



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

West Yorkshire Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

experts from over 15 forces and those working with victims of domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

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

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

Domestic abuse in West Yorkshire⁷

Calls for assistance



In West Yorkshire, domestic abuse accounts for 7% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 35% were from repeat victims.

Crime

7%

Domestic abuse accounts for 7% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

19%

West Yorkshire recorded 541 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 103 were domestic abuse related. This is 19% 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 11,010 assaults with injury, of these 4,089 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

60%

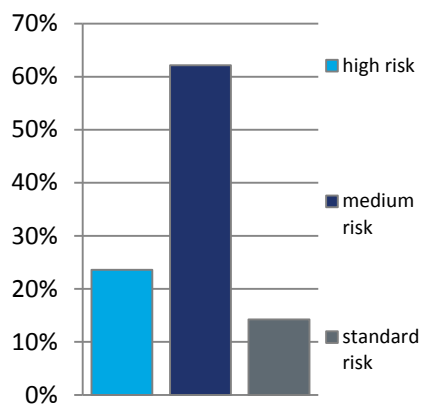
The force recorded 1,511 harassment offences, of these 906 were domestic abuse related. This is 60% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

6%

The force also recorded 2,969 sexual offences, of these 185 were domestic abuse related. This is 6% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



On 01 November 2013 West Yorkshire had 695 active domestic abuse cases; 24% were high risk, 62% were medium risk, and 14% were standard risk.

Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 88 arrests in West Yorkshire for the 12 months to end of August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Outcomes



West Yorkshire recorded 10,690 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 35% resulted in a charge, 14% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

HMIC found that there are some risks in the way West Yorkshire Police deals with victims of domestic abuse. Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the force and it worked well with partners. However, HMIC was concerned that there are a number of inconsistencies in the processes and across the force area, which means that the force cannot be confident that risks to victims of domestic abuse are assessed effectively and measures are put in place to maintain their future safety in all cases. This report outlines a number of areas where the force needs to improve its response.

Identifying victims

Most domestic abuse victims contact the force by telephone and speak to call handlers who are responsible for taking the details and opening an incident log; this log is then passed to the district control room for it to send the appropriate police response. HMIC found that call handlers have received little training in how to understand and deal with domestic abuse incidents beyond the training, which includes an element of domestic abuse, when they start in their job. Similarly, staff on enquiry desks in police stations have had limited specific training on how to recognise and deal with the full spectrum of domestic abuse, and the force cannot be confident that domestic abuse victims are getting the consistent quality of response at this first point of contact.

The force computer systems are able to identify repeat callers and those who have previously been identified as vulnerable; the dispatch staff in the control room carry out all the computer checks and then pass the relevant information to the attending officers. Although HMIC found that incidents are appropriately graded according to risk, there remains a tendency for the dispatcher to put out a general call over the radio to ask which patrol officer can attend, rather than checking the mapping system to send the nearest available resource. This means that the force is not making the most efficient use of its resources and the victim may not get the quickest response possible.

While there was little evidence that the control room supervisor routinely supervises domestic abuse incidents, it was clear that the attending officer would always contact their own supervisor to discuss the incident and the action they took.

Keeping victims safe

Protecting vulnerable people and tackling domestic abuse are clear priorities for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the force. Staff have a good understanding of their importance and take their roles in tackling them seriously.

However, HMIC found a general view among staff that they are not given as high a priority status by the force as some other crimes such as burglary.

There are weaknesses in the levels of training provided to frontline staff and their supervisors. The quality of completed risk assessments is patchy. Although a formal risk assessment is required to be undertaken at the scene, HMIC found that this is often completed by the officers back at the station and may not include all the necessary information. Instead, officers are using professional judgement to determine the risk posed to the victim and the action needed at the scene to safeguard them. This limits the value of the risk assessment to the safeguarding officers when they review it.

While attending scenes of domestic abuse officers, would take great care to consider any children involved including not only those at the house but others who may be staying elsewhere.

HMIC found that there are inconsistencies in the way investigations and victim safeguarding are managed, with an array of different officers and teams potentially being involved depending on the nature of the crime, the risk to the victim and the district the incident occurs in. This leads to confusion and means a victim may be contacted by a range of different officers, all with the same purpose.

Management of risk

The risk grading applied to each domestic abuse case is reviewed by the specialist staff in the district safeguarding unit who use the additional information available to them to ensure the grade is correct. However, in the districts where the volume of cases is high, then those cases initially graded as medium or standard risk may not be given sufficient examination to ensure the appropriate response is given to the victim. The level of additional training provided to the specialist staff is inconsistent across the force, and in a number of units it is insufficient for the responsibility they bear.

The force works very well with the partner agencies who deliver local services for victims of domestic abuse and they also share information, which can ensure that the level of risk is initially reviewed so that the appropriate service to be delivered to the victim.

The level of service provided in high-risk cases appears strong but for medium and standard risk cases it is less evident and inconsistent across the force area. The multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) for each district are well attended by the statutory and voluntary partners with commitments to act to make domestic abuse victims safer. In some parts of the force, neighbourhood

staff support the victims by regularly checking on the bail conditions imposed by the courts on the perpetrators of domestic abuse.

HMIC has concerns that the lack of consistency in dealing with victims of domestic abuse across the force area and at each stage in the process means that the force cannot be confident that victims are getting the quality of service they need from the police in all cases. There are safeguarding units based within each district that review risk assessments of victims and provide specialist safeguarding support. However, the variations in workload means that, in some areas, specialist officers are dealing only with high-risk victims and provide no specialist support at all to standard and medium risk victims. The level of additional training provided to the specialist staff is inconsistent across the force and in a number of units is insufficient for the responsibility they bear.

There are inconsistencies in the role played by neighbourhood policing teams; in some parts of West Yorkshire, neighbourhood staff are involved in supporting victims – for example, by regularly checking on the bail conditions imposed by the courts on the perpetrators of domestic abuse. In other areas, they have little or no involvement.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

The risk to victims of domestic abuse who are being dealt with by the safeguarding unit is well managed; however, they are dealing only with a relatively small proportion of the total number of victims.

There has been limited work done by the force to introduce a consistent approach to managing the most serious domestic abuse offenders, unlike other problem offenders such as prolific burglars, where there are well-established programmes in place to robustly manage their behaviour to prevent reoffending. While local officers are regularly informed about burglary or vehicle crime offenders in their area, it is less likely that they will be provided with similar information about domestic abuse offenders.

There is no systematic, consistent process in place to ensure that the lessons learned from domestic homicides are fed back to all staff and processes and practices improved as a consequence.

The force collects a lot of information about domestic abuse incidents, looking at repeat victims and arrest and conviction rates. Monitoring has revealed significant differences in performance across the force area; however, managers are not yet able to understand fully what leads to these differences and so cannot put in place improvements to services.

Findings

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

Most domestic abuse victims contact the force by telephone and speak to call handlers who are responsible for taking the details and opening an incident log; this log is then passed to the district control room for it to send the appropriate police response. HMIC found that call handlers have received little training in how to understand and deal with domestic abuse incidents beyond the training, which includes an element of domestic abuse, when they start in their job. Similarly, staff on enquiry desks in police stations have had limited specific training on how to recognise and deal with the full spectrum of domestic abuse, and the force cannot be confident that domestic abuse victims are getting the consistent quality of response at this first point of contact.

The force computer systems are able to identify repeat callers and those who have previously been identified as vulnerable; the dispatch staff in the control room carry out all the computer checks and then pass the relevant information to the attending officers. Although HMIC found that incidents are appropriately graded according to risk, there remains a tendency for the dispatcher to put out a general call over the radio to ask which patrol officer can attend, rather than checking the mapping system to send the nearest available resource. This means that the force is not making the most efficient use of its resources and the victim may not get the quickest response possible.

While there was little evidence that the control room supervisor routinely supervises domestic abuse incidents, it was clear that the attending officer would always contact their own supervisor to discuss the incident and the action they took.

Most domestic abuse victims contact the police for help via the force contact centre. Call handlers take the details and open an incident log on the police computer system. Gathering as much relevant information as possible to effectively assess the risk to the victim and send the appropriate police response is vital. However, HMIC found that, because of the volume of calls being dealt with, call handlers often record only the minimum amount of information on the incident log before passing it to the district control room in the area where the incident has occurred, for them to dispatch an officer. They do not use the reminder card created by the force, or the scripts provided within the force command and control system to help them ask relevant questions of the caller. Call handlers have received little training in recognising and understanding the nature of domestic abuse and the force policies. All call handlers receive a programme of training when they start the job and this

includes an element on domestic abuse; however, limited additional training has been provided.

Similarly, police station enquiry counter staff have not received the level of training or awareness to prepare them for the callers to police stations who wish to report domestic abuse, which could be incidents of violence, stalking, harassment or coercion. Because of the volume of callers, these staff appear to have developed a reasonable understanding of the problem and largely use common sense to assist victims. They will create an incident log and refer the person to staff within the force who are better able to help them. However, the force cannot be confident that these counter staff are sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are getting a consistently good response from the police at this initial point of contact.

The force computer system can identify repeat callers but it is not often that this information is used by call handlers to inform the district control room staff when they pass the incident log to them. Once a dispatcher has received the incident log from the call handler they undertake research about any previous police involvement with the victim, the perpetrator and the location. The force computer systems are able to give them information about repeat or vulnerable victims and previous calls to the address, and the national computer system is checked for details about previous offending by the person responsible for the latest incident. The information that is gathered by the dispatcher is routinely passed to the attending officer while they are travelling to the scene or immediately on their arrival, so that they have an understanding of the issues they may face and are able to make an informed assessment of the risk.

Based on the information gathered, the dispatcher in the district control room makes a decision as to how quickly the police need to respond. Domestic abuse incidents are most often graded as needing an immediate response (to be attended within 15 minutes) or a priority response (to be attended within 60 minutes). However, HMIC found that occasionally they are incorrectly graded as suitable for an appointment, which means that a local neighbourhood officer may be sent to a call that requires attendance within 48 hours. The dispatcher in the district control room should search the force incident system and maps to identify the closest available patrol to be sent to an incident. Quite often, the dispatcher will ask over the radio if any patrol is available to attend, rather than use the computer system that can identify where every officer and police car are currently located. This is a cultural issue the force managers are aware of and are trying to influence by reminding control room staff of the correct procedures. However, there remains a situation whereby officers are only deployed to incidents within their own district boundaries and sometimes only within their former divisional boundaries. This can mean that the nearest and most suitable officer is not deployed to an incident of domestic abuse because they are simply

the other side of a boundary. This is not making the most efficient use of police resources and, importantly, means that the response to a victim may be slower than it need be.

Once an officer has been sent to an incident, there was little evidence of a supervisor in the control room monitoring the incident and ensuring the correct actions are taken by staff at the scene. While most of the staff we spoke to during the inspection understood that repeat and vulnerable victims are at increased risk, and were able to describe who would be regarded as a repeat victim, they were less able to define vulnerability. When a victim has previously been identified as vulnerable, staff in the safeguarding unit will place a marker on the police information system attached to that victim's name and address, so that control room staff are alerted to their vulnerability if they call again. Control room staff routinely inform attending officers that there is a high-risk victim involved. It is not usual for a supervisor to attend the scene of a domestic incident, particularly in the busier parts of the force. However, there appears to be universal supervision of incidents using the radio handsets that allow the supervisor to talk to the attending officer directly; this is known as 'point to point'. The supervisor discusses the actions taken by the officer and their assessment of the risk faced by the victim is categorised as high, medium or standard. These details are then passed to the control room so that they can be entered onto the incident log.

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

Protecting vulnerable people and tackling domestic abuse are clear priorities for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the force. Staff have a good understanding of their importance and take their roles in tackling them seriously. However, HMIC found a general view among staff that they are not given as high a priority status by the force as some other crimes such as burglary.

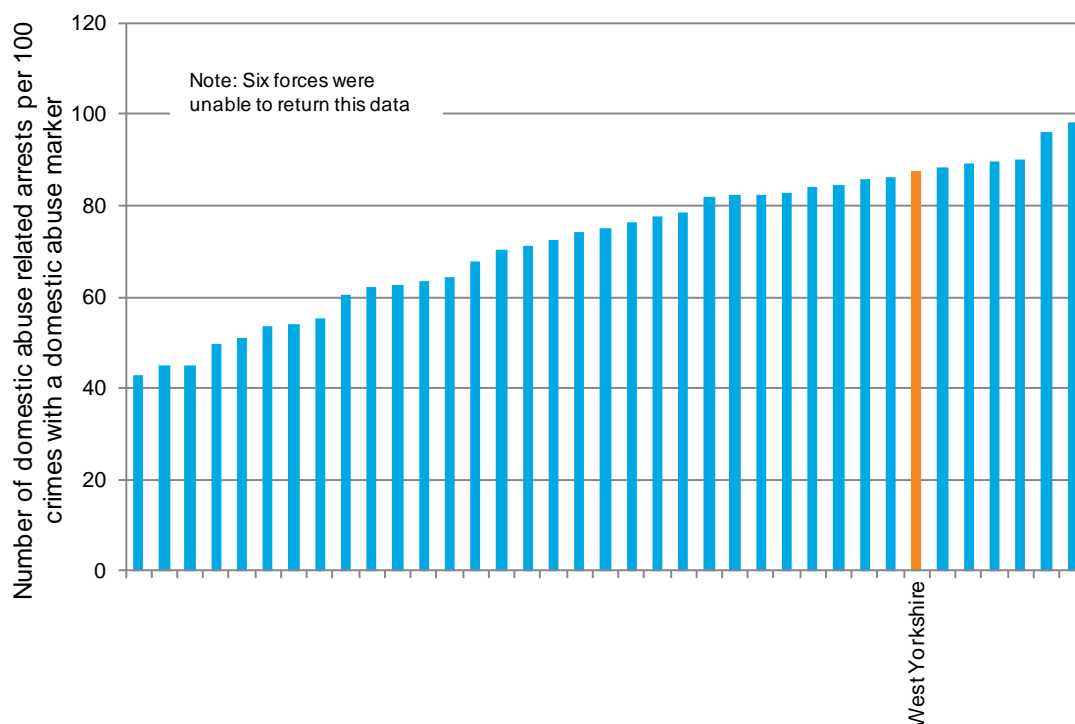
There are weaknesses in the levels of training provided to frontline staff and their supervisors. The quality of completed risk assessments is patchy. Although a formal risk assessment is required to be undertaken at the scene, HMIC found that this is often completed by the officers back at the station and may not include all the necessary information. Instead, officers are using professional judgement to determine the risk posed to the victim and the action needed at the scene to safeguard them. This limits the value of the risk assessment to the safeguarding officers when they review it.

While attending scenes of domestic abuse officers, would take great care to consider any children involved including not only those at the house but others who may be staying elsewhere.

HMIC found that there are inconsistencies in the way investigations and victim safeguarding are managed, with an array of different officers and teams potentially being involved depending on the nature of the crime, the risk to the victim and the district the incident occurs in. This leads to confusion and means a victim may be contacted by a range of different officers, all with the same purpose.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 88 arrests in West Yorkshire for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.⁸

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

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for both the PCC and the force. Protecting vulnerable people is a clearly stated priority in the PCC's police and crime plan

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

and the force also includes it in its annual strategic assessment. HMIC found that staff throughout the force are aware that it is an important priority, and the detailed supervision of incidents is an outward sign to staff that it is taken seriously by senior officers. However, the inspection did reveal that, while domestic abuse is regarded as important, it receives less focus and strategic leadership than other types of crime, such as burglary.

HMIC found that there has been a lack of training for staff in dealing with domestic abuse. Most frontline staff we spoke to during the inspection could not recall much, if any, training about domestic abuse beyond an initial input delivered when they first joined the force. There are online self-learning packages available but their impact has been minimal with few staff able to recall when or if they had completed the courses. Most of the supervisors also said that they had received little or no training beyond that which was delivered when the risk assessment form used at incidents of domestic abuse was introduced some two or three years ago.

Attending officers at domestic abuse incidents are required to undertake a formal risk assessment using the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool and their own professional judgement. The level of assessed risk should inform the actions the officer takes at the scene to safeguard the victim. However, HMIC found that officers typically complete the risk assessment form on a computer when they return to the station. As a result, they may not have gathered all of the relevant information from the victim and the forms can be poorly completed. Staff who need to use the assessment later find problems because some questions have not been asked or the detail recorded is minimal. Even though the risk assessment tool is not consistently used at the scene, HMIC did find that officers are making informed and professional judgements of the immediate risk faced by the victim, and their initial actions are closely supervised either at the scene by their sergeant or through a discussion over the radio from the scene.

HMIC found that frontline officers have a good understanding of their responsibilities to children when attending incidents of domestic abuse. Officers check on the welfare of children present at the scene, elsewhere in the house and any other houses where children of the relationship are situated. They routinely record the details of all children in the relationship onto the DASH assessment form so that, when necessary, referrals could be made to partner agencies involved in the care of children.

Once the risk assessment form is completed, it is transferred onto the case management system (NICHE) where it is reviewed by staff in the safeguarding

units based in each district. There is some duplication of effort in that the DASH risk assessment needs to be input onto two separate systems.

The current force policy requires attending officers to take 'positive action' to minimise the risk to domestic abuse victims. This includes arresting the perpetrator when appropriate to do so. For officers, this often means arresting for a breach of the peace if no other criminal offence is disclosed or confirmed by the victim. Arresting for breach of the peace often leads to difficulties at the custody suite when the custody officer does not accept that a breach of the peace has occurred or is being prevented by the arrest, so the person is released without charge. The force policy specifically states that officers must not remove the perpetrator and take them to another address to calm the situation. It was clear that during the inspection many frontline officers were not following this policy and were indeed taking the perpetrator to another address rather than making an arrest because they thought this was the right thing to do. This course of action is routinely discussed with supervisors by radio and agreed before it takes place. The force would benefit from revisiting this policy, which is uncommon among other forces, and finding a solution that is practical and more easily complied with by staff.

In addition to contacting the attending officer by radio to discuss their actions and assessment, the frontline supervisors often call the victim of domestic abuse at the scene while the officer is still with them. They discuss the actions of the officer and the level of risk to see if the victim is satisfied with everything the force is doing to make them feel safe. It is clear that the level of intrusive supervision in West Yorkshire is stronger than that seen in most forces during these inspections. Once the officer has discussed the case with their supervisor and completed the risk assessment form, they are required to record the name of the supervisor on the form to show that the result has been agreed between them. However, it is uncommon for supervisors to see the completed form, which might explain why the quality of some of them is below an acceptable standard.

HMIC found that there are inconsistencies in the process of managing investigations and the way they are allocated varies across the force area and according to the seriousness of the crime. In some districts, an arresting officer would pass the case over to staff working in the custody suite, who would then interview the prisoner and prepare any subsequent court file. If the offence was a serious one, such as grievous bodily harm, then a member of staff from the local district safeguarding unit may deal with the prisoner or it might be a local detective from the criminal investigation department (CID). Similarly, there are inconsistencies in who takes responsibility for the victim of a domestic abuse case; this varies across districts and according to the level of risk identified. In one district, we found that quite regularly an attending officer, a prisoner

handling officer and a member of the safeguarding unit may contact the same victim on the same day to provide them with an update on their case. This is not only a duplication of effort: it can also be confusing and concerning for a victim and may cause them to lose confidence in the police.

The supervision of domestic abuse cases with or without a prisoner varies across the force area with response sergeants, prisoner handling sergeants, CID sergeants or those from the safeguarding units being responsible for ensuring that the investigation and any subsequent prosecution file meets an acceptable standard. Many of these supervisors have not received any recent relevant training and the quality of the product therefore varies across the force. HMIC found that domestic abuse cases that had been assessed as high risk receive the appropriate level of investigation and supervision. The same could not be said for those cases assessed as medium or standard risk and HMIC were concerned that these cases, which represent the majority, receive insufficient overview and monitoring. There is a risk that, as a result of this lack of oversight and quality assurance, medium-risk cases may be poorly investigated, meaning that an offender may not be brought to justice, thereby placing the victim at greater risk of future harm.

Early in 2014, the force intends to review its safeguarding unit structure. It will be important that this review includes a clarification of roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the process of dealing with domestic abuse throughout the process from initial identification, safety planning, investigation and victim contact.

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

The risk grading applied to each domestic abuse case is reviewed by the specialist staff in the district safeguarding unit who use the additional information available to them to ensure the grade is correct. However, in the districts where the volume of cases is high, then those cases initially graded as medium or standard risk may not be given sufficient examination to ensure the appropriate response is given to the victim. The level of additional training provided to the specialist staff is inconsistent across the force, and in a number of units it is insufficient for the responsibility they bear.

The force works very well with the partner agencies who deliver local services for victims of domestic abuse and they also share information, which can ensure that the level of risk is initially reviewed so that the appropriate service to be delivered to the victim.

The level of service provided in high-risk cases appears strong but for medium and standard risk cases it is less evident and inconsistent across the force area.

The multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) for each district are well attended by the statutory and voluntary partners with commitments to act to make domestic abuse victims safer. In some parts of the force, neighbourhood staff support the victims by regularly checking on the bail conditions imposed by the courts on the perpetrators of domestic abuse.

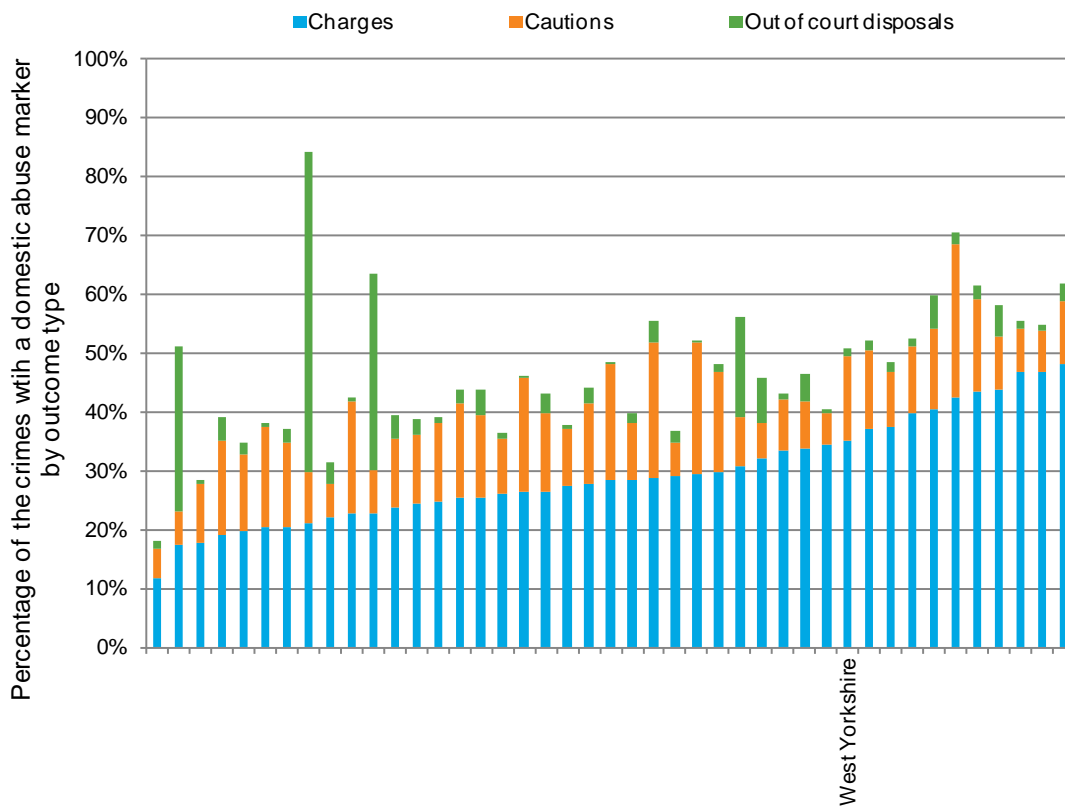
HMIC has concerns that the lack of consistency in dealing with victims of domestic abuse across the force area and at each stage in the process means that the force cannot be confident that victims are getting the quality of service they need from the police in all cases. There are safeguarding units based within each district that review risk assessments of victims and provide specialist safeguarding support. However, the variations in workload means that, in some areas, specialist officers are dealing only with high-risk victims and provide no specialist support at all to standard and medium risk victims. The level of additional training provided to the specialist staff is inconsistent across the force and in a number of units is insufficient for the responsibility they bear.

There are inconsistencies in the role played by neighbourhood policing teams; in some parts of West Yorkshire, neighbourhood staff are involved in supporting victims – for example, by regularly checking on the bail conditions imposed by the courts on the perpetrators of domestic abuse. In other areas, they have little or no involvement.

West Yorkshire recorded 10,690 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013.⁹ Of these crimes 35 percent resulted in a charge, 14 percent resulted in a caution and, 1 percent had an out of court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

⁹ 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 2013¹⁰

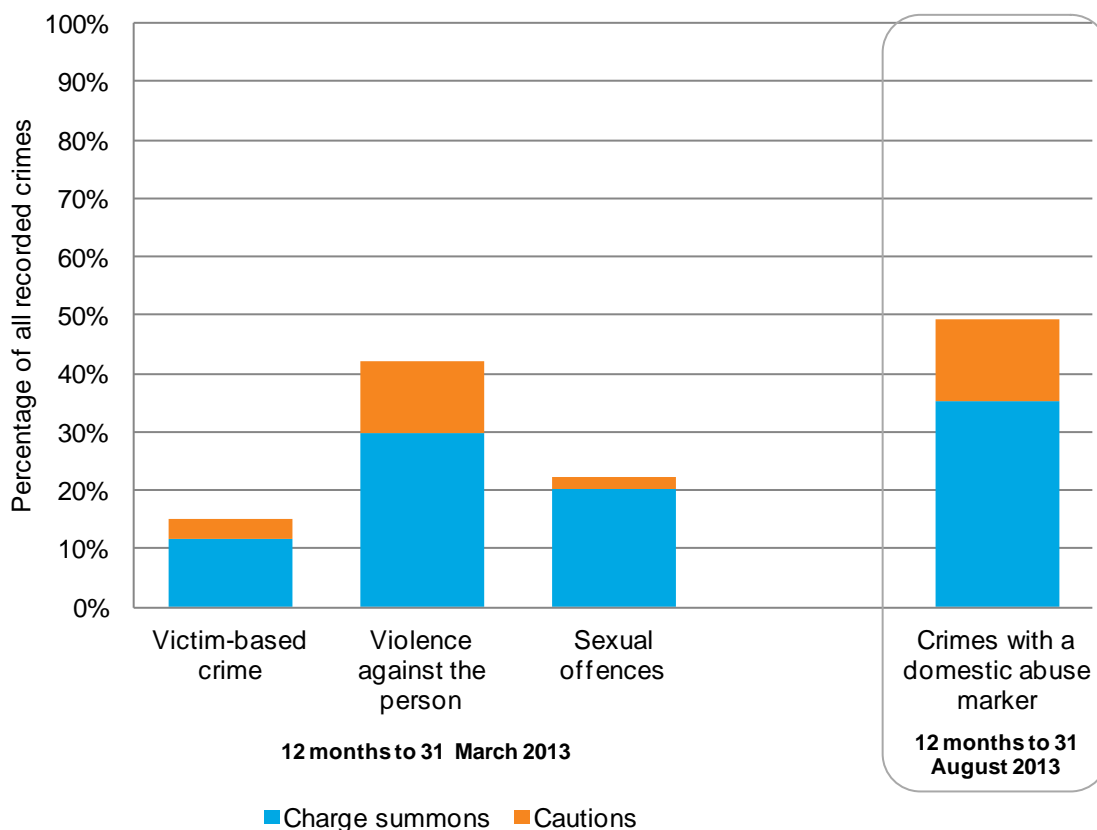


Source: HMIC data collection

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

¹⁰ 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 marker¹¹



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

The force employs specialist officers in the safeguarding units based in each district. The safeguarding officers should review all domestic abuse risk assessments carried out by the attending officers and submitted to them. Staff in the safeguarding units can carry out additional research and checks to add to the information already collected and may reassess the risk differently in the light of additional information. HMIC once again found inconsistencies in this part of the process. There were variations in the review and reassessment of risk between different areas and different officers. In most districts, either a safeguarding officer or member of staff reviews all cases dependent upon the initial risk assessment, the high-risk victims being reviewed by a safeguarding officer and the medium and standard risk ones being reviewed by a member of

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

staff or a clerk. The volume of cases each day determines the level and quality of scrutiny each case receives. In those districts where the numbers are low, then a safeguarding supervisor looks at each assessment form and adds their knowledge and experience to determine the final risk rating. In places where the volume of cases is much higher, high-risk cases are always reviewed but, worryingly, medium and standard risk victims may not be assessed for several days, if at all.

The staffing levels in each safeguarding unit do not appear to match the workload. This means that, because the risk assessments are not routinely seen by the attending officer's supervisor, the force cannot be confident that there is a process in place to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse are being consistently and effectively risk assessed, and that adequate measures are therefore in place to ensure their safety. It also means that there could be a delay in sharing information about victims and their children with partner agencies, thereby preventing victims from accessing other partner services that might support them and minimise the risk they face.

The extent of training for the specialist staff within the safeguarding units varies across the force and a significant proportion have not received the level of investigative training that is common in similar forces. For staff working in this area of policing, it is expected that they have not only been trained to a high level for investigation but also that they have been trained in the complexities of safeguarding so that they understand the needs of all victims of domestic abuse. It is apparent that this type of training, like the investigative training, has not been provided for all of the staff within the units concerned.

HMIC found that the police work well with partners in dealing with domestic abuse. Information is shared with partner agencies including social services, health, education and voluntary organisations which principally support victims but also some perpetrators of domestic abuse. These partner agencies told HMIC that their relationship with West Yorkshire Police was good. They mostly deal with staff in the safeguarding units whom they see and speak to almost daily, but in some parts of the force area they also deal with local neighbourhood officers. However, there were some inconsistencies in receiving risk assessment information; in the main, the partner organisations receive the DASH forms regularly, although sometimes the quality is poor, and on other occasions they do not receive the form at all. Partner agencies contact victims themselves and occasionally a victim may disclose additional information that has an impact on their risk level. The partners inform the police of any change so that the appropriate level of intervention can be taken by the safeguarding units. However, it was not clear that the risk assessments are ever subsequently reviewed.

The volume of cases in some parts of the force mean that the staff in the safeguarding units can only deal with the cases as they come in and do not have the capacity to keep reviewing each case to see if the level of risk has changed. We found that, for those cases initially assessed as high risk, the safeguarding units provide a reasonable service to victims but for medium and standard risk cases the ongoing service is of a much lower standard.

In other parts of the force area where workloads are smaller, the safeguarding units will also deal with some medium-risk cases. This means that victims of domestic abuse may get an inferior service from the police dependent upon where they live. In one district, for example, a recent decision was taken that all medium and standard risk cases would remain the responsibility of the response officers who initially attended the incident. These officers have received no training in victim safeguarding and support. In addition, because of their shift pattern covering 24 hours a day, there will be periods of several days when they are unavailable to victims.

Safety planning is effective for victims who have been assessed as high risk. It includes the provision of additional security features, such as alarms, and a personal visit from a member of the local safeguarding unit, as well as staff from the partner agencies who provide various types of support for domestic abuse victims. The level of safety planning for medium and standard risk victims is less clear across the force with units with lower numbers able to contact their victims and discuss their safety arrangements while other units with a higher volume of medium and standard risk victims are unable to provide such a bespoke service; a letter from the police or a telephone call may be the extent of the service these units can provide.

Each district is served by a MARAC where police and partners meet once or twice each month to discuss the high-risk domestic abuse victims. The detective inspector from the local safeguarding unit will usually chair the meeting, which is also attended by partner agencies such as health, education, social services, victim support and voluntary partners. The MARACs provide the opportunity to formally share information about high-risk victims and jointly agree a co-ordinated set of actions to minimise the risk to the victims and their families. HMIC found that in most districts the process works effectively to safeguard victims, although the volume of cases dealt with varies across the force area. In one district, for example, the high number of referrals to the MARAC means that there is less rigour in following up actions to check they have been completed.

The principal responsibility for the care of domestic abuse victims is perceived to rest with the safeguarding units although, in some parts of the force, local neighbourhood officers do get involved in providing a 'Cocoon Watch' programme. This is where, with consent, officers are allowed to inform the

neighbours of a victim and ask them to alert the police if they see or hear anything that might be suspicious. In one district staff reported that they had not conducted Cocoon Watch for the past three years, while in another it continues as an option for victims. Neighbourhood officers in parts of the force also get involved in checking on offenders who have been granted bail by the courts to ensure that they are abiding by their bail conditions. These checks are allocated and monitored at the daily management meetings that take place in each district.

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

The risk to victims of domestic abuse who are being dealt with by the safeguarding unit is well managed; however, they are dealing only with a relatively small proportion of the total number of victims.

There has been limited work done by the force to introduce a consistent approach to managing the most serious domestic abuse offenders, unlike other problem offenders such as prolific burglars, where there are well-established programmes in place to robustly manage their behaviour to prevent reoffending. While local officers are regularly informed about burglary or vehicle crime offenders in their area, it is less likely that they will be provided with similar information about domestic abuse offenders.

There is no systematic, consistent process in place to ensure that the lessons learned from domestic homicides are fed back to all staff and processes and practices improved as a consequence.

The force collects a lot of information about domestic abuse incidents, looking at repeat victims and arrest and conviction rates. Monitoring has revealed significant differences in performance across the force area; however, managers are not yet able to understand fully what leads to these differences and so cannot put in place improvements to services.

Staff from district safeguarding units discuss with victims of domestic abuse the way in which they wish to be kept updated about their case. This is particularly the case when the perpetrator has been arrested and charged with a criminal offence. This victim contract will determine the extent to which staff from the units maintain contact when a perpetrator has been imprisoned for an offence after domestic abuse. However, safeguarding unit staff do not deal with all victims of domestic abuse; some only deal with those assessed as high risk. When an offender is being released from prison, the information is passed to the local district. Staff then assess the possible risks to victims and put in place

actions to prevent further offences. This process is currently refined for offenders who have committed volume crime offences such as burglary and vehicle crime, but it is less refined for victims of domestic abuse. The force has plans to change this system, which would mean that comprehensive risk assessments are conducted for all domestic abuse offenders when they are released from prison.

The force has done limited work to date to identify serial and serious perpetrators of domestic abuse. The computer systems are able to provide this information but each district has its own process and there is no clarity over what districts are expected to do with regard to managing the most serious domestic abuse offenders in order to reduce their reoffending. Different districts are taking different approaches.

The force does not have a comprehensive response to situations when a victim of domestic abuse who has repeatedly called the force for help then stops calling the police. In some circumstances, the fear among victims is that if they repeatedly call the force, they might face the possibility of having their children taken into care because of the possible harm faced by the children. While some problem solving takes place for high-risk victims of domestic abuse, it does not appear to be as strong for those victims assessed as medium or standard risk.

The force has a much more rigorous and comprehensive approach to managing prolific offenders of other crimes. Information about the most prolific burglars and car thieves are passed to local patrolling officers on a regular basis when they are briefed at the start of their shifts. However, it is apparent that similar information about the most regular offenders or victims of domestic abuse is not routinely passed to local response or neighbourhood officers. They do become aware of the addresses of incidents of domestic abuse but that appears to be learned through regular attendance rather than by being briefed from information collected by the force.

The process for learning following domestic homicide reviews is inconsistent for the force. Once the reviews have taken place, conducted with police and partner agencies, the results are considered at senior levels within the force, but there is no clear mechanism throughout the force where the lessons learned are fed back to all specialists or frontline staff in order that improvements in processes and practices can be developed.

The force routinely collects a lot of data about domestic abuse, which includes the number of incidents, the number of repeat victims, the arrest rate, the prosecution rate and the number of cases that do not result in a court case. All of this information is then considered in a range of meetings held by the chief constable or the local district commanders, or in local neighbourhoods, with the

aim of improving the service delivered to domestic abuse victims. The monitoring of these data has shown that there are significant variations in performance across the force area. For example, in one district, the majority of offenders charged with a domestic abuse offence plead guilty at their first appearance in court while in another part of the force the complete opposite occurs and most people plead not guilty on first appearance and elect to go to trial. Staff based at headquarters are trying to understand why these differences occur; they are introducing training for officers involved in court cases to try and understand why some areas are getting better results, and then to share that good practice. Each day in the districts, a management meeting is held to discuss the priority crimes and incidents that have occurred in the previous 24 hours. The outstanding offenders are also discussed and allocated for action at these meetings, and the inspection team found that domestic abuse incidents are discussed, and victims and offenders regularly included, in these daily meetings.

Recommendations

As a result of this inspection, HMIC has developed recommendations that 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. Front counter staff, call handlers, dispatchers, frontline staff and specialists should receive training appropriate to their role, and then regularly receive refresher training.
2. The staff in the divisional control rooms must use the available technology to deploy the closest suitable patrol to attend domestic abuse incidents regardless of divisional boundaries.
3. The force must review its current policy, which prevents officers from removing a perpetrator to a suitable address rather than arrest as many staff, with the knowledge of their supervisors, breach this policy when dealing with domestic abuse incidents.
4. The force should consider alternatives to the current process for the completion of the risk assessment form with attending officers rarely taking the form with them to the scene and often completing it later, on a computer and to a poor standard.
5. The force must review the handling of medium and standard risk cases throughout the investigation, including the provision of victim updates and the supervision of these cases.
6. The force should introduce a single process to identify and manage serious and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.
7. The force should ensure local officers are as aware of the families at greatest risk of domestic abuse as they are of the burglars and vehicle crime offenders.

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.