



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

West Midlands Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This report details what HMIC found in West Midlands Police and at the end of the report we set out some recommendations. These recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for all forces made in the national report.⁶ A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

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

Domestic abuse in West Midlands⁷

Calls for assistance



In West Midlands, domestic abuse accounts for 8% of calls to the police for assistance. The force was unable to provide data for the number of calls for assistance from repeat victims.

Crime

8%

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

16%

West Midlands recorded 1,415 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 229 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

31%

The force also recorded 16,736 assaults with injury, of these 5,192 were domestic abuse related. This is 31% 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

48%

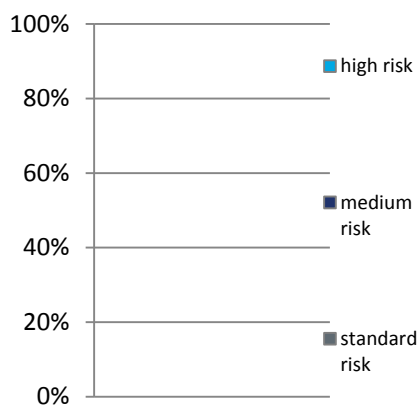
The force recorded 3,351 harassment offences, of these 1,614 were domestic abuse related. This is 48% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

8%

The force also recorded 2,885 sexual offences, of these 242 were domestic abuse related. This is 8% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



The force did not provide data relating to the number of high, medium and standard risk cases they had active.

Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 50 arrests in West Midlands.⁸ For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

⁸ West Midlands Police have stated that their domestic abuse flagging is not consistently used on their custody system so their data may be inaccurate.

Outcomes



West Midlands recorded 13,715 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 32% resulted in a charge, 6% resulted in a caution and, 8% had an out of court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

HMIC found that West Midlands Police is providing some good services when identifying and tackling domestic abuse. There is clear and positive leadership to improve the way it deals with domestic abuse. It has invested well in improving its understanding of the scale and nature of domestic abuse in its communities, and there are some proactive and innovative practices and projects providing a focus on keeping victims safe which are contributing to a shift in culture of the organisation.

However, there are still some areas where improvements can be made to strengthen the services to victims. The approach to risk assessment is fragmented, leading to confusion, and the force cannot be confident that all victims are consistently getting access to the services they need from the police and partners.

Identifying victims

Most calls for police response to domestic abuse are received by the force control room. HMIC found that there are good systems within the control room to identify victims who have previously reported domestic abuse. Staff are trained to question callers in order to understand the likely threat, harm and risk to the victim or anyone else who may be present. They can access the force intelligence systems and inform the attending officer so they are prepared for the situation they will find themselves managing. However, the numerous electronic databases the operators can access are not integrated, so they need to check a number of different systems to find the relevant information. The control room operators usually send a uniformed officer immediately or within an hour, dependent on their assessment of the risk.

The force does not use specific criteria to define or identify domestic abuse repeat or vulnerable victims, however all staff recognise that any previous report of domestic abuse or circumstances making the victim especially vulnerable will influence the service provided.

The initial quality of service provided to victims from the control room is not subject to any formal review. Supervisors and specialist staff review the victim risk assessment forms for all high and medium risk assessed incidents. There is no robust review of the domestic abuse incidents in the absence of a risk assessment form or when a victim has been assessed as standard risk. There is an expectation that frontline supervisors will attend all serious and repeat incidents of domestic abuse, but this expectation is not adhered to consistently across the force area.

Keeping victims safe

The force treats tackling domestic abuse as a priority and has invested in the training of staff to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to provide a good standard of service to victims. The force has reviewed its approach and is implementing an action plan to improve services. There is a revised force domestic abuse policy in draft awaiting final implementation which was due to be launched in December 2013. The assistant chief constable maintains a regular oversight of the implementation of the action plan to ensure the standard of service to victims of domestic abuse is maintained and improved.

The force uses the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool when considering the risk of harm to domestic abuse victims, including all so-called honour-based violence offences and incidents. However, officers are only required to carry out formal victim risk assessments where a crime has been committed involving intimate partners or ex-partners.

The officer is expected to make a judgement in all other circumstances on whether or not to complete a DASH risk assessment. HMIC found that this causes confusion and leads to inconsistencies. A formal risk rating from a DASH risk assessment triggers involvement of partner agencies and specialist support to victims. There is no robust quality assurance process in place to monitor whether they are consistently making the right decision. The force cannot be confident that all victims are consistently receiving appropriate services from either the police or partners.

Management of risk

HMIC found that there are good processes in place to share information with partners and support the needs of children present in households where domestic abuse occurs.

The force provides a comprehensive and enhanced service to the victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as being at the greatest risk of harm. Specialist safeguarding and public protection teams have the oversight and support the safety planning and investigations relating to the victims assessed as high and medium risk. The resilience for the safeguarding teams over the weekend period is provided by public protection officers who fulfil the safeguarding tasks in the absence of the safeguarding staff. However, while committed to these tasks they are prevented from effectively carrying out their core duties.

There are good relationships between the police and partner agencies. The force is actively engaged in nine local multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs), where information is shared, and partners' support for victims assessed as high risk is discussed and planned. The administrative support for the MARACs across the force area is inconsistent. This means those MARACs operating without a dedicated co-ordinator or administrator are unlikely to be as effective as others and places a greater burden on the role of the chair.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping victims safe

HMIC found that the force is continually seeking to improve the service to domestic abuse victims. It has worked hard to understand who is suffering domestic abuse in its communities. The force uses data and intelligence well to help them understand the scale and nature of domestic abuse across the West Midlands. They have invested in the analytical resources needed to produce profiles and plans to reduce harm and also to encourage victims to come forward and report their abuse to the police. There are innovative projects underway which focus on victims and improving their safety. This commitment to victims has contributed to a positive shift in force culture.

The force also recognises the need to focus on those perpetrators who cause repeated harm. In one local policing area, it is looking at ways to identify 'serial perpetrators' and to manage them in a similar way to how persistent offenders of other types of crime are managed. This area of work requires development for the rest of the force.

The force is keen to learn the lessons identified in domestic homicide reviews and recommendations are reviewed and acted upon with necessary improvements in processes and practices being implemented and monitored. For example, the force is trialling a project where officers and mental health workers jointly respond to incidents where mental ill health is a factor and where harm is threatened or likely. A mental health worker, a paramedic and a police officer are available inside a 'mental health response' car. There is good leadership and oversight of the learning process to ensure it takes place and is part of staff training.

Findings

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

Most calls for police response to domestic abuse are received by the force control room. HMIC found that there are good systems within the control room to identify victims who have previously reported domestic abuse. Staff are trained to question callers in order to understand the likely threat, harm and risk to the victim or anyone else who may be present. They can access the force intelligence systems and inform the attending officer so they are prepared for the situation they will find themselves managing. However, the numerous electronic databases the operators can access are not integrated, so they need to check a number of different systems to find the relevant information. The control room operators usually send a uniformed officer immediately or within an hour, dependent on their assessment of the risk.

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Victims of domestic abuse are identified by West Midlands Police through calls to their police control room, attendance at stations or by other agencies, such as health and children services, at a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). The majority of incidents and crimes are reported through the police control room. Within the control room there are 'call handlers' and 'resource allocation and dispatch officers' (RADs). The call handler undertakes the initial assessment of the circumstances of the call against a generic risk assessment process to determine the level of risk and to 'grade' the required police response.

All domestic-related incidents are graded along with other incident types on a case-by-case basis. Calls can be graded as 'immediate', 'early response', 'routine' and 'diary'. The majority of domestic abuse calls receive an immediate

or early response. Any classified as routine or diary must be reviewed by a control room supervisor to ensure that this slower response is appropriate. Call handlers have a 'prompt' checklist when dealing with callers in a vulnerable situation which includes questions around 'how frightened is the caller?' An abandoned or silent call will always be attended.

There is no agreed force definition of either a 'repeat' victim or 'vulnerable' victim of domestic abuse, although staff spoken to understood the importance of how repeat and vulnerable status influences the risk assessment of the victim. This lack of clarity as to definition creates a risk that repeat and vulnerable victims of domestic abuse may receive an inconsistent level of service. If there is no specified definition, the force cannot properly understand how many victims are in these categories, which may hinder their ability to produce a strategy to mitigate the risk to them.

Call handlers and RADs have access to the various force databases: intelligence systems, incident logs, domestic abuse records and police national databases which inform their assessment of risk to a caller at the first point of contact. They use the information to equip the attending officers with the necessary information. Generally officers felt that they were provided with good quality intelligence when attending incidents. However, as the force electronic databases are not integrated currently, the extent of information obtained is at the discretion of the individual call handler or RAD, depending on the time available and their knowledge and expertise. A search tool is being introduced known as 'E-Notes', this will assist an operator in quickly searching for any information held, using a telephone number, location, victim or offender name. The force is currently piloting an overarching search tool 'Discoverer' that will effectively search the individual force systems to identify previous domestic abuse calls and associated risk levels.

Training is mandatory for all staff that have contact with victims of domestic abuse, including the control room staff in receipt of the initial call. Staff have undertaken national training on domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and so-called honour-based violence, using an electronic training package produced by the College of Policing. Completing the training package is monitored by the force to ensure timely completion by staff. The control room staff have dedicated training days and have used these to improve domestic abuse awareness with support from their public protection unit (PPU) staff.

'Live-time' supervision takes place in the control room and the supervisor supports call handlers and RADs in the higher risk incidents and crimes. There is no process to assess the quality of service or action taken by the control room staff when responding to reports of domestic abuse. Therefore, the force does not know whether they are dealing consistently with victims, and

empathetically and correctly assessing the risk to a victim at the first opportunity, so that the appropriate advice and response is provided.

The force has invested a great deal of resource in the supervisory role, and the expectation is that supervisors scrutinise all crime types on local policing areas. Guidance and training has been provided to enhance supervisory skills around vulnerability and the risk of threat and harm, which includes domestic abuse. HMIC found that the initial response to domestic abuse incidents and the service provided by frontline officers was supervised robustly in some local policing areas, but that this was not consistent practice across the force. Supervisory roles and responsibilities are further reinforced in the new force domestic abuse policy which was about to be launched at the time of the inspection.

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

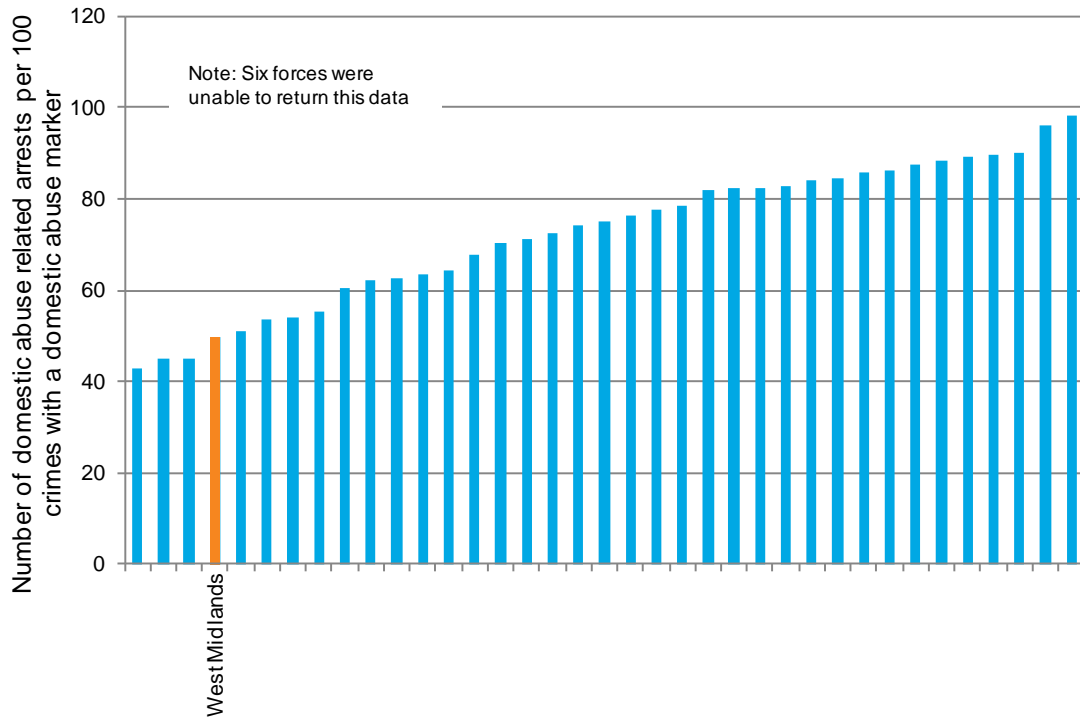
The force treats tackling domestic abuse as a priority and has invested in the training of staff to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to provide a good standard of service to victims. The force has reviewed its approach and is implementing an action plan to improve services. There is a revised force domestic abuse policy in draft awaiting final implementation which was due to be launched in December 2013. The assistant chief constable maintains a regular oversight of the implementation of the action plan to ensure the standard of service to victims of domestic abuse is maintained and improved.

The force uses the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool when considering the risk of harm to domestic abuse victims, including all so-called honour-based violence offences and incidents. However, officers are only required to carry out formal victim risk assessments where a crime has been committed involving intimate partners or ex-partners.

The officer is expected to make a judgement in all other circumstances on whether or not to complete a DASH risk assessment. HMIC found that this causes confusion and leads to inconsistencies. A formal risk rating from a DASH risk assessment triggers involvement of partner agencies and specialist support to victims. There is no robust quality assurance process in place to monitor whether they are consistently making the right decision. The force cannot be confident that all victims are consistently receiving appropriate services from either the police or partners.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 50 arrests⁹ in West Midlands. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90. This low arrest rate compared to other forces indicates that this is an issue the force may want to review.

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



Source: HMIC data collection.

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the force and the police and crime commissioner (PCC). It is documented in the PCC's police and crime plan and the force's strategic assessment and control strategy. The assistant chief constable chairs a domestic abuse strategic meeting which leads the activity to improve services. The force is implementing a force action plan for improvements and there has been a complete review of the force domestic abuse policy, which was in draft form at the time of the HMIC inspection.

⁹ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems. West Midlands Police have stated that their domestic abuse flag is not consistently applied on their custody system. This could mean their data is inaccurate.

The force domestic abuse training has been reviewed and additional training provided where required. All staff spoken to by HMIC inspectors said they had received training. They were particularly complimentary about the innovative theatre group domestic abuse training that had recently been delivered. The investment in the training of officers and staff who attend incidents of domestic abuse and those who have contact with victims, reinforces the focus the force has placed on effectively tackling domestic abuse. All officers have received training on the force values, on vulnerability and on the national decision model, which has provided a greater understanding of the impact their response has on the victim. The training of sergeants has been prioritised to increase their understanding of their responsibility in supervising incidents that present the greatest risk of harm.

HMIC found that supervisory attendance at domestic abuse incidents across the force is inconsistent. Some sergeants believe it is force policy for them to attend high risk or repeat incidents and do so, others attend when capacity allows. Some had no knowledge of an attendance policy for supervisors and rarely attend. The force has already recognised the need to demonstrate clearer leadership and the newly developed force policy will mandate supervisor attendance at high risk and repeat incidents though it is currently still in draft format.

The risk assessment used for domestic abuse incidents in the West Midlands is the one used by most police forces and approved by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool. The officers complete the DASH questions on a template after a discussion with the victim. The answers provided, along with the officers' professional judgements, are the basis for deciding the risk level that is applied to a victim. This relates to the risk of harm posed to the victim and will be defined as high, medium or standard.

The force policy requires mandatory completion of a DASH risk assessment when a domestic abuse crime has been reported between intimate partners or ex-partners. It is the decision of the attending officer whether a risk assessment should be completed for any other domestic abuse reported incident that does not amount to a crime. Officers do not have to complete a DASH risk assessment for domestic abuse crimes or incidents involving victims who are not the intimate partner or ex-partner of the perpetrator. The officer should still ask pertinent questions to make a decision whether a DASH risk assessment should be completed. This has created confusion among some officers and dissatisfaction from some of the partner agencies that HMIC inspectors met.

Officers are applying inconsistent criteria when deciding whether or not to complete risk assessments and therefore not complying with the policy. The

formal risk assessment and risk grading, triggers information-sharing actions and dialogue between police and partner agencies. There is a possibility that some victims who may be at risk of harm are not referred to partner agencies nor are they in receipt of specialist police resources because no formal assessment takes place. The force appears to have a low proportion of victims assessed as high risk compared with the total number of incidents (five percent compared with the charitable organisation Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) expectations of ten percent).

The force policy details that 5 percent of the standard risk assessments should be subject to a dip sample by the safeguarding sergeants. This is not consistently applied; some safeguarding sergeants review every standard risk assessment, others indicated that they do not have the capacity to carry out the dip sampling. The force does carry out a regular audit to identify compliance with the DASH policy, but this is reliant on the information recorded on the incident log. It does not have a robust process to quality assure the consistency of the risk assessments of victims who are assessed as standard risk.

HMIC found that there was a strong focus on the welfare of children involved in domestic abuse incidents. The force takes into consideration the protection of children when dealing with domestic abuse and has adopted good practice to ensure their individual needs are met. Frontline officers establish if any children are in the house when attending reports of domestic abuse, if present, they check their welfare. The details of the children are forwarded to force child protection officers. Children who are present at a domestic abuse incident are risk assessed using the 'Barnado's screening tool' and information is shared with health and children services. This is known as a joint screening process, a professional discussion about every child takes place and action is taken if safeguarding or support is needed for that child.

The attending officers determine the risk grading from the DASH risk assessment at the scene and are required to take appropriate immediate action to safeguard the victim. They must then submit the form to their sergeant before they go off duty. Frontline supervisors are required to review all completed DASH risk assessments. They can alter the grade and provide guidance and support on the safeguarding measures and investigative opportunities for the domestic abuse incidents attended. It is their responsibility to provide the details of all high risk victims to the inspector who may direct additional actions and consider against the force threat to life policy.

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

HMIC found that there are good processes in place to share information with partners and support the needs of children present in households where domestic abuse occurs.

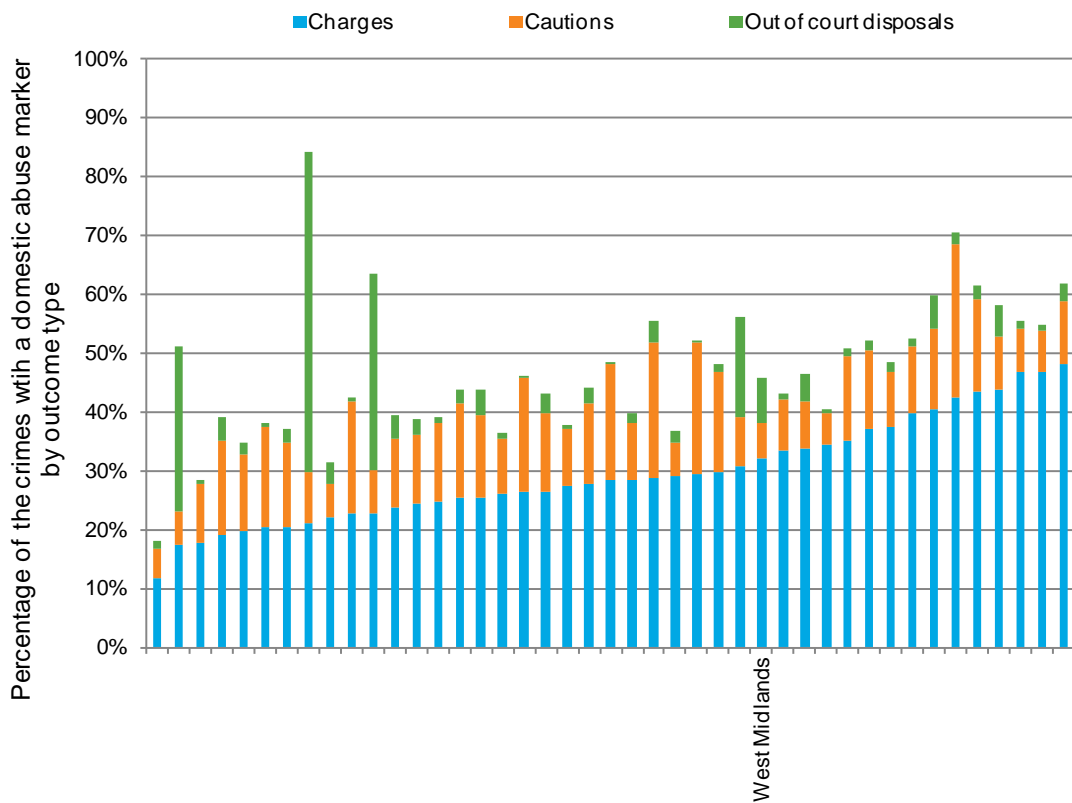
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There are good relationships between the police and partner agencies. The force is actively engaged in nine local multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs), where information is shared, and partners' support for victims assessed as high risk is discussed and planned. The administrative support for the MARACs across the force area is inconsistent. This means those MARACs operating without a dedicated co-ordinator or administrator are unlikely to be as effective as others and places a greater burden on the role of the chair.

West Midlands recorded 13,715 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 32 percent resulted in a charge, 6 percent resulted in a caution and 8 percent had an out-of-court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.¹⁰

¹⁰ 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 2013¹¹

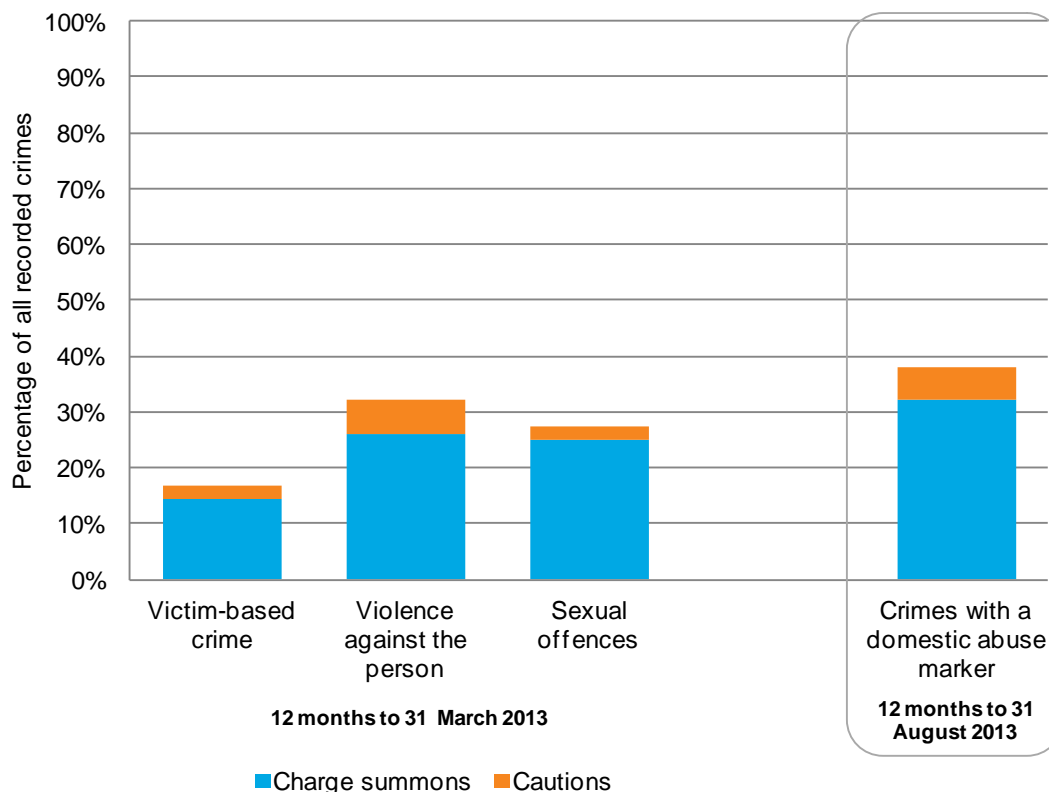


Source: HMIC data collection.

West Midlands 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.

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

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



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

The force employs specialist public protection officers who provide expertise in the management of vulnerable victims. The specialist team considers the protection and support for the victims at highest risk of harm which include domestic abuse victims. They carry out the criminal investigations, keeping the victims informed throughout the process. There are public protection officers located in each of the ten local policing units (LPUs).

There are also teams of specialist safeguarding staff in each LPU who are responsible for reviewing all the high and medium risk domestic abuse assessments, they oversee the safety planning for victims and make referrals to

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

partner agencies where necessary. In most cases the team work with local neighbourhood officers and agree contact plans with the victims. Following the initial attendance and risk assessment, a high risk victim must be contacted within one day and a medium risk victim within five working days of the initial report. This provides consistent oversight of the police activity already taken and of the assessments of all high and medium risk victims. Currently the safeguarding team do not work at weekends, when the review of the risk assessments falls to the PPU staff. This means they cannot effectively fulfil their core role during the weekend.

The force is committed to reducing the harm caused by domestic abuse and works in partnership to achieve this. There are seven local authority areas in the West Midlands Police force area and local senior officers attend their retrospective community safety partnerships providing local ownership and accountability for the services in their area.

There are, in total, nine multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) covering the seven local authority areas. MARACs provide an opportunity for partner agencies to meet on a regular basis to consider high risk victims of domestic abuse, to share all available information and to agree a co-ordinated set of actions from all relevant agencies to support and safeguard victims. In addition to the police, representatives include health services, local authority children's services, housing and the IDVA service. Seven of the nine MARACs are held on a fortnightly basis and two on a monthly basis. The MARAC is chaired by the detective inspectors that work in the public safeguarding teams in each of the LPU's. Every victim that has been assessed as high risk should be referred to a MARAC for multi-agency consideration.

The attendance and engagement at MARACs is good. The support available to the MARACs differs across the force's geographic area, as funding for MARAC co-ordinators and administrators varies between local authorities. Only two of the MARACs have co-ordinators and there are insufficient administrators. The MARACs would be more effective if there were dedicated co-ordinators and administrators for each conference. There is no overarching steering group that governs the processes or resourcing in the local MARACs, but the force is working with the national advisory body for MARACs (CAADA) to carry out an independent assessment of their practices.

All high risk victims are referred to independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) who also attend the MARACs. HMIC found the relationships between the police and IDVAs was generally good but there were some concerns from IDVAs about the delay in some victim referrals to them.

The high risk victims are discussed at the local daily briefings held across the force. Some of the high risk cases are further discussed at the PPU and force daily briefings. However there is a greater focus on managing the perpetrators rather than the actions to support the victims. In addition, there is greater priority placed on the perpetrators of serious acquisitive crime than the perpetrators of domestic abuse.

The force does have established practices that support vulnerable victims, which include a sanctuary scheme where victims can remain in their own home, but are provided with additional security measures. Schemes such as police watch and cocoon watch introduce additional patrols and contact from local police and neighbours to provide victim support and reassurance.

HMIC found inconsistencies with the practices of neighbourhood officers; in some areas they review every domestic abuse incident so that they know of all the activity in their neighbourhood and can engage with the victims and keep track of the perpetrators. This is not replicated everywhere. Neighbourhood teams in some areas were not aware of the domestic abuse incidents or the status of the victims and perpetrators in their neighbourhoods.

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

HMIC found that the force is continually seeking to improve the service to domestic abuse victims. It has worked hard to understand who is suffering domestic abuse in its communities. The force uses data and intelligence well to help them understand the scale and nature of domestic abuse across the West Midlands. They have invested in the analytical resources needed to produce profiles and plans to reduce harm and also to encourage victims to come forward and report their abuse to the police. There are innovative projects underway which focus on victims and improving their safety. This positive commitment to victims has contributed to a positive shift in force culture.

The force also recognises the need to focus on those perpetrators who cause repeated harm. In one local policing area, it is looking at ways to identify 'serial perpetrators' and to manage them in a similar way to how persistent offenders of other types of crime are managed. This area of work requires development for the rest of the force.

The force is keen to learn the lessons identified in domestic homicide reviews and recommendations are reviewed and acted upon with necessary improvements in processes and practices being implemented and monitored. For example, the force is trialling a project where officers and mental health workers jointly respond to incidents where mental ill health is a factor and where harm is threatened or likely. A mental health worker, a paramedic and a police officer are available inside a 'mental health response' car. There is good leadership and oversight of the learning process to ensure it takes place and is part of staff training.

Following an arrest, perpetrators are interviewed, and either released from custody or remanded to appear at court. The risk to the victim is reviewed to ensure the safeguarding measures in place are sufficient. It is the responsibility of the investigating officer to inform the victim of what is happening to the perpetrator and consider any additional safeguarding measures. When perpetrators are being released from prison they are discussed at force tasking meetings and victims are informed and risk levels reviewed.

The force is keen to understand the domestic abuse profile of the communities they police. They have carried out a detailed analysis of the scale and nature of domestic abuse across the West Midlands and produced a report known as a problem profile. This is supported by more detailed profiles that provide information about the type of victims who are most affected by domestic abuse. The force now understands that domestic abuse is under-reported and has

adopted a mature approach of encouraging victims to report, even though this increases the numbers of recorded violent crime. The force monitors the reporting at its quarterly performance meetings, where the increase in domestic abuse reporting is viewed as a positive step along with the decrease in repeat victimisation.

The force has recognised the need to take more proactive action to better manage perpetrators of domestic abuse, in order to reduce reoffending and minimise the risk to victims. A pilot project is running in one of the force LPUs which provides the opportunity for the MARAC to refer a perpetrator offending against a high risk victim to the integrated management teams (IOMs) in order that IOM partners can jointly agree a plan to reduce the offending behaviour of the perpetrator.

The force is carrying out some innovative work in the Birmingham South LPU. It has developed a domestic abuse repeat victim demand analysis which revealed the amount of time officers spent dealing with domestic abuse and identified the callers who contacted the police the most. It has used the information to focus on the top ten repeats callers for each local neighbourhood area and resources are re-aligned to allow for the extra work. Some of the callers may not be victims of a crime, but still need support and a DASH risk assessment may not have been completed. The teams work jointly with local partners to provide appropriate services and support for the victim. There are structured local partnership meetings which are held weekly to discuss the incidents and action plans are agreed which are monitored by the sector inspectors. Good relationships are maintained with the PPU to ensure a joined-up seamless response.

The same LPU is also running a pilot which provides two dedicated officers on every shift to deal with the victims of domestic abuse. The immediate response is still provided by uniformed response officers; however the dedicated officers immediately follow on, building rapport and supporting the victim. They have the time to obtain a detailed statement of evidence. The dedicated officer role occurs on a rota basis from the response officer teams. They can all enhance their learning and develop a greater understanding of the needs of domestic abuse victims. The pilot has been viewed positively by officers, changing the culture and thinking. PPU investigators have also reported that the initial investigations and safeguarding for victims have improved.

The force strives continually to improve its service to victims of domestic abuse and has identified that abuse increases over the Christmas period. Its tactical operations are intelligence-led and they have made contact with victims from the last 12 months providing reassurance and checking their welfare. The force

ran a vulnerability programme in 2013 in five phases. Domestic abuse was the focus for December.

The domestic abuse task and finish group oversees all the domestic abuse policing activity across the force. This group has identified the difficulties in accessing all relevant information on previous domestic abuse incidents, victims and offenders, as these are currently held on a number of different databases. The group is working on solutions. The force recognises that any enhancement to its technology systems would benefit the staff who deal with reports of domestic abuse. While the force is exploring longer term solutions to its infrastructure, they are attempting to find short-term fixes. The introduction of the 'Discoverer' and 'E-notes' search tools should improve the service.

The force has a structure in place that ensures that they learn from the recommendations from domestic homicide reviews. The assistant chief constable chairs a group of senior officers that provides the direction and governance to change the force's practices where necessary. The learning has featured strongly in the training of supervisors, so they are clear about the consequences of not intrusively supervising incidents that present the most risk.

The force and health partners have identified that some of the recent domestic murders have been committed by perpetrators suffering from a mental health illness. The force is running a pilot where police, mental health workers and paramedics jointly respond to incidents where likely harm is suspected due to an individual suffering mental health illness.

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 to apply a definition for a domestic abuse 'repeat victim' and 'vulnerable victim' to ensure it consistently identifies those most at risk and provide the appropriate service.
2. The force to introduce quality assurance processes in the control room to ensure victims receive an appropriate and consistent service to all reports of domestic abuse.
3. The force to implement a robust quality assurance process that provides consistent reviews of standard risk assessments.
4. The force to communicate the DASH risk assessment policy and ensure it is understood and complied with.
5. The force to conduct qualitative reviews of domestic abuse incidents, including non-crime and between family members other than intimate partners or ex-partners, to establish whether the current ratio of just over five percent of victims with high risk status is accurate.
6. The force engages with partners and reviews the arrangements for MARAC co-ordinators and administrators across the force area to provide a consistent service.

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.