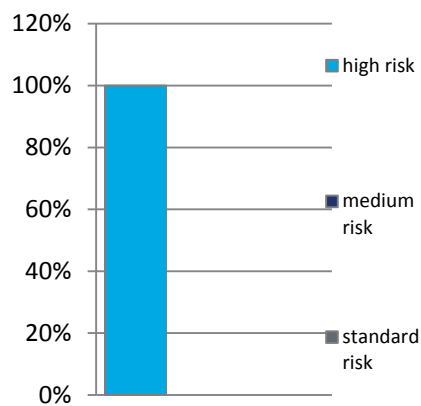
The force recorded 953 harassment offences, of these 479 were domestic abuse related. This is 50% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

16%

The force also recorded 1,670 sexual offences, of these 262 were domestic abuse related. This is 16% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



On 31 August 2013 Sussex had 211 active high risk domestic abuse cases. The force was unable to provide the number of medium and standard risk cases active on this day.

Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 55 arrests in Sussex. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Outcomes



Sussex recorded 7,018 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 25% resulted in a charge, 16% resulted in a caution and, 2% had an out of court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

Responding to and preventing incidents of domestic abuse is a priority for the Sussex Police. This stems from the police and crime commissioner and chief constable, and runs through the Police and crime plan. The force has plans to improve its response to domestic abuse. This includes developing a programme to target serial domestic abuse offenders, as well as surveying victims to fully understand any opportunities to improve. Although there are some pockets of good practice, there are areas which require substantial improvement in order to provide a consistent quality of service and minimise the risks to victims. These include improving the information being provided to officers who attend incidents of domestic abuse, and the subsequent number of risk assessments which are being re-graded.

Staff demonstrated a good level of commitment to keeping victims of domestic abuse safe, and awareness of the importance of doing so. The force has developed very strong links with partner agencies and is providing a good joined-up response.

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

The force has developed strong strategic partnerships with other agencies across Sussex including the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and local councils, as well as the voluntary sector. This has meant there are meetings that are well designed to scrutinise the existing arrangements for tackling domestic abuse, as well as looking at opportunities to improve the service to victims.

Identifying victims

Victims of domestic incidents are normally identified by the force when they contact the police control room, although a victim may also attend a police station or be referred by other agencies such as housing providers or social care. The force takes domestic abuse incidents very seriously, and they are responded to as a high priority.

Call takers in the control room have had training to help them gather as much information as possible, so that they can assess the risk to a victim and provide the most appropriate response. The force has also introduced a set of questions which the call taker must ask to identify any concerns. The force command and control system also undertakes an automated search of the address and the telephone number of the caller; this allows the call taker to identify instantly any previous incidents which have been reported to the police.

The control room staff are responsible for searching police databases to gather any further information about the caller, offender, location or risk to children at the address. However, not all staff in the control room are trained to access all of the police databases, meaning that the officer attending the incident may not be provided with the most complete and up-to-date information.

Keeping victims safe

Tackling domestic abuse is regarded as a priority for the police and crime commissioner and the force. The force has worked well with partners to raise awareness within its communities and encourage victims to come forward and report domestic abuse.

Sussex Police was the first force to be awarded White Ribbon status in recognition for its campaign to promote awareness of domestic abuse.

Officers who attend incidents of domestic abuse are committed to assessing effectively the risk to victims and taking positive action, although there is limited understanding of the range of safety measures available to manage risk. There are good levels of supervision from the initial stages of the incident through the investigation process.

Although there has been some training for officers and staff on domestic abuse it has been delivered on a departmental basis, and is therefore patchy. There is not an overall force training programme.

Management of risk

The force has set up dedicated teams to deal with high risk domestic abuse incidents. Victims at high risk of serious harm or murder get a good service and are supported by the force and independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs). The service provided to victims of domestic incidents assessed as medium or standard is varied across the county. The main focus of officers from the response investigation team (RIT) is to investigate any offences, meaning there is less emphasis on safety planning and keeping the victim safe.

The force's specialist staff in the adult protection team (APT) re-assess the risk assessments for all incidents assessed as high or medium risk by the attending officer. They also review a sample of standard risk incidents, to assure the quality of the process. The number of domestic abuse incidents which were re-graded following this re-assessment is of concern, as it means that staff are not recognising the level of risk at the time of reporting, which may mean that victims do not get the level of support they need; the force needs to understand the reasons behind this.

The APT takes on the responsibility for investigating and the victim safeguarding for all high risk incidents. Standard and medium risk incidents are dealt with by the response investigation team. There is a good response from the force to high risk victims, however for medium and standard risk, there is more of a focus on the investigation, rather than on safety planning for the victim.

The force has developed good relationships with partners, and the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) are regarded as working well, which means that information is exchanged effectively; risks are assessed; and actions are put in place to support the victim. The force and partners are planning to further strengthen this joint approach to supporting victims through the establishment of a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) in each of the county's three districts.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

The force works well in partnership with other agencies and there are good structures in place to enable joined-up work to support victims and keep them safe. The force has recognised that it needs to do more work to manage proactively the behaviour of domestic abuse perpetrators in order to reduce reoffending; there are currently only limited programmes in place. There is an innovative pilot perpetrator programme running in Sussex which seeks to identify and manage serial domestic abuse perpetrators.

The force's process to learn the lessons from domestic homicide reviews is failing to ensure that learning is systematically shared across the force and as a result, recommendations from reviews are not being acted upon. This is of concern.

The force has recently introduced a way to survey victims of domestic abuse. Undertaken by IDVAs it will help the force to hear and understand the victim's perspective of their services and identify any opportunities to improve.

Findings

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

Victims of domestic incidents are normally identified by the force when they contact the police control room, although a victim may also attend a police station or be referred by other agencies such as housing providers or social care. The force takes domestic abuse incidents very seriously, and they are responded to as a high priority.

Call takers in the control room have had training to help them gather as much information as possible, so that they can assess the risk to a victim and provide the most appropriate response. The force has also introduced a set of questions which the call taker must ask to identify any concerns. The force command and control system also undertakes an automated search of the address and the telephone number of the caller; this allows the call taker to identify instantly any previous incidents which have been reported to the police.

The control room staff are responsible for searching police databases to gather any further information about the caller, offender, location or risk to children at the address. However, not all staff in the control room are trained to access all of the police databases, meaning that the officer attending the incident may not be provided with the most complete and up-to-date information.

Members of staff in the police control room have been trained to establish whether the caller is reporting an incident which falls into the national definition for domestic abuse. As part of its domestic abuse strategy, the force has also developed a comprehensive guide for staff, to assist when they receive the report of an incident of domestic abuse. The guide includes advice to staff about: what action they should take if there are children involved; disputes over property; as well as including the national definition of domestic abuse.

Sussex Police has introduced a set of questions to support the call taker to recognise the level of risk to the victim as well as assessing whether they are vulnerable in any way. Force policy means that the questions must be completed for every incident. It is also used by the control room staff to assess how quickly the officers should respond to the incident. However, the question set does not include any enquiry to establish whether the victim has been subject to previous incidents of domestic abuse whether reported to police or not. By relying only on checking police intelligence databases the call taker may not identify repeat victimisation for a caller who has been abused previously and not reported it to police, or who has recently moved to the area. This is of concern.

The force attends all domestic abuse incidents as a grade 1 immediate response, unless the call taker can ascertain that the victim is safe, and there are no concerns that the offender will return immediately. This means that officers should arrive at the incident within 15 minutes. HMIC listened to a small sample of calls and found operators were helpful, polite and professional in how they dealt with the victim. In all cases where the perpetrator was still at the scene, the incident was allocated an immediate response. However, only a limited level of detail of the action taken was recorded on the incident log, which may not provide the full picture if there are any repeat incidents in the future. In one incident, despite the suspect still being present, the call taker did not stay on the line to the victim until the arrival of police officers, nor did they provide immediate guidance on how the caller could best protect themselves until the police arrived.

Although the force has a robust process for the supervision of domestic abuse this may not be translating into practice. There is inconsistent supervision of the incident record (which is the log kept detailing the call) and what police are doing to respond.

Once the call taker enters the details of the incident, the force command and control system undertakes an automatic search of the caller's address and telephone number, this will then provide the details of any previous incidents. The force also uses history markers, which identify to the call taker if there has been a previous incident. These markers can be linked to an address or a specific street, so when a victim contacts the control room to report an incident, the staff will be aware instantly of previous incidents. Although the use of history markers is a positive way of instantly alerting the control room staff to a potential increased risk, there is not a process to review whether the history marker is still relevant, for example when a victim has moved house. This may lead to a wrong assessment of the level of risk or vulnerability faced by a victim.

When a call comes into the police control room, the call taker is expected to check the police systems to see if there is any information available which would influence the assessment of risk to the victim. The police systems hold information including whether the victim had previously reported an incident, information relating to children in the house or whether anyone in the address holds a firearm. However, not all staff in the control room have been trained in accessing all of the force's databases. While some history will be covered by the call taker using the question set and the automated search, it means that the level of intelligence and information provided to the officers attending the incident is inconsistent at best. Officers may not have the most up-to-date or complete information when they attend an incident, which may affect their assessment of risk, their ability to identify the victim if there is a counterclaim ('she/he hit me first') and the subsequent action they take.

The force takes domestic abuse incidents very seriously and they are responded to as a high priority. Domestic abuse incidents are normally attended by response officers and generally receive an emergency or priority response, which means that officers attend quickly. In some circumstances, the force policy does allow for a scheduled appointment to be made. In order for an incident of domestic abuse to become a scheduled appointment, rather than an immediate or priority response, the divisional supervisor must make contact with the victim. During the call they must offer safety advice and undertake a new risk assessment. If the divisional supervisor deems it is appropriate to delay police attendance for a scheduled appointment, the police must still attend within 24 hours. Planned appointments are arranged by the force appointment scheduling unit (FASU) which will prioritise domestic abuse incidents. When a scheduled appointment is made and the victim fails to attend or cancels, the incident will be allocated for an officer to visit the victim in order to ensure they are safe.

The force has provided a dedicated unit to respond to incidents of domestic abuse, which is staffed with an independent domestic abuse adviser (IDVA), which means the victim gets specialist support more quickly. This is commendable good practice.

Sussex Police has a good level of supervision of domestic abuse incidents. Initially they are supervised by staff within the police control room who have responsibility to ensure the correct response and action has been taken. District supervisors are also informed of all grade one and two incidents (emergency and priority). The control room supervisor will retain responsibility for the incident until they are sure it is under the control of the district teams' supervision. Within the police control room there is a dedicated quality control team who undertake regular audits of incidents. Domestic abuse incidents are included as part of the audit. Calls are listened to and assessed to ensure that the call taker deals with the incident appropriately, is professional and displays empathy and sympathy. Again this is commendable good practice.

Staff within the police control room receive training as part of their initial course when they first start working for the police. This includes training on how to respond to incidents of domestic abuse. Training in the expanded definition for domestic abuse⁸ was delivered to control room staff during their scheduled training days. However, control room staff have not had any further training in domestic abuse and when they provide safety advice for victims, this is based on experience and professional judgement rather than training and guidance.

⁸ The nationally accepted definition of domestic abuse is provided by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). It was broadened in April 2013 to include people aged 16 years and over (formerly over 18 years); and introduced coercive controlling behaviour into the definition of domestic abuse.

This means that the force cannot be confident that victims are getting a consistent quality of advice at this critical stage.

The force defines repeat victimisation as two or more incidents in the previous twelve months. Control room staff recognise that being a repeat victim will influence the risk assessment but the precise force definition of repeat victimisation is not widely known by staff. The three police areas maintain a spreadsheet to track repeat incidents but knowledge of how the force responds to repeat victims is inconsistent among staff.

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

Tackling domestic abuse is regarded as a priority for the police and crime commissioner and the force. The force has worked well with partners to raise awareness within its communities and encourage victims to come forward and report domestic abuse.

Sussex Police was the first force to be awarded White Ribbon status in recognition for its campaign to promote awareness of domestic abuse.

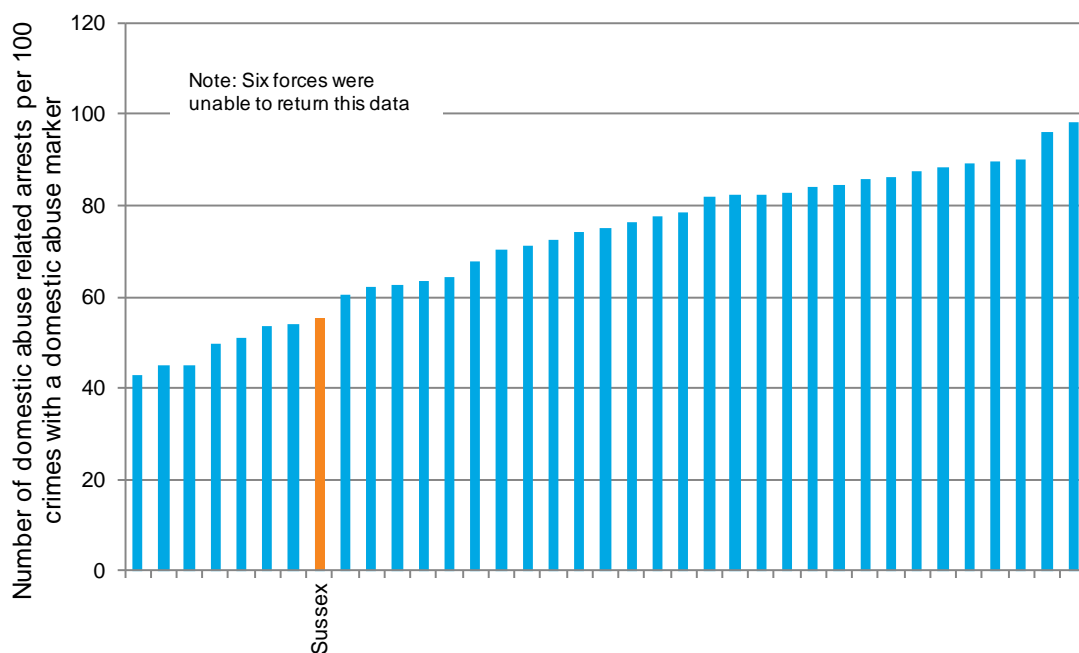
Officers who attend incidents of domestic abuse are committed to assessing effectively the risk to victims and taking positive action, although there is limited understanding of the range of safety measures available to manage risk. There are good levels of supervision from the initial stages of the incident through the investigation process.

Although there has been some training for officers and staff on domestic abuse it has been delivered on a departmental basis, and is therefore patchy. There is not an overall force training programme.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 55⁹ arrests in Sussex. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90. The low arrest rate compared to other forces indicates that this is an issue the force may want to review.

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

Figure 1 : Number of domestic abuse related arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013¹⁰



Source: HMIC data collection.

Domestic abuse is a priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the force; there are specific references to domestic abuse as an objective under tackling community priorities in the PCC’s police and crime plan. The importance of domestic abuse is also reflected in the force’s operational delivery plan, which sets out how the force will deliver services to the communities of Sussex. This is reinforced by messages to staff as well as highlighting domestic abuse on the force intranet.

Responding to domestic abuse is also a priority for the crime and disorder partnerships across Sussex. The force has, in the last 12 months, launched a campaign to raise awareness and increase the reporting of incidents of domestic abuse, this has included use of social media such as Twitter.

Sussex is the first force in the country to receive White Ribbon status for its response to domestic abuse. The White Ribbon campaign is a global campaign designed to ensure that men take more responsibility for reducing the level of violence against women. This means the force has been recognised for their work in raising awareness which includes working closely with: other partners,

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

education programmes with schools, the local community, as well as with local sports organisations.

Through the White Ribbon award and the reinforcement from chief officers, the staff are clear that responding to domestic abuse is a priority. The force works to achieve 'the Sussex standard' which underpins the values expected of staff. It includes an expectation that the views of the victim will be considered when making decisions.

Although staff have been trained to understand domestic abuse, this has been delivered on a departmental basis. The force does not have an overarching training strategy and has not undertaken a training needs analysis to assess the level of knowledge particularly in respect of the coercive and psychological control aspects of domestic abuse.

The relatively low arrest rates – 55 arrests for every 100 domestic abuse crimes – may suggest that positive action is not translating into operational practice.

In order to understand and respond to incidents of domestic abuse, the force has largely relied on staff undertaking computer-based self-learning packages, together with targeted communication through individual emails and messages. HMIC is recommending that in the future, domestic abuse training should be face-to-face, rather than online.

Information about the new definition for domestic abuse (which was introduced in 2013) was communicated to staff by email and messages on the force intranet. The computer-based packages, have been used to raise awareness across the force of stalking and harassment offences, as well as on undertaking domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessments. The force has invested in training for the 120 officers and staff working in the response investigation team (RIT). The RIT has responsibility for investigating medium and standard risk incidents, and therefore deals with the majority of domestic abuse reported to the force. However, as there is no overarching strategy, it means that training is, at best, inconsistent across the force.

The force requires that attending officers undertake formal risk assessment at all domestic abuse incidents. Officers and staff are committed to using the DASH risk assessment tool for all incidents of domestic abuse. It is clear that staff understand the reasons why it is important to complete the DASH risk assessment and why they are asking the questions of the victim.

When a domestic abuse incident is reported into the police control room, the call taker will seek to establish whether children are present. The question set developed by the force requires the call taker to ascertain the location of the children. It is force policy to ensure that the welfare of children is taken into consideration when dealing with domestic abuse, and also to ensure a referral form is completed and forwarded to partner agencies such as children's

services. In August 2013, the force audit and review team undertook an analysis of whether the referral was being routinely completed. The report concluded that there was room for improvement and that the submissions of referrals were inconsistent; it made four recommendations including raising awareness with staff to ensure there is greater compliance in the future. These recommendations are now being implemented.

In response to domestic abuse the control room will send two officers, wherever possible. This means that they are able to speak to each party separately, gaining a fuller understanding of what has taken place. The force expects that officers will take positive action, but there was a concerning lack of understanding amongst staff about what this actually means. A significant number of staff interviewed as part of the inspection, interpreted positive action as meaning arresting the offender.

It is the responsibility of the initial attending officer to undertake safety planning in order to ensure the safety of the victim and others present. However there has been limited training for frontline staff to help them understand what measures they can put in place to safeguard the victim. Officers generally rely on personal experience. The force has produced a training video to raise staff understanding of risk and effective safeguarding, however, very few frontline staff had seen it.

On completion of the DASH risk assessment by the attending officer, it will be reviewed by the frontline supervisor.

Sussex Police has invested in over 450 sets of body-worn video cameras, which are used by officers to capture evidence when they attend incidents. It is force policy to make use of these video cameras at incidents of domestic abuse. This is good practice as it can often provide strong evidence to support the victim's account. It may also enable a prosecution to go ahead without the need for a victim's statement, for example, where the victim is too frightened to give evidence. The use of this type of video evidence is relatively new and the force would benefit from drawing up a protocol with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to ensure it can be admitted into court proceedings.

The force has set up an adult protection team (APT) which is made up of officers who have responsibility for investigating all domestic abuse incidents which have been assessed as high risk. The officers and staff within the APT are accredited investigators. Having a dedicated specialist team has ensured there is greater consistency in how victims are dealt with.

For medium and standard risk domestic abuse incidents, where a suspect has been arrested, the matter will be dealt with by a staff member from the response investigation team (RIT). The RIT deal with 80 percent of all domestic abuse incidents in Sussex. There is a good level of supervision of the investigations of domestic abuse. This means that decisions as to the most appropriate way to

deal with the offender are supervised, leading to a consistent approach. HMIC reviewed a small number of files and found that the quality of investigation was good, with lines of enquiry appropriately pursued. One of the files included evidence from body-worn video in support of the prosecution.

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

The force has set up dedicated teams to deal with high risk domestic abuse incidents. Victims at high risk of serious harm or murder get a good service and are supported by the force and independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs). The service provided to victims of domestic incidents assessed as medium or standard is varied across the county. The main focus of officers from the response investigation team (RIT) is to investigate any offences, meaning there is less emphasis on safety planning and keeping the victim safe.

The force's specialist staff in the adult protection team (APT) re-assess the risk assessments for all incidents assessed as high or medium risk by the attending officer. They also review a sample of standard risk incidents, to assure the quality of the process. The number of domestic abuse incidents which were re-graded following this re-assessment is of concern, as it means that staff are not recognising the level of risk at the time of reporting, which may mean that victims do not get the level of support they need; the force needs to understand the reasons behind this.

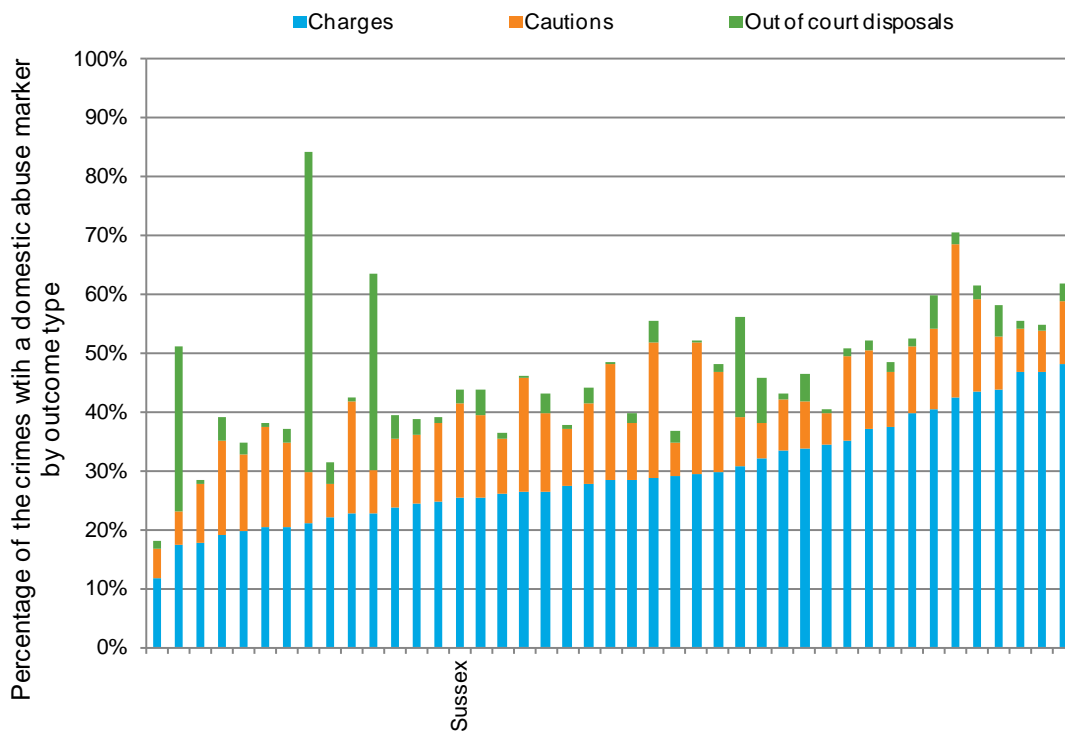
The APT takes on the responsibility for investigating and the victim safeguarding for all high risk incidents. Standard and medium risk incidents are dealt with by the response investigation team. There is a good response from the force to high risk victims, however for medium and standard risk, there is more of a focus on the investigation, rather than on safety planning for the victim.

The force has developed good relationships with partners, and the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) are regarded as working well, which means that information is exchanged effectively; risks are assessed; and actions are put in place to support the victim. The force and partners are planning to further strengthen this joint approach to supporting victims through the establishment of a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) in each of the county's three districts.

Sussex recorded 7,018 domestic abuse related crimes¹¹ for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 25 percent resulted in a charge, 16 percent resulted in a caution and 2 percent had an out-of-court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

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

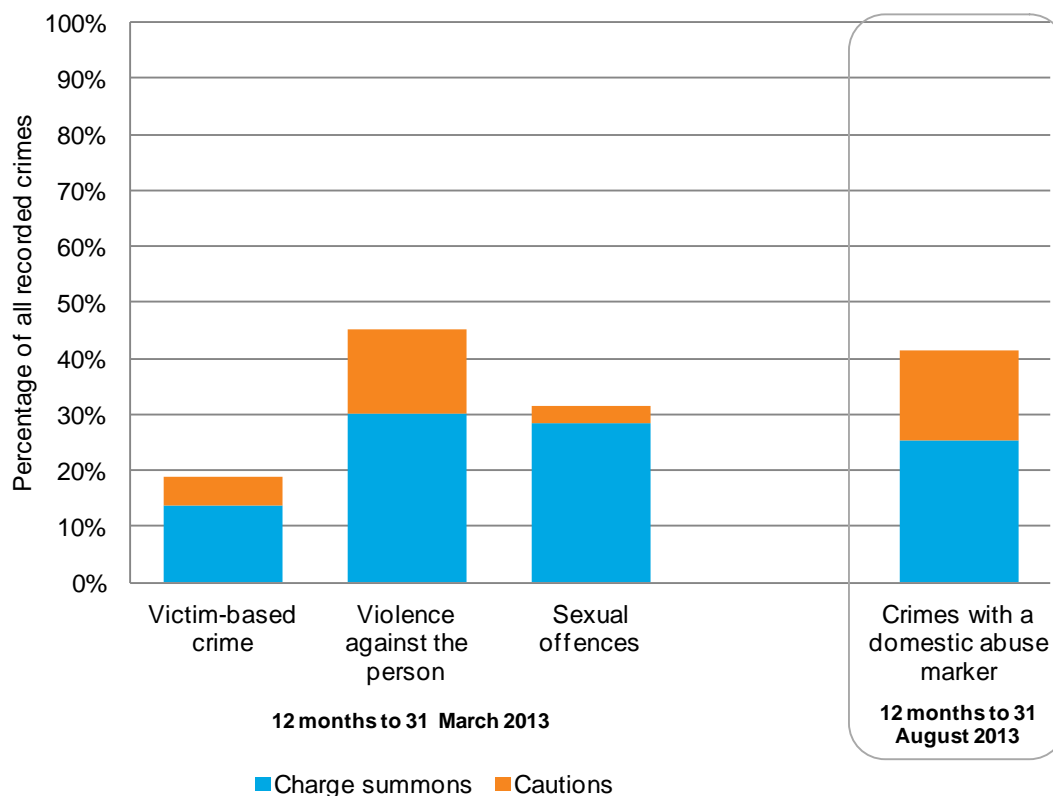
Figure 2 : Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013



Source: HMIC data collection

Sussex 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 3: Percentage of charge summons and cautions used for victim-based crime, violence against the person, sexual offences and all crimes with a domestic abuse marker¹²



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

Sussex Police has invested in an adult protection team (APTs) which is staffed by specialists who have responsibility to take on the management of all domestic incidents which are assessed as high risk. They manage all aspects of the incident including investigation and safeguarding the victim. The RIT have responsibility for the investigation of all other domestic abuse incidents where an offender has been arrested. There is a good response from the force to victims of high risk domestic abuse, however for medium and standard risk there is more of a focus on the investigation, rather than safety planning for the victim.

In addition to directly managing the high risk incidents, staff in the APT also have responsibility for undertaking a secondary risk assessment of all DASH forms which have been determined as either medium or high risk by the initial attending officer. They also undertake dip samples of DASH assessments which are standard risk. This is done in order to assure the consistency and

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

accuracy of the assessments. In order to re-assess the DASH form, APT staff will use additional information available from partner agencies such as health, education, children's and adults' social services. This means that they have a better picture of the risk to the victim. Staff in the APT are accredited investigators, but they have not had any enhanced training in risk assessments and are more reliant on using the experience they have gained.

Members of staff expressed concern that DASH risk assessments were often downgraded from high to medium upon review by the APT. This is despite robust levels of supervision of the initial risk assessment by the attending officer's sergeant, prior to submission to the APT for secondary review. Between 1 September 2012 and 1 March 2013, the force completed more than 13,000 DASH risk assessments, of which, over 10 percent had the category changed. Although most were downgraded, a sizeable number were upgraded. This suggests that a sizeable proportion of victims are not being correctly risk assessed at the outset, and as a result, may not be getting the appropriate level of safeguarding at the initial attendance. This is of considerable concern. It is possible that APT officers are downgrading risk ratings, in order to reduce the demand on APT resources in managing high risk cases. If this is the case, then this is not acceptable. The force should undertake a more in-depth review to determine the position quickly; that said the fact that the force are making secondary risk assessments is positive.

The APTs are based in each of the three geographical policing areas across the county: West Sussex, East Sussex, and Brighton. The force is currently working with partners in order to develop a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) in each area, to provide a better service to victims. This hub 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. Across the county, the progress of the plans are at different stages; in Brighton a project officer has already been appointed and it is expected that the MASH will go live in July 2014. In West Sussex, it is expected that a MASH will commence in late 2014, although the force is already working in co-locations with some partners. The plans for East Sussex have yet to be developed.

Sussex Police has worked hard to develop strategic partnerships with other agencies who deliver services to support the victims of domestic abuse. The pan-Sussex domestic abuse group has membership from across the county including adult and children's services, education, health, as well as the voluntary sector.

Although there is a positive approach and a strong commitment to work in partnership, the responsibility for who should provide continued support and updates to the victim is unclear. Victims are likely to be contacted and get updates from a variety of sources including the attending officer, the

investigating officer, independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs), a witness care officer, a victim support worker, as well as other partner agencies if children are involved. This can be confusing for the victim and can lead to the victim losing confidence and disengaging with police, potentially placing them at greater risk. The force has recognised this as a concern and is currently developing plans to make responsibility for contact and support for the victim much clearer and more efficient.

When a high risk victim is identified, the case is referred to the next multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). There are currently seven MARAC meetings held. There is good engagement from other agencies but there is concern in East Sussex that some health service partners are not fully engaged.

The number of referrals into the MARACs has risen over the last year by 14 percent. This was in response to a report by Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA), who had reviewed Sussex MARACs and had identified that the number of referrals was low, particularly from the lesbian and gay community. The increase in cases coming before the MARACs, has led to concern from the partners, that the increasing number of referrals is not sustainable. This is due to the level of resources required to manage the process. In West Sussex they have implemented a 'MARAC-plus' meeting which allows the partnership to devote more time to dealing with the most serious domestic abuse risks. Across the county there is a MARAC steering group which has responsibility for overseeing the countywide response.

When a referral is made to the MARAC, police and partners report that they work well together in seeking to reduce the risk to the victim, as well as taking responsibility for relevant actions. However, there is not a review process after actions are allocated to agencies. This means the level of risk to the victim is not re-assessed collectively between the agencies, and the success of an action is not known by other agencies. A case would only be brought back to the MARAC if there was a further incident, this is a concern.

There are good working relationships with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The force and CPS have set up a joint scrutiny meeting. The members of the group have responsibility to develop jointly how domestic abuse incidents are taken through the judicial process. There was recognition that Sussex had one of the highest attrition rates in the nation for domestic abuse. This means that cases were not continuing to trial for a number of reasons, one of which, for example, was found to be that the victim was disengaging, due to the length of time required to bring the case to trial. The group has worked hard to reduce the attrition rate.

Within Sussex there are specialist domestic violence courts, however there is concern that they are unable to deal with domestic abuse cases in a timely

manner, with examples of a six-month wait before a matter comes to trial. This means that victims lose confidence in the system. The force has worked with partners locally and has recently introduced a pilot scheme whereby there is a target of bringing a domestic abuse case from charge to trial within eight weeks.

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

The force works well in partnership with other agencies and there are good structures in place to enable joined-up work to support victims and keep them safe. The force has recognised that it needs to do more work to manage proactively the behaviour of domestic abuse perpetrators in order to reduce reoffending; there are currently only limited programmes in place. There is an innovative pilot perpetrator programme running in Sussex which seeks to identify and manage serial domestic abuse perpetrators.

The force's process to learn the lessons from domestic homicide reviews is failing to ensure that learning is systematically shared across the force and as a result, recommendations from reviews are not being acted upon. This is of concern.

The force has recently introduced a way to survey victims of domestic abuse. Undertaken by IDVAs it will help the force to hear and understand the victim's perspective of their services and identify any opportunities to improve.

The force recognises that more needs to be done to work with domestic abuse offenders to manage their behaviour and reduce the risk of their reoffending. The available provision of perpetrator management programmes is limited. For example, where an offender is sentenced to a term of imprisonment of under 12 months, currently there is no programme designed to support the perpetrator in breaking the cycle of offending.

Sussex Police has put in place a pilot serial perpetrator programme in order to track and manage those offenders who commit offences of domestic abuse against more than one victim. The programme is based on the work undertaken by Police Scotland and seeks to target the top ten highest risk offenders in each of the districts in Sussex. The programme will benefit from bringing in partner agencies. The serial perpetrator programme is innovative and represents good practice.

HMIC is concerned that the force does not currently have a process in place to ensure that the victim of domestic abuse is informed when an offender is due to be released from prison. This can be a critical time in terms of an increased risk to the victim and it is important that they are updated, and that their safety plan is reviewed to take account of the new risk. The force has recognised this as a

concern and has developed a process to monitor all releases from prison. This is due to be implemented shortly. This should ensure that the victim is made aware and that a further risk assessment will be undertaken, in order to provide necessary support and safety measures.

The force has a well-developed tasking process which includes daily management meetings where the response to domestic abuse incidents is considered. The force performance unit identifies details of repeat victims and offenders. These are then passed from the force performance unit to each of the three divisions. HMIC saw evidence that staff were informed of these details, and in some cases, re-assurance visits were undertaken, however the response is inconsistent. The force has recently undertaken a review of how it monitors its performance in respect of domestic abuse. This has led to the performance department regularly producing a document which includes number of offences; arrests; as well as details of the top ten highest risk offenders and victims.

Sussex Police has had three recent domestic homicide reviews (DHRs). The force has established a process where any recommendations and learning, which is identified as part of a review, is discussed and developed through the review and contingency meeting. The review and contingency meeting is a multi-agency group which is chaired by the force head of crime. However, there is little knowledge of the process, and the lessons learned have not been shared systematically throughout the force, to ensure that improvements in practices and processes can take place. As a result the force has failed to respond to the recommendations and learning from some domestic homicide reviews. This is of considerable concern.

The force has recently introduced a process to undertake quality of service surveys with victims of domestic abuse. The survey is undertaken by the IDVAs and provides the force with a real opportunity to hear and understand the views of victims of domestic abuse and to shape its service accordingly.

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 consider how it ensures attending officers are supplied with as much information as possible when they deal with domestic abuse incidents. Currently this information is not available as control room staff have not been trained in using the force intelligence system. Officers should be given more information when they are attending incidents, for example, whether there has been a previous domestic abuse incident or whether there are children at the address. This would allow them to make a more accurate assessment of the level of risk to the victim.
2. The force should provide greater clarity for staff over what is considered positive action. Staff currently interpret this as arresting the offender, which means that opportunities for safeguarding the victim may be missed.
3. The force should review the training delivered to staff about domestic abuse. In particular, ensuring that staff receive appropriate training in coercive and psychological control, stalking and harassment and so-called honour-based violence.
4. The force should consider how to raise the levels of knowledge of staff in how best to undertake effective safety planning, this should include what options are available. The increased awareness and action would reduce the levels of risk for victims.
5. The force should streamline the contacts made with victims. Currently, the victim may be contacted by all or one of the following: the officer in the case, victim support, witness care, IDVA, or a neighbourhood officer. This can be confusing for the victim and may lead to them disengaging with the services.
6. The force should urgently evaluate the reasons why so many DASH assessments have the level of risk altered on review by the APT. DASH risk assessments are always completed by the attending officer but HMIC has concerns about their accuracy, due to the level of re-grading both upwards and downwards. The number of re-graded assessments is significant, meaning that officers are not recognising the correct level of risk, and victims may not be getting the level of support they require.

7. The force should review urgently how it monitors the conclusions from domestic homicide reviews to ensure that any recommendations are acted upon. Although the force has a process to consider recommendations, they have not always been followed, meaning the force is not learning from past mistakes.
8. The force should consider how it can better measure how effective it is in responding to incidents of domestic abuse. The current focus is on quantity, for example, on attrition and arrest rates. The force has not undertaken a countywide problem profile on domestic abuse, which would help shape its overall response, instead relying on more local analysis.

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.