



Wiltshire Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-378-8

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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 domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

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

This report details what HMIC found in Wiltshire 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 Wiltshire⁷

Calls for assistance



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

Crime

8%

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

19%

Wiltshire recorded 68 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 13 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

33%

The force also recorded 3,347 assaults with injury, of these 1,120 were domestic abuse related. This is 33% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

⁷ Data in this section is based upon forces' own definition of calls for assistance and domestic abuse, and 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

39%

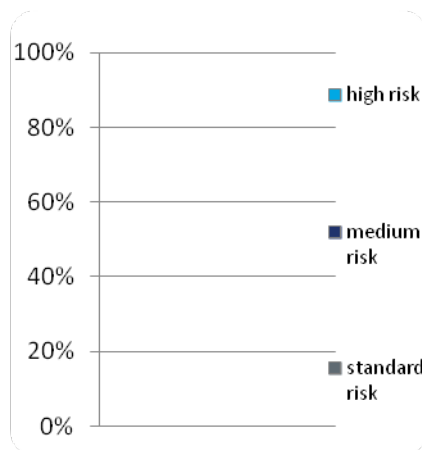
The force recorded 198 harassment offences, of these 77 were domestic abuse related. This is 39% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

9%

The force also recorded 686 sexual offences, of these 63 were domestic abuse related. This is 9% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



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 82 arrests in Wiltshire. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Outcomes



Wiltshire recorded 2,720 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 20% resulted in a charge, 17% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

Although HMIC found effective work being done to tackle domestic abuse, there are several areas for improvement which Wiltshire Police needs to address before they can have confidence that they are providing a consistently good service to victims. Officers and staff recognise the importance of dealing with domestic abuse properly but need further training to understand elements of abuse other than physical assault, for example, coercive and controlling behaviour. High risk cases receive a great deal of scrutiny but this is not the case for incidents assessed as standard risk. The increasing workload for staff in specialist teams means that there is little opportunity for reviewing risk levels and checking on victims' welfare as often as staff would like. The force has recognised a number of areas where improvement is needed and is working with the PCC to deliver these.

Identifying victims

The majority of victims of domestic abuse in the force area are identified following a telephone call to police. Some victims attend police stations or make contact using the Clare's Law pilot programme.

Calls about domestic abuse are handled and responded to within the force control room, where staff are good at listening, questioning, and at gathering necessary information.

Officers attending incidents are given a clear picture of the intelligence known about individuals and addresses involved in the call. A research team in the control room works to check all computer systems for relevant information.

Many patrol officers do not trust newly issued mobile devices to operate properly, so important information is passed to them using the radio.

Unfortunately control room operators do not always succeed in identifying repeat victims. There is no recognised force definition of a repeat victim but patrol officers consider anyone who has suffered domestic abuse in the previous year to be a 'repeat' victim. There is a strong emphasis on the supervision of domestic abuse calls within the force control room.

Keeping victims safe

Officers understand the risks associated with not responding well to a domestic abuse incident and are aware of the priority given by the force to this area of crime in the recent past. When risk assessment was first introduced, training was provided. However, many officers have not been updated on more recent developments, other than those in the two pilot programmes being trialled in the force. Staff understand how to risk assess victims' circumstances. They are not

afraid to use personal judgement to determine the overall level of risk if this is appropriate rather than relying on a pure scoring system.

The safeguarding of both children and victims is uppermost in the minds of officers when attending, but plans for keeping victims safe could be better documented. Some methods of gathering evidence, such as body-worn cameras and the use of photography at a crime scene are not well used. In cases involving high risk to victims, both the supervision of risk assessment forms and the investigation itself is completed to a high standard. The force recognises the need to improve investigation and supervision of 'medium' and 'standard' risk cases.

Management of risk

The resources available within the specialist units of the Public Protection Department (PPD) are unable to meet the demand of cases assigned to the teams. There is no review of standard risk domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) assessments except frontline supervision. Risk is not re-evaluated and safety plans are not routinely reviewed unless there are further developments in cases. Force policies which set out who should investigate different types of cases are not followed due to caseload pressures. Partnership relationships are positive and a strong system exists for managing the large volumes of high risk cases, which go through the local multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process. There is only partial engagement of community officers in responding to domestic abuse.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

Clare's Law and protection orders have proved successful in working with partners to prevent future harm to victims. However, the force does not have failsafe systems in place to maintain contact with victims. This is most notably the case when an offender is due for release from prison and renewed safeguarding measures or risk assessments may be necessary. The force has done work in the past aimed at identifying those offenders capable of causing most harm to victims, but this has not been updated.

Local officers are not routinely told about such offenders and have little information on families where domestic abuse crime may be a problem. This leads to inappropriate outcomes and management of repeat offenders. Force approaches to learning the lessons from past serious cases require greater clarity particularly on who takes responsibility of necessary action. A revised force performance management process is yet to have an impact on how domestic abuse incidents are policed.

Findings

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

The majority of victims of domestic abuse in the force area are identified following a telephone call to police. Some victims attend police stations or make contact using the Clare's Law pilot programme.

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Within the force control room, all managers and staff taking calls from the public and organising the police response recognised physical forms of domestic abuse and how to tackle it. They dealt quickly with telephone calls and ensured officers were sent as soon as possible. Staff also highlighted when a caller might be vulnerable or in need of special help. However, call handlers and those deciding what priority to put on calls did not always recognise less obvious forms of domestic abuse.

Cases of coercion or controlling behaviour – recently included in the national policing definition of domestic abuse – were less readily recognised as domestic abuse and not all staff have been trained to understand this. Similarly, stalking and so-called honour-based violence were not always seen as part of this type of crime. HMIC listened to telephone calls to the force and found many examples where call-takers displayed strong empathy for the caller, and also helped to reassure the caller while information the police needed was being gathered. While the attitude of call-takers was good, it is concerning that there are types of domestic abuse that may not be identified at this initial stage.

Within the control room there are lists of questions for operators to ask which ensure that all necessary information is gathered. These are reduced to the

minimum in cases where an immediate response is necessary. Where there is more time, a full picture and risk is assessed by working through all the questions. Full use is made of police information systems to assist officers responding to the call. In the control room, operators are able to check to see if there have been previous calls from addresses and the nature of any contact with the police. Systems will also automatically highlight if someone holds a firearms licence at the address. This is all helpful and gives officers useful information prior to attendance.

The force has invested in a number of intelligence development officers, who assist control room staff to build up as much information from records as possible. These officers work throughout the day alongside control room staff. On occasions, there are insufficient intelligence staff to work through the entire night and this causes gaps in service provided by the team. The information collected is routinely passed to the officers as soon as possible before they go to deal with a call. This is particularly the case if it is believed a violent or dangerous offender may be involved. This information assists officers in assessing risk to victims accurately.

Recent changes in force structure mean that patrol staff now work out of four main stations. This has produced an improvement in officers' ability to get to incidents, including domestic abuse, within the target times set for emergency cases. Great emphasis is placed on providing a very swift response to calls involving domestic abuse. Managers in the control room pay close attention to the time it takes for officers to arrive at the scene of emergency calls. Since the changes, the speed of getting to priority cases, (where a fast but not an immediate response is required), has been maintained at previous levels.

Control room staff regard getting an officer to the incident of domestic abuse as a high priority. If there are no patrol staff available, supervisors will routinely direct specialist teams such as firearms officers, traffic patrols, or dog handling units to go to these calls in the first instance. However, some control room staff, confusingly, refer to a domestic incident as a "disorder", leading uniformed officers to misinterpret the type of incident they are attending. This is concerning, as officers may lack important information that they would have requested if the incident had been correctly identified to them as domestic abuse.

Control room staff have been included in a force-wide scheme to build an understanding of two new initiatives involving domestic abuse prevention; Clare's Law and Domestic Violence Prevention Notices. Other than this, the main way the force has trained officers and support staff has been through computerised or 'eLearning' training. Many people in the control room have yet to take the eLearning package and apply this learning to their daily work. Efforts are now being made to ask specialists in domestic abuse what training is

needed in the control room. This is intended to ensure that all forms of domestic abuse are identified and responded to appropriately.

The circumstances in which someone becomes a repeat victim are not clearly defined by the force within its policy on policing domestic abuse. Control room managers believe that the detailed 23 questions normally asked of those calling about domestic abuse, help identify if someone has experienced this crime in the past. Individual call takers and control room operators appear to work from a common sense definition of what is a repeat case. They consider anyone a repeat victim if they have had a similar problem in the previous 12 months.

The force computer system has a built-in method of identifying if someone has contacted the control room previously from that address or using the same telephone number. This allows the operator to look at the nature of previous calls and add this information to the assessment of risk about the current call. The set of questions is also intended to help identify a caller who might be vulnerable in some way, adding to the priority given to the call. In practice, officers often identify cases involving what they consider to be repeat victims, which have not been identified during the initial call handling. It is helpful if an attending officer understands if a caller is a repeat victim prior to their arrival as this will help them build their risk assessment.

There is a strong expectation that the control room inspector should oversee all domestic abuse related calls. Together with two supervisors, the inspector has responsibility for ensuring that officers dealing with each domestic abuse incident have taken all the required initial actions. A degree of live-time evaluation of both radio conversations and records on incident logs takes place on a dip sample basis. Domestic abuse incidents on the force system cannot be closed as completed in the control room without first being quality checked by a supervisor. This supervision is important as it means that cases undergo a level of scrutiny at an early stage to check that all necessary action has been taken and recorded.

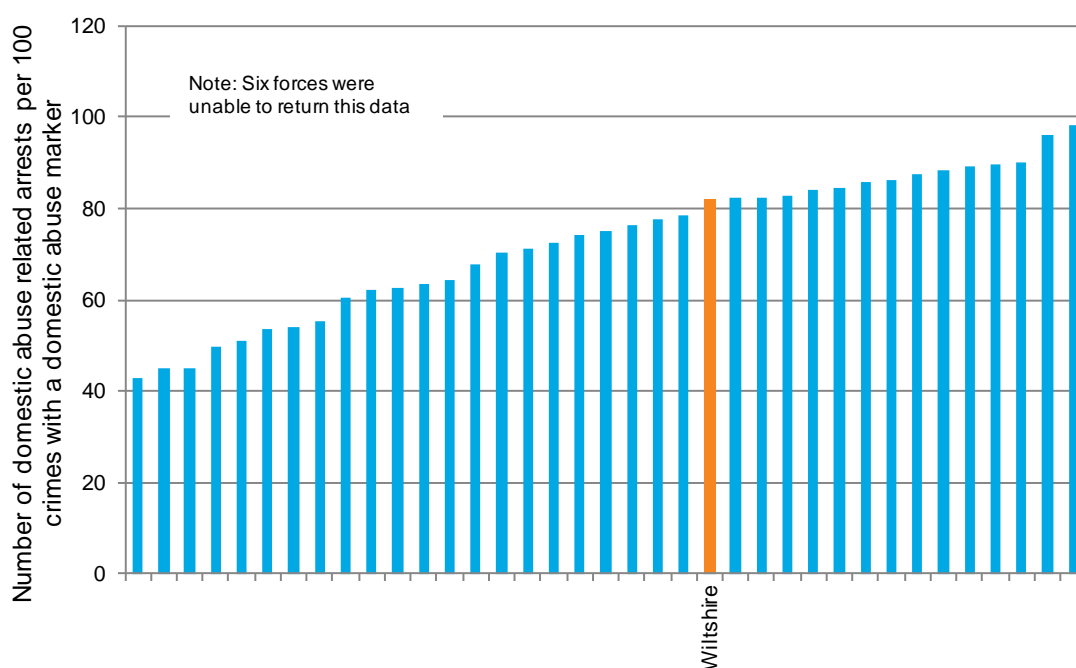
How does the force respond to victims of domestic abuse? This includes initial action, including risk assessment

Officers understand the risks associated with not responding well to a domestic abuse incident and are aware of the priority given by the force to this area of crime in the recent past. When risk assessment was first introduced, training was provided. However, many officers have not been updated on more recent developments, other than those in the two pilot programmes being trialled in the force. Staff understand how to risk assess victims' circumstances. They are not afraid to use personal judgement to determine the overall level of risk if this is appropriate rather than relying on a pure scoring system.

The safeguarding of both children and victims is uppermost in the minds of officers when attending, but plans for keeping victims safe could be better documented. Some methods of gathering evidence, such as body-worn cameras and the use of photography at a crime scene are not well used. In cases involving high risk to victims, both the supervision of risk assessment forms and the investigation itself is completed to a high standard. The force recognises the need to improve investigation and supervision of ‘medium’ and ‘standard’ risk cases.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 82 arrests⁸ in Wiltshire. For most forces this number is between 45 and 90.

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



Source: HMIC data collection.

The force has featured prominently in recent years in the national development of policy and practices to improve the police response to domestic abuse. Elements of this previous focus are retained within the police and crime commissioner’s (PCC) Plan 2013–17, which has aims of putting victims and witnesses first, as well as making clear reference to domestic abuse through a

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

case study. However, some key managers identified that the driving forces behind the prioritisation of domestic abuse had “slipped back” somewhat and renewed effort was needed. Many see the very recent appointment of a senior detective with acknowledged expertise in this area, as providing this reinvigorated drive.

Officers and staff regard the management of domestic abuse as something which it is critically important to get right. This is underpinned primarily by a fear of the risks to victims; the force; and themselves as individuals, if the case is badly managed or harm comes to a victim in consequence.

Few people within the operational teams responding to domestic abuse have received any direct training on the subject in the last few years, apart from information on the pilot projects. As with control room staff, the majority of officers are sent e-learning packages to complete. This method is not popular or readily taken up. At the time of the inspection, only around a third of the staff had completed this form of training. Partnership agencies also see training as a key area for development to build frontline officers awareness and knowledge of the subject to help them work with domestic abuse victims and witnesses. The training provided by central domestic abuse coordinators is highly regarded but is only available to agency workers in multi-agency partnerships and specialist teams. A force-wide analysis of what training is required is underway in response to this current gap.

The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment some years ago saw a significant attempt to make officers and staff understand the importance of dealing with domestic abuse properly and about the importance of completion of the DASH form. This form is completed in all but a small number of cases. The force’s version of the DASH form – the PPD1 – is available to officers on their mobile devices, but this is proving problematic. Patrol officers have only limited confidence in the reliability of these mobile devices. As a result they do not record the risk assessment at the scene of the incident, as frequently they find that the devices fail to save the assessment or do not forward it safely to force systems. Instead, officers wait until the end of their tour of duty to complete the form at a police station computer terminal. This is a lost opportunity for the information on the forms to be immediately available to other officers should another incident occur soon after.

Everyone involved in the response to a domestic abuse incident revealed a strong recognition that particular attention had to be paid to the well-being of any children involved. Patrol staff had a good level of knowledge of the impact on and likely behaviours of children, resulting from domestic abuse taking place within a family. Most officers regularly check on the safety of children and report their findings in the DASH form. A quality assurance review recently carried out by the force found that 84 percent of DASH forms had the appropriate amount

of information about children potentially connected to the incident. Detectives are revising the section in the form about children, to make the information more easily accessible to partner agencies, helping to properly safeguard children.

The number of officers sent to cases involving domestic abuse is decided following the initial risk assessments made during and after any telephone call. Normally at least two officers attend. Both are then able to gather information from those present at the scene and also pay attention to the safety of all present with an emphasis on any identified victim. Patrol officers have a good understanding of what they should do to make victims and children safer. They recognise the need to take 'positive action', which they interpret as making any justifiable and necessary arrests. This also extends to other steps intended to make a real difference to the welfare and safety of the victim. They can request that a red warning marker is put on the force call handling computer system in regard to the address to highlight the potential future risk factors. However, these actions are not always clearly set down on force records. The same force review which showed positive record keeping about children, revealed that only 47 percent of cases had a documented safeguarding plan for victims in place.

Following the completion of the DASH assessment, if it is decided that any victim is at a high risk of further domestic abuse, there is clear oversight and supervision. There is strong compliance with force policy, which sets out that an inspector must check the actions and records completed in 'high risk' cases. In practice, officers at a scene will make radio contact with an inspector to ensure they have made all relevant enquiries and the inspector is satisfied with the actions taken.

The supervision of cases at the levels of 'medium' and 'standard' risk follow a different pattern. Until very recently, standard risk cases have not routinely been supervised by patrol staff but only reviewed by the specialist domestic abuse team as part of a centralised recording process. The potential risks in this approach have been recognised by the force and a new system where patrol sergeants review both medium and standard risk cases has been implemented.

The force has identified that the skills of frontline staff in both investigation and in producing court files for prosecution could be improved. To address this, a half-day training programme for supervisors and patrol officers is being delivered. This aims to help individuals understand key actions they need to take at a scene and how to build up evidence using a case study approach. While not directly focused on domestic abuse cases, it is hoped that this will improve standards in this area, which are variable at present. The use of body-worn cameras is inconsistent when officers are dealing with domestic abuse scenes. Additionally officers often use their own mobile telephones to take pictures of a victim's injuries as they have no other means of capturing this

evidence. This means that officers are not maximising the amount of evidence they collect when they initially attend an incident.

The degree to which victims are updated with developments in the case is also a mixed picture. In domestic abuse cases, where specialist officers are allocated an investigation following an arrest, the victim usually will be contacted. However, patrol officers handling standard and medium risk cases sometimes fail to update victims, as the focus is on dealing with offenders and completing the relevant records, rather than the care of victims.

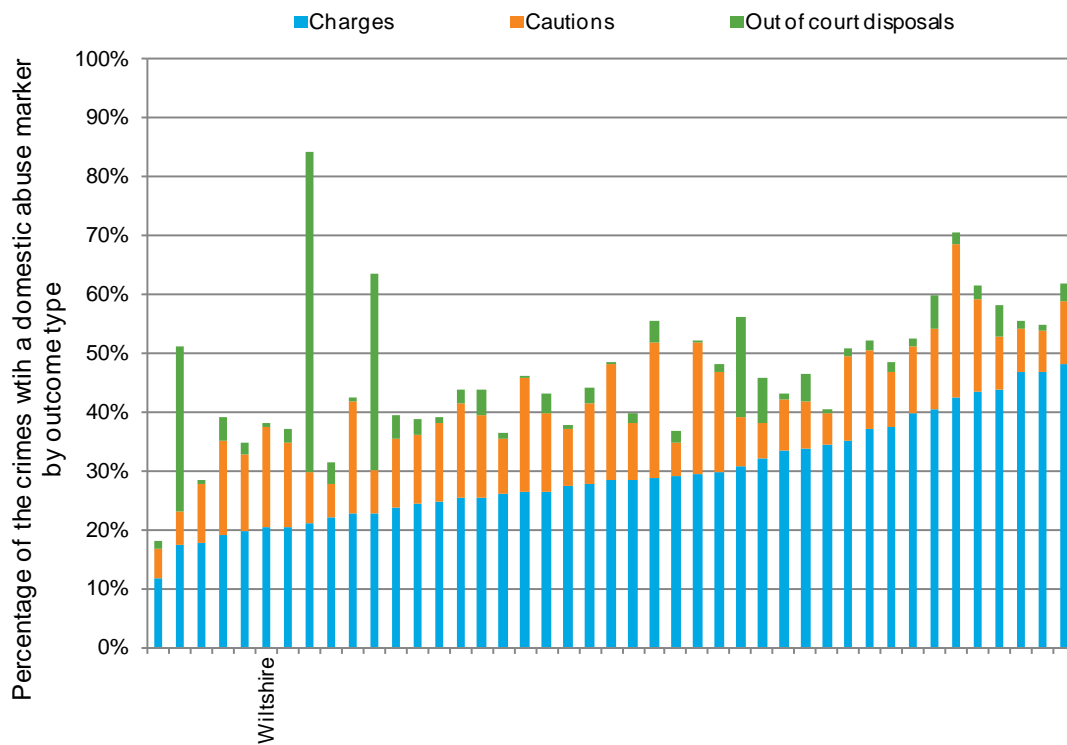
Levels of supervision of investigation are directly related to the level of risk to victims. In high risk cases allocated to the specialist Domestic Abuse Investigation Teams (DAITs), officers will take on and supervise any related investigation. As DAIT officers do not work a 24 hour shift pattern and the volume of high risk cases is relatively large, many high risk cases pass to non-specialised investigators to manage. These cases do not receive the same degree of supervision as those within the DAIT team. In cases involving the lower levels of risk, it is left to patrol supervisors to check the progress of the investigation through the force crime tracking system. This is an area of concern as some high-risk cases are being investigated by officers who are inexperienced in dealing with domestic abuse and these cases may not receive a high level of scrutiny.

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

The resources available within the specialist units of the Public Protection Department (PPD) are unable to meet the demand of cases assigned to the teams. There is no review of standard risk domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) assessments except frontline supervision. Risk is not re-evaluated and safety plans are not routinely reviewed unless there are further developments in cases. Force policies which set out who should investigate different types of cases are not followed due to caseload pressures. Partnership relationships are positive and a strong system exists for managing the large volumes of high risk cases, which go through the local multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process. There is only partial engagement of community officers in responding to domestic abuse.

Wiltshire recorded 2,720 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 20 percent resulted in a charge, 17 percent resulted in a caution and, 1 percent had an out of court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013⁹

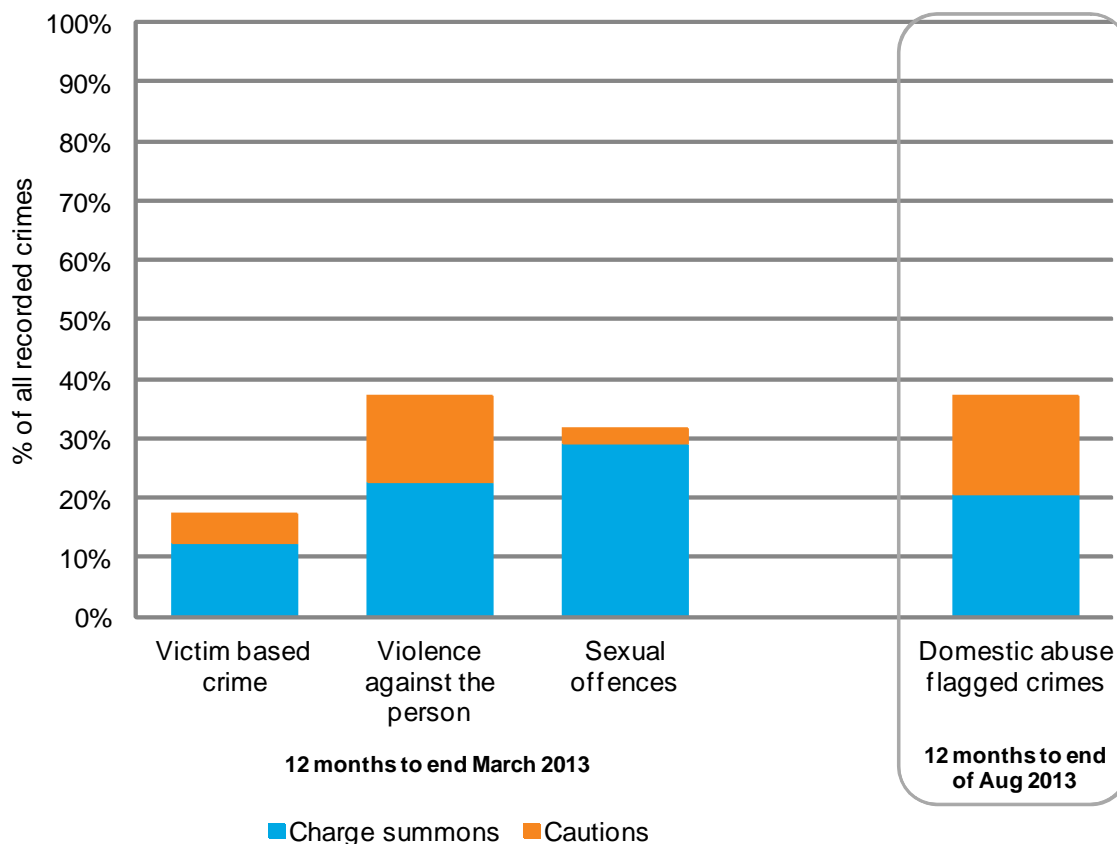


Source: HMIC data collection.

Wiltshire 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.

⁹ 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 marker ¹⁰



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

There are three area-based, specialist, domestic abuse investigation teams (DAITs) working within the force as part of the Public Protection Directorate (PPD). These teams are sent all the completed PPD1 DASH forms for review. DAIT specialists closely check high and medium risk DASH forms. If necessary, they adjust the original grading of risk given if they deem it to be incorrect, or if further intelligence is available which changes the risk factors. The force is unable to calculate what percentage of risk grades are changed in this way due to the adoption of a new records system. There is also no evidence of patrol officers receiving feedback to assist decision-making in risk assessments in the future if their judgements about risk levels are adjusted. This is a missed

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

opportunity, as an understanding of where mistakes in risk assessment are made would help educate officers improving future risk assessment.

An administrator receives the standard risk forms and keeps track where multiple forms are completed for the same address. If the administrator notes five instances within any twelve-month period, this elevates the case for consideration at the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). In standard risk cases, with the exception of the check for high levels of repeat victimisation, there is no additional checking beyond that done by frontline supervision. This is a significant omission, which needs to be addressed urgently. A system is needed to identify where a victim reports a number of standard risk incidents, as this is likely to increase the level of risk to them and needs to be dealt with appropriately.

Two of the three force 'hubs' dealing with domestic abuse are staffed with officers who are able to deal with domestic abuse as well as child abuse and vulnerable adults. In the third unit distinctions between specialist areas are preserved. The force has also maintained the same number of officers working in these three hubs since they were set up in 2009. The officers working in this area are highly motivated and passionate about delivering the best service they can to victims and witnesses.

Partner agencies report that these units are "extremely stretched" and in some cases unable currently to assist them in supplying the information they need for their work. Estimates reveal that around 30 to 40 percent of serious high risk cases are routinely passed to other investigators due to consistently high workloads and long-term absences within the DAIT teams. Within the hubs, cases involving child abuse and safeguarding take precedence over other areas of work including domestic abuse cases. As a result DAIT officers are unable to give victims appropriate levels of support. They believe that some of their colleagues, with a main specialism in child abuse, are less willing to pick up domestic abuse cases and do not have the same levels of focus on the subject. The specialist teams are given only limited levels of immediate supervisory support. This is an area of concern and needs to be reviewed in order that high risk victims of domestic abuse are given appropriate support.

The training provided to officers when coming into the DAIT role does not equip them for the task. Dealing with high volumes of cases provides only 'on-the-job' training, yet DAIT officers are still regarded by uniformed colleagues as "instant experts".

The force has representatives on the single joint partnership working to combat domestic abuse involving both the county area and the unity authority of Swindon. This reflects a positive and constructive relationship, which the force enjoys with its partners in this field. The pilot initiative around Clare's Law has

also engaged partners in key decisions about when to disclose shared information about individuals in potentially abusive relationships.

There are a number of independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs), who are active within both local authority areas. Police specialists regard these individuals as extremely effective in complementing their activity in safeguarding victims. A local Ofsted inspection has already commented on the need for increased numbers of IDVAs in the county to improve both “reach and impact”. This is under active review in the county and has involved the police and crime commissioner.

All partners routinely attend the various MARACs held in the county and in the Swindon area. Relationships around the working practices of the conferences are judged to be well developed. The police chair the meetings and there is a strong commitment to ensure that actions from previous meetings are completed.

A PPD inspector has been successful in helping patrol officers understand the reasons why a MARAC conference is held by briefing them at the beginning of their shifts. Officers know what types of cases are covered within the conferences. This has improved their understanding of the importance of a MARAC case when researching previous events in an ongoing case. Some 60 percent of the referrals to the Wiltshire MARAC are of a non-police origin. This is seen as indicative of the awareness and trust of partnership agencies in the MARAC process. Partners noted that the MARAC has matured and is now well used.

Where officers have highlighted 14 risk indicators or above on the DASH risk assessment this causes a referral to the MARAC conference. Since Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA), a national charity, evaluated the MARAC, a policy has been adopted whereby five incidents of domestic abuse in a twelve month period cause a case to go to the MARAC.

Specialist domestic violence courts (SDVCs) were closed in the county around three years prior to the inspection, but specialist lawyers are retained within the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) structure. A number of cases have been successfully prosecuted despite the withdrawal of the victim’s support by the prosecution. Such prosecutions are often only achieved by specialist officers challenging CPS decisions on the basis of good additional supporting evidence and knowledge of the law and legal precedent in this area of crime. Conviction rates at Crown Court, (65 percent for CPS charged cases and 77 percent for police charged cases) and Magistrates’ Court (83 percent for CPS charged cases and 87 percent for police charged cases) are high when compared nationally.

After the initial re-assessment of the DASH form within the PPU hubs, there is no meaningful re-assessment of risk in domestic abuse cases as they progress through the stages of police involvement. Unless there is another incident, which has implications for the original case, there exists no pro-active mechanism to check that the level of risk is still appropriate. The same is true of safety planning for victims, in that once initial actions have been completed, there are no triggers for subsequent reviews of safety measures taken.

There is a force domestic abuse policy, which clearly sets out the organisational expectations as to who should manage and investigate separate cases with varying degrees of risk. In standard risk cases, the policy is largely followed as frontline patrol teams, who take the initial report, are expected to continue both investigation of the offence but also make sure all necessary measures are taken to protect the victim involved. Practice starts to diverge from policy in the management of medium risk cases, where the DAIT teams are expected to assist in the safeguarding of victims leaving the investigation of the crime to uniformed officers. Work pressures within the PPD hubs mean that very few medium risk cases receive this attention. Even with high risk cases, as outlined above, specialist DAIT officers are unable to respond to the full caseload and new cases are frequently passed to divisional crime investigators to manage. Senior managers in the force are aware of these significant pressures, which work to distort case management. A force-wide review of demand management and resourcing is planned for the near future. This is essential as the lack of review and management of some high and medium cases is an area of concern where victims may not be receiving an appropriate service.

Patrol staff and investigators have a regular role in combatting domestic abuse in the force area. The degree of engagement by neighbourhood teams and PCSOs varies from team to team. Some community-based officers were completely unaware that others were involved in this type of work. Those who take on domestic abuse work are usually self-tasked and not formally tasked from outside the team. There appears to be a real thirst for knowledge about domestic abuse victims and perpetrators in their areas. Some community support officers feel they could contribute to domestic abuse cases through reassurance patrols or making contact with children through their schools. Some were putting themselves forward for multi-agency training, as no training was available within the force. This is a missed opportunity for the force.

Community teams and patrol staff do not see any information about victims at greatest risk or the most serious offenders in domestic abuse matters. Such information had been published by the force in the past but was no longer routinely available. Officers believe that their own review of previous incidents and crimes on local beats is the most reliable way of gaining an insight into patterns of domestic abuse.

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

Clare's Law and protection orders have proved successful in working with partners to prevent future harm to victims. However, the force does not have failsafe systems in place to maintain contact with victims. This is most notably the case when an offender is due for release from prison and renewed safeguarding measures or risk assessments may be necessary. The force has done work in the past aimed at identifying those offenders capable of causing most harm to victims, but this has not been updated.

Local officers are not routinely told about such offenders and have little information on families where domestic abuse crime may be a problem. This leads to inappropriate outcomes and management of repeat offenders. Force approaches to learning the lessons from past serious cases require greater clarity particularly on who takes responsibility of necessary action. A revised force performance management process is yet to have an impact on how domestic abuse incidents are policed.

One of the consequences of the high caseload and staff absences within the specialist units is that many preventative schemes to manage risk to victims in the future are not in place. This relates specifically to action needed when an offender has been sent to prison, either on remand awaiting a court hearing, or following sentencing.

The force states that once an offender has been sentenced, responsibility for maintaining contact with a victim passes to the probation service. No method is in place within the force to make checks on changes in risk levels as any proposed release date approaches. Checks with the local probation service revealed that this was not its responsibility except in a small number of specified cases (and not in any case where the offender was serving less than a year in prison).

DAIT teams are notified in some areas of the force about the release of domestic abuse prisoners. This is not consistent across the force and there is no comprehensive process for advising any victim of an impending release. Only with the most violent offenders falling within the area multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) would such notifications be made. This is an area of significant concern as it is essential that risk is re-assessed and appropriate safety plans put in place for victims when a perpetrator is released from prison.

In situations where an offender is granted bail by the crown court, links between prison liaison officers and specialised DAIT teams operate to alert potential

witnesses and victims. In these pressing situations, specialists prioritise the importance of advising victims. In cases in the magistrates' court, a written agreement had been drawn up some time ago to ensure police were advised of any sudden bail releases. It was far from clear if such an agreement was still in existence or functioning. This needs to be clarified and re-emphasised.

Another area of concern within the inspection was the absence of any mechanism for identifying repeat victims of domestic abuse, who suddenly stop contacting the police. The force is aware that it has no way of identifying cases where victims, who have previously contacted the police on a regular basis, stop doing so without explanation. There are hopes that when a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is fully functioning, this may become part of processes set up to help gain a picture of wider trends in domestic abuse. At the time of the inspection, plans to establish an embryonic MASH were well advanced.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), known as 'Clare's Law' has been piloted in the force area since July 2012. This has involved the local police checking systems and intelligence and providing appropriate information to applicants, who are concerned that their partner may have been involved in previous domestic abuse incidents. The force monitors the operation of the scheme and has set up a meeting structure with partners to assist in making the right decisions about when and what to disclose. Partners are supportive of the police approach to the scheme, which they see as a positive initiative. While not yet drawing comparisons with other pilot sites, some senior managers feel that the relatively low numbers of disclosures (six) indicate that more could be done to make information available to more applicants.

There is also a domestic violence prevention notice (DVPN) scheme running as part of a second pilot. This scheme allows police to serve a notice on any offender to control their actions. A key intention is to prevent them from returning to a place where a report of abuse has been made. There have been 261 initial applications for a notice, of which the courts have supported 208. The fact that only 25 of these have been breached is interpreted as a very positive end result.

Officers see these notices as an effective additional tactic to help them with the safeguarding of victims at a time when they are most vulnerable.

The loss of an analyst focussing on domestic abuse crime has had a severe impact on the ability of local neighbourhood and patrol teams to understand who is most at risk in their area. In the past there were regular circulations of the 'top ten' offenders and their potential victims. This is no longer issued on a force-wide basis. Similarly, since the review of what the force considers to be its most important and necessary actions, perpetrators and victims rarely feature in

the daily briefing material. Officers tended to rely on information from other officers and their own knowledge to know which families were most at risk.

Wiltshire has seen a rise in the size and diversity of its black and minority ethnic communities, including new communities from Poland, Fiji, Africa and from various Traveller groups. While domestic abuse is seen as under-reported within these communities, few attempts of formal initiatives have been made to work with these communities with the aim of reducing domestic abuse. This is a concern as it is likely there will be significant under-reporting, which means that victims may be isolated and without appropriate support.

In the past, the force has carried out some preliminary research work attempting to understand offending patterns of serious and repeat domestic abuse perpetrators. This was about those who pose the most significant risk to victims in the force area. Senior officers, at the time, argued for these types of offenders to be included in the county multi-agency offender management program but without success. Unfortunately this early work has not been developed further. Currently the force does not have a comprehensive picture of domestic abuse crime built up from analysis of all force systems and available intelligence. There is no precise information on the number and identity of these significant offenders and as a result, no policing measures to target them.

This initial research also showed that such offenders were often not being treated appropriately when deciding on how to proceed with and finalise crimes. As much as 40 percent of the force's domestic abuse crime is being dealt with by means of a police caution. This represents one quarter of force cautions in total. A number of these cautions were given to repeat offenders, some of whom had previous court sentences for similar offences. During the inspection, initiatives to build more robust decision-making into custody suites were starting to take effect. This should be closely monitored in the future.

The force currently has four domestic homicide reviews (DHRs) being reported on, following cases in the last twelve months. As these are not fully in the public domain, knowledge of the primary issues emerging from the four reviews is patchy.

At present, the key actions from DHRs and serious case reviews (SCRs) are managed by departments or business areas. These will be included in the new overarching force Strategic Improvement Board (SIB) as agenda items, but this process has yet to fully emerge. Following national developments and some local corporate learning, the firearms licensing department is working with local general practitioners' surgeries in a number of innovative ways. Methods of quickly alerting the police to concerns about patients in possession of licensed firearms are being trialled.

Checks do not seem to have been carried out on previous reviews to ensure learning has been appropriately picked up on and embedded.

Until recently a 'Balanced Scorecard' approach had been used to track force performance against domestic abuse crime. Attrition rates, positive outcomes, repeat victimisation and similar indicators were measured over time. The adoption of a new records management system removed this facility so the force no longer sees this important information.

The force has recently set up the SIB performance system to give greater time and consideration to the main performance areas. This is also seen as responding to the need to have a more rounded appreciation of what succeeds in driving the force's delivery plan for the PCC's priorities. It is, however, far from clear how many of these arrangements and measures underpin delivery against domestic abuse crime at present. The force is intending to track progress made against a new and substantial improvement plan created by the newly appointed head of PPD.

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. Evaluate the programme of training being devised by public protection department (PPD) specialists to ensure all staff and in particular, control room operators, understand the national policing definition of domestic abuse.
2. Establish robust measures in the force control room to ensure repeat victims of domestic abuse are identified at first point of contact.
3. Implement a wider assessment of completed DASH PPD1 forms to include standard risk. This should identify all risk factors involved and assist with a more developed problem-solving approach.
4. Review the quality of initial investigation of domestic abuse cases and maximise the potential from devices such as mobile computers and body-worn cameras.
5. Review the level of resourcing, caseloads, accountability and training within the PPD hubs dealing with domestic abuse.
6. Review the benefits of force level analysis of the factors involved in domestic abuse crime and the advantages from commissioning a force 'problem profile'.
7. Monitor closely the impact of recent changes in decision-making within the custody environment and the overall percentage of cautions within domestic abuse crime.
8. Review the methods available to identify and target serious and repeat offenders.
9. Work with partners and criminal justice agencies to develop methods of maintaining contact with victims following the imprisonment of offenders.
10. Review how lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews are fully understood and integrated into daily working practices.

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.