



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest

# Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse

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## Executive summary

### 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.<sup>1</sup> Seventy seven women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2012/13.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, one in four of young people, aged 10 to 24, reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood.<sup>3</sup> Forces told us that crime relating to domestic abuse constitutes some eight percent of all recorded crime in their areas and one third of their recorded assaults with injury. On average the police receive an emergency call relating to domestic abuse every 30 seconds.

Other agencies and partners share the responsibility to tackle domestic abuse and keep victims safe; it does not rest solely with the police. However, the police have an essential role to play.

In September 2013, the Home Secretary commissioned HMIC to conduct an inspection<sup>4</sup> on the police response. We were asked to:

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

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<sup>1</sup> Walby, S. (2009). *The cost of domestic violence*.

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

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

<sup>4</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence)

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 who took part in focus groups throughout England and Wales (and a number of other victims in one-to-one interviews) and surveyed over 500 victims on-line. We also surveyed nearly 200 professionals working with victims of domestic abuse.

HMIC inspected all police forces in England and Wales, interviewing senior and operational leads, and held focus groups with frontline staff and partners. We carried out visits to police stations (which were unannounced) to test the reality of the forces' approaches with frontline officers.

Our inspection teams were supplemented by experts in the field of domestic abuse. These included public protection experts from more than 15 forces and those working with victims of domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

## **Main findings**

The overall police response to victims of domestic abuse is not good enough. This is despite considerable improvements in the service over the last decade, and the commitment and dedication of many able police officers and police staff. In too many forces there are weaknesses in the service provided to victims; some of these are serious and this means that victims are put at unnecessary risk. Many forces need to take action now.

Domestic abuse is a priority on paper but, in the majority of forces, not in practice. Almost all police and crime commissioners have identified domestic abuse as a priority in their Police and Crime Plans. All forces told us that it is a priority for them.

This stated intent is not translating into operational reality in most forces. Tackling domestic abuse too often remains a poor relation to acquisitive crime and serious organised crime.

The factors that contribute to this in many forces are:

- a lack of visible leadership and clear direction set by senior officers;
- alarming and unacceptable weaknesses in some core policing activity, in particular the collection of evidence by officers at the scene of domestic abuse incidents;
- poor management and supervision that fails to reinforce the right behaviours, attitudes and actions of officers;
- failure to prioritise action that will tackle domestic abuse when setting the priorities for the day-to-day activity of frontline officers and assigning their work<sup>5</sup>;
- officers lacking the skills and knowledge necessary to engage confidently and competently with victims of domestic abuse; and
- extremely limited systematic feedback from victims about their experience of the police response.

Police forces must take urgent action to improve the effectiveness of the service they offer to victims of domestic abuse; if they do this they will ensure that the risk to victims is better managed and, ultimately, they are made safer. Our recommendations set out what needs to be done to secure lasting change.

Although HMIC identifies an urgent need to improve the police response to victims of domestic abuse, our conclusions should not detract from the tireless work of many officers and staff in both frontline and specialist roles. They are often doing their very best to keep victims safe, sometimes when there is little support from the wider organisation. There can be little kudos attached to being a domestic abuse specialist in the police service and all too often their achievements, and those of other frontline staff working in this area, wrongly go unrecognised.

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<sup>5</sup> Police forces and police officers refer to this practice as “tasking”

## Organisational issues

Tackling domestic abuse well is vitally important. It is a complex and sensitive issue. No two domestic abuse environments are the same, and some victims have suffered in silence for years or even decades. The police need to have the right tools, resources, training and partnerships in place to enable them do their job as well as they should. A proper understanding of domestic abuse, and an appreciation of the harm it causes to victims and their children, is essential if officers are to carry out effectively their core policing activities of keeping victims safe, preventing crime, investigating crime and bringing offenders to justice.

Much has changed since HMIC inspected police forces on their response to domestic abuse a decade ago<sup>6</sup>. Specialist domestic abuse units have been created in forces with expert investigative capabilities. Support to high-risk victims<sup>7</sup> has been transformed, with independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) in place to make sure that victims have access to a range of support. There is now a more systematic approach to risk identification that almost all forces have adopted, and although this still requires attention, it is very much a step in the right direction. Guidance, practice and policies on domestic abuse mean victims are more routinely identified when they call the police, and the police attend promptly.<sup>8</sup>

The police service has faced a significant austerity challenge over the last four years, resulting in reduced budgets and substantially fewer police officers and staff. It is encouraging, therefore, that forces have managed largely to protect their investment in specialist domestic abuse services.

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<sup>6</sup> *Violence at Home: A joint thematic inspection of the Investigation and Prosecution of Cases Involving Domestic Violence*, HMCPSI and HMIC, February 2004.

[www.hmcpsi.gov.uk/documents/reports/CJJI\\_THM/BOTJ/DomVio0104Rep.pdf](http://www.hmcpsi.gov.uk/documents/reports/CJJI_THM/BOTJ/DomVio0104Rep.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> High risk victims are described as those where there are “identifiable indicators of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious”. Serious harm is 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.” From the DASH checklist:

<http://www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk/uploads/pdfs/DASH%202009.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Detail of these changes can be found at Annex A to this report.

Despite this progress and investment, not all police leaders are ensuring that domestic abuse is a priority in practice. HMIC found that many forces do not assign to officers work to prevent, reduce and tackle domestic abuse effectively. So opportunities to target perpetrators are missed and forces' performance management systems seldom promote and assess the effectiveness of the police response to victims of domestic abuse.

Leadership has a profound effect on the culture of the force and the attitudes of police officers who are dealing with domestic abuse. It is vital that police leaders reinforce the right attitudes and behaviours. Victims told HMIC that they did not always feel believed or that they were being taken seriously by the police. Sometimes they felt judged.

Many frontline officers, and in some cases specialist police officers, lack the skills they need to tackle domestic abuse effectively. Officers are often ill-equipped to identify dangerous patterns of behaviour in domestic abuse perpetrators accurately, in particular where there is no overt physical violence but instead there is psychological intimidation and control, which can also have fatal consequences. Officers often have little or no information about the victim or the perpetrator when they arrive at the scene. Outdated information technology and poor force information systems are preventing vital information from being placed in the hands of frontline officers quickly.

HMIC is concerned about the poor attitudes that some police officers display towards victims of domestic abuse. This may stem from a lack of understanding. The current approach to training, which is largely reliant on e-learning,<sup>9</sup> is failing to address this issue. While recognising the financial constraints that forces are under, there is an urgent need to overhaul domestic abuse training. HMIC sees little, if any, value in e-learning as an effective training method as it limits the opportunity for discussion, reflection and checking understanding. Some forces have built short face-to-face training sessions for response officers into their daily briefing meetings at little cost.

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<sup>9</sup> Typical e-learning is where an individual reads information on a computer and then answers a short multiple-choice test.

There is evidence of ineffective supervision of all ranks, often with a failure to challenge poor attitudes. We found limited examples of forces thinking creatively about how to improve officers' knowledge, understanding, and, consequently, their ability to deal with domestic abuse victims with confidence.

The voices of victims need to be heard to make sure the police response is focused on them. Feedback from victims helps forces to plan appropriate services. It also provides a means of assessing how well the force is performing. We found very few examples of forces routinely seeking the views of victims of domestic abuse. HMIC understands that this needs to be done sensitively and safely, but it is important that it happens.

## **First contact**

The first time a victim of domestic abuse contacts the police is, in most cases, not the first time they have experienced it. Sometimes their life and the lives of their children may be in immediate danger. Those answering that telephone call for help need to be able to recognise domestic abuse; to reassure the victim; and to advise them on how to keep safe. They need to judge how quickly a police officer should be sent. That officer needs to have a full picture of what has happened to the victim in the past. It is vital they have the right information so they can take the most effective action to support the victim when they get there.

HMIC found that staff answering 999 calls usually understand the definition of domestic abuse and mark cases accordingly on their information systems. They make sure that in the vast majority of cases an officer responds either immediately or within the hour. We saw many good examples of call handlers getting the right information from victims and providing them with sound advice on how to keep safe until the responding officer arrived.

There are aspects of this first contact that could be improved. Some forces either have no definitions of what constitutes a repeat (in terms of previous police contact) or vulnerable victim, and in some forces the definitions are not well understood by staff. Where a definition of a repeat victim is in place, it varies from force to force. If forces are unable to identify repeat victims, and convey the history of the abuse they

have suffered to the responding officer, then valuable opportunities to identify and safeguard the victim on arrival are likely to be missed.

## **Initial response**

The quality of the response of an officer attending a domestic abuse incident is just as important as the speed with which they turn up. A responding officer is expected to keep the victim and their children safe; give them confidence in the policing response; assess future risk so that the force can keep them safe in the longer term; investigate the incident; and gather evidence to support a prosecution. It can be complex and sensitive work. In some cases, victims can appear to be uncooperative when in reality they may be terrified, being controlled by the perpetrator and in desperate need of support. Officers too can be under pressure due to the busy and varied nature of a response shift.

Victims' experiences of the initial response are very mixed. All too often, the quality of the service that a victim receives is entirely dependent on the empathy, understanding and commitment of the individual attending. Without effective supervision and training in place forces are leaving the matter of the competence and capability of the responding officer almost entirely to chance. The service that some of the most vulnerable victims in our communities receive from the police should not be a lottery.

We conducted an on-line survey of over 500 victims of domestic abuse. Seventy-nine percent of the victims who had reported the incident to the police were satisfied with the initial police response, which is positive. When asked the main reasons for their satisfaction, one of the most common reasons was the speed of the policing response (14 percent). Another common reason (14 percent) said it was because officers were helpful. Although a high number of victims felt satisfied, a third felt no safer or less safe after the initial response.

HMIC discussed the issue of the initial response in nine focus groups with 70 victims, allowing for deeper exploration of the behaviours of officers and the impact this can have. Many of the victims we spoke to were higher risk and had multiple contacts with the police. The majority had experienced very poor attitudes at some point from

responding officers. Victims told us that they were frequently not taken seriously, that they felt judged and that some officers demonstrated a considerable lack of empathy and understanding. Some of these behaviours were also observed during our inspections of forces. A swift policing response is necessary but it is not sufficient. The poor attitudes of some officers can have a very serious adverse effect on the confidence of victims.

In many forces, HMIC found alarming and unacceptable weaknesses in the collection of evidence by officers after arrival at a domestic abuse scene. We have very serious concerns about the quality of the initial investigation. In a file review of 600 domestic abuse cases of actual bodily harm (where the victim will have a visible injury), HMIC found that photographs of the injury were taken in only half of the cases, and in three cases out of ten the officer's statement lacked important details such as a description of the scene or the injuries of the victims. There is extensive national police policy and practice on how police officers should carry out core policing tasks including crime investigation. It is simply not good enough that officers are not carrying out the tasks of evidence-gathering in cases of domestic violence in a professional and consistent way. It is a core part of officer competence.

Almost all forces told us that they expect responding officers to take 'positive action' at a domestic abuse incident. This term is confusing; it means different things to different officers and is open to wide and unhelpful individual interpretation. Often frontline officers do not understand what is meant in practice by 'positive action'. On occasions, victims might ask officers not to arrest the perpetrator. Officers need to understand that there may be complex reasons behind this request. HMIC is concerned that the lack of clarity as to what 'positive action' actually means can result in perpetrators of domestic abuse not being arrested when the officer has grounds to do so. This view is supported by the evidence, which shows unacceptable variation in the extent to which police officers arrest those suspected of a domestic abuse crime. In most forces, the number of arrests as a proportion of crime identified as domestic abuse is between 45 percent and 90 percent.

Responding officers should be reminded that it is their job to attend the incident swiftly, identify the victim and the perpetrator, gather evidence that will support a

criminal justice sanction if a crime has been committed, keep the victim safe and take the proper action. This means where the officer can justify the arrest – the officer should normally make an arrest. On the rare occasions where an arrest is not made, the officer must provide a recorded rationale to justify this.

Finally, the issue of risk identification requires urgent attention. The initial risk assessment process is important in making sure that the victim is both kept safe at the scene and can be protected properly from future harm. While the police service has an agreed risk assessment form, DASH (which stands for domestic abuse, stalking and harassment), the extent to which it is used by responding officers and the way in which it is used, vary significantly from force to force. There is often a poor understanding on the part of officers of the factors for risk assessment. Too often the completion of the DASH form is seen as a compliance exercise rather than one that is necessary to protect the victim. The measure of a successful police response to a domestic abuse incident should not be whether a form has been filled in. It should be whether the officer has correctly identified the level of risk, has taken appropriate action to keep the victim safe as a result and has obtained or protected evidence necessary for an appropriate prosecution.

## **Action taken**

HMIC found a large number of committed officers working in domestic abuse specialist units, but in many forces there are significant weaknesses in how forces keep victims safe and support them through the criminal justice process. These include:

- unnecessary duplication of risk assessments, delays in allocating cases and confusion across the police force about who is responsible for supporting the victims;
- uncertainty amongst officers and staff within forces about who is responsible for what element of victim care and the investigation;
- assessment of risk based solely on an unverified rigid tick-box approach rather than professional judgment and the weighing of different factors by experts and specialists;

- limited systematic approaches to re-assessing risk at known trigger points, for example when the perpetrator is released from police custody;
- reviewing standard and medium risk cases following a pattern of repeat incidents, but where the number of incidents that have to occur before a review is triggered is unacceptably high. Even more concerning is where forces have no policy of review after repeat incidents; and
- risky gaps in the capability and capacity of specialist domestic abuse units which may be under-resourced and overwhelmed. This is often due to high levels of vacancies (in some cases due to stress), unsustainable workloads, limited or no additional training, and lack of effective support and supervision.

As a result of these weaknesses, victims who have not been correctly identified as high risk are in danger of not being offered the appropriate safeguarding services. High risk cases are usually dealt with by specialist police officers who tend to have better knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse, and referrals are made to a range of other agencies that can help to support these victims. Some forces have thought creatively about tackling the problems highlighted. HMIC saw some good examples such as:

- secondments and attachments to work in the specialist areas, in some cases linked to career progression as a detective;
- giving clear instructions to, and integrating well with, neighbourhood teams, so domestic abuse is everyone's business and a wider resource is devoted to supporting victims;
- additional training for some PCSOs to provide support to victims in the community; and
- use of independent domestic violence advisers in police stations to help build the capability and expertise of officers.

Crimes associated with domestic abuse are wide and varied. Many are very serious. Forces told us that between 2012 and 2013 there were 269,700 domestic abuse related crimes in England and Wales. Almost two thirds of these were assaults<sup>10</sup>. And there were 6,400 sexual offences and rapes. While the dynamics of domestic

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<sup>10</sup> Assault with intent to cause serious harm (2 percent); assault with injury (36 percent); and assault without injury (28 percent).

abuse mean that the victims may find it difficult actively to support police action (for example they may not want the offender to be charged and prosecuted), criminal justice agencies have a responsibility to seek criminal justice sanctions. The police service needs to build the case for the victim, not expect the victim to build the case for the police.

There are unacceptable variations in charging perpetrators of domestic abuse with criminal offences. In some forces, there are high levels of cautioning. In addition, in some forces there appear to be comparatively fewer charges for domestic abuse-related crimes compared with other victim-based crime or violence against the person offences. HMIC is concerned that these data further underline that some forces are not prioritising the issue of domestic abuse.

There are also problems with the extent to which criminal justice sanctions are pursued after charge. While there is appetite within both the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to pursue prosecutions without the support of the victim (known as evidence-led prosecutions), the numbers of these cases are still very small. Both the national policing lead on domestic abuse and the Director of Public Prosecutions have re-emphasised that evidence-led prosecutions should be pursued.

HMIC identified some practices that are of considerable concern. A small number of forces are using restorative justice approaches as a way of purportedly resolving domestic abuse assaults and incidents involving intimate partners. While the intention of these forces is to provide a meaningful resolution for the victim, the approach gives rise to unacceptable risk. The use of restorative justice in intimate partner relationships is not appropriate. The national policing lead on domestic abuse wrote to all forces in January 2014 confirming this to be the position.

## **Working with partners**

Partnership working is vital to improving practice in this area. Statutory and voluntary sector services need to come together at a local level to provide multi-agency support that meets the often complex needs of the victim and their children. HMIC found good established working practices in many areas through the MARACs.

However in some forces HMIC has concerns about high caseloads and how the police are dealing with this. The practice of the police imposing a quota on the number of cases assessed as high risk based on the number of cases a MARAC, or a specialist unit, can manage, rather than on the actual level of risk to the victim, is of significant concern. It is a practice that should stop now.

Many forces are looking at how to increase the effectiveness of their partnership working in domestic abuse through the creation of multi-agency safeguarding hubs (or MASHs) which bring together staff from police and partner agencies who work from the same location. Often these build on similar arrangements to those that already exist in respect of child protection. HMIC strongly supports the development of these approaches. They should be built on evidence of the principal characteristics of successful multi-agency partnerships. Forces and partners also need to make sure there is a clear understanding of the relationship between the MARAC and the MASH, avoiding duplication but not constructing rigidly separate structures.

## **Management of risk**

HMIC found that forces are still missing opportunities to manage better the risks to victims of domestic abuse. Many forces are not deploying one of their most valuable assets, neighbourhood policing teams, in the fight against domestic abuse. Many are failing to target and manage their perpetrator population in a way that is now common practice in tackling other sorts of crime. While most forces have recently started to identify and target their prolific domestic abuse offenders, in many cases this has not been embedded into the working practices of response officers or neighbourhood teams. Nor is it apparent that forces are using broader resources such as intelligence analysts to support disruptive action and, where appropriate, covert resources in order to collect intelligence. Forces should consider applying the same disruption tactics that work so successfully against members of organised crime groups against their most harmful perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Opportunities to learn as an organisation are also missed by forces. While they participate in domestic homicide reviews (DHRs), there is insufficient evidence to show how learning from the reviews is being used to improve police practice.

Common barriers to the reviews being more effective are: the time lag between the incident and the completion of the review (including the Home Office quality assurance process); the responsibility for implementing the recommendations being at too tactical a level within the organisation; the focus of the review being felt to be an exercise in the apportionment of blame rather than one of learning lessons; and the difficulty in accessing learning from reviews relating to other forces.

## **Conclusion**

**The overall police response to victims of domestic abuse is not good enough. Unacceptable failings in core policing activities, investigating crime, preventing crime, bringing offenders to justice and keeping victims safe are the principal reasons for this.**

HMIC has developed a set of recommendations in consultation with police officers, police staff, police and crime commissioners, domestic abuse workers, voluntary sector organisations, and academics. It is essential that these recommendations are acted on if there is to be a lasting difference made to the way the police service keeps victims safe.

Putting these recommendations into practice requires concerted effort at both the local and national levels. Implementation will require strong leadership and commitment, supported by clear guidance and reinforced by effective supervision. Forces must provide reassurance to the communities they serve that the deficiencies identified in this report are being tackled, and that victims of domestic abuse can come forward to the police with confidence that they will receive a response which is prompt, adequate and effective.

The policing landscape has changed dramatically since the last HMIC inspection of domestic abuse. The recent reforms to the institutional architecture of policing have made two significant changes which can help prevent the implementation failure that has gone before.

First, democratically elected police and crime commissioners now hold chief constables to account on behalf of the public. Domestic abuse is both a volume and

a violent crime. It has a profound impact on the lives of many members of our communities. Almost all police and crime commissioners have recognised this and have tackled domestic abuse as an explicit priority. Police and crime commissioners can use the findings of this report, and each force's individual report, to hold their chief constable and his or her senior team to account for making the improvements required. Annex B provides further support in the form of a toolkit for police and crime commissioners.

Second, the newly established College of Policing is well-placed to support police forces in building the necessary capability required to effect the change.

**Police leaders have declared that tackling domestic abuse is their priority. They must act decisively to make this an operational reality. It must become everyone's business within the force rather than someone else's problem. This opportunity to secure fundamental and lasting change must not be squandered.**

## Recommendations

There are fundamental weaknesses in the service provided to victims of domestic abuse by the police service and this must improve radically and rapidly. This report must act as a catalyst for forces to make the necessary and essential improvements. Victims have waited too long in this respect.

### Recommendation 1

There should be a renewed national effort to tackle domestic abuse. The Home Office, working with the College of Policing, chief constables and police and crime commissioners, needs to inject urgency and energy into solving the material problems identified in this report.

A national oversight and monitoring group should be established and convened immediately to monitor and report on the progress made in implementing these recommendations. This group should have a wide membership (including non-government domestic abuse organisations), be chaired at a senior level, and be able to influence government departments and other national and local bodies where multi-agency issues are raised about domestic abuse.

The group should report publicly on progress every quarter. There should be a full review of the police service's progress in relation to all recommendations in 12 months' time.

### Recommendation 2

By September 2014, every police force in England and Wales should establish and publish an action plan that specifies in detail what steps it will take to improve its approach to domestic abuse. This action plan should be developed:

- in consultation with police and crime commissioners, domestic abuse support organisations and victims' representatives;
- after close consideration of all the recommendations in this report;
- with reference to all relevant domestic homicide reviews and IPCC findings, whether in connection with the force in question or another force; and

- drawing on relevant knowledge acquired or available from other sources such as CPS scrutiny panels and MARAC self assessments.

The action plan should be established on the basis of best practice, based on revised relevant guidance from the College of Policing. To ensure consistency, the College and the national policing lead on domestic abuse have agreed to provide advice on the areas that each plan should cover by the end of April 2014.

Chief officers in each police force should oversee and ensure full implementation of these action plans. This should be a personal responsibility in each case. Police and crime commissioners should hold forces to account in this respect. HMIC will inspect forces' progress on domestic abuse as part of its new annual all-force inspection programme. Police and crime commissioners and chief constables should be called upon to report publicly on progress, as well as to the national oversight and monitoring group.

### **Recommendation 3**

To inform the action plan specified in Recommendation 2, chief constables should review how they, and their senior officers, give full effect to their forces' stated priority on domestic abuse. This should consider how action to tackle domestic abuse is prioritised and valued, and how staff are given the appropriate level of professional and conspicuous support and encouragement. This should be done through a clear and specific assessment of the following issues in respect of domestic abuse:

- the force's culture and values;
- the force's performance management framework;
- the reward and recognition policy in the force and the roles and behaviours that this rewards currently;
- the selection and promotion processes in the force;
- the messages and communications sent by the senior leadership team to the rest of the force about tackling domestic abuse;
- the development opportunities for officers and staff in the force; and
- force policy on how perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse in the force are managed.

Where the review identifies shortcomings, the chief constable should ensure the implementation of prompt, adequate and effective remedial action. Those remedial steps should be incorporated into the action plan specified in Recommendation 2. HMIC should be provided with a copy of each review and the action plan.

## **Recommendation 4**

Data collected on domestic abuse needs to be consistent, comparable, accessible and accurate so that it can be used to monitor progress. This requires the Home Office to develop national data standards in relation to domestic abuse data. The data should be collected by police forces and provided to the Home Office, for example as part of the annual data return. These should include data standards for both crimes and incidents, and clear and unambiguous definitions of important terms such as 'repeat victim', to ensure like-for-like comparisons can be made.

In addition, the views of victims are an essential element in monitoring police effectiveness. The Home Office should ensure that the views of victims of domestic abuse are incorporated routinely and consistently into national monitoring arrangements.

The new national arrangements for collecting data and capturing the views of victims should be in place by the start of the 2015/16 financial year.

## **Recommendation 5**

The College of Policing is updating authorised professional practice for officers on domestic abuse alongside other areas such as investigation and public protection. This update should be informed by the conclusions of and recommendations in this report, together with existing reviews of domestic abuse best practice, and should be developed with contributions from a wide set of interested parties.

The authorised professional practice update should reiterate and clearly set out principles and minimum standards in the following areas:

- approaches to identifying repeat and vulnerable victims;

- information that responding officers must have available to them on or before arrival;
- victim care and safety planning;
- evidence-gathering to support domestic abuse investigations (in the context of professional police investigation) and evidence-led prosecutions;
- positive action and arrest in cases of domestic abuse;
- risk assessment;
- standards of supervision;
- effective targeting of domestic abuse perpetrators, including the use of covert tactics and the definition of serial and/or persistent perpetrators;
- use of different criminal justice disposals, in particular simple cautions and restorative justice; and
- the principal components of multi-agency arrangements (such as the MARAC and MASH) to tackle domestic abuse.

## **Recommendation 6**

The College of Policing is reviewing the evidence base for risk assessment in cases of domestic abuse. The College should urgently consider the current approach to risk assessment with others, such as practitioners in forces, academic experts and organisations supporting practitioners and victims. It should make an assessment of the sufficiency of the tools that frontline officers are given to assess risk, and of the training they receive in connection with risk assessment.

This approach should:

- in the immediate term, examine whether the approach to identifying the risk of domestic abuse can be made more efficient and assess how forces can be assisted to improve awareness and training to ensure that risk assessments link directly to risk management and safety planning actions; and
- in the medium term, establish a 'task and finish group' (a specific action-orientated group with a set deadline) to consider, over the next six months, the evidence base that underpins identification of risk and determine whether more fundamental changes are needed to the current approach.

Meanwhile, forces should ensure that they continue to use the DASH risk assessment tool in the way that it was originally intended.

## **Recommendation 7**

The College of Policing should conduct a thorough and fundamental review of the sufficiency and effect of training and development on forces' response to domestic abuse. Training for officers and staff should reflect the fact that tackling domestic abuse is core policing business; all relevant officers and staff should be trained to understand the dynamics of different types of domestic abuse, particularly coercive control.

Domestic abuse training should link to:

- other relevant areas of training and development, for example investigative practice, working with vulnerable people, and developing communication skills, including a specific focus on empathy with victims;
- the College of Policing's revised guidance and professional practice, and the developing evidence based on effective ways to tackle domestic abuse.

The College of Policing should include successful attainment of professional standards in domestic abuse in the foundation skills threshold and specialist skills threshold tests which police officers have to pass to progress up their pay scales, so as to ensure that a sound professional understanding of domestic abuse becomes part of officers' continuing professional development and is embedded throughout the careers of all serving officers.

Police forces should ensure that their approach to domestic abuse training is evidence-based. Training should tackle the specific problems of lack of knowledge and poor attitudes to domestic abuse which exist in forces. It should be face-to-face training rather than provided through e-learning.

## **Recommendation 8**

Forces need support in how they target and manage perpetrators of domestic abuse. The College of Policing, through the national policing lead for domestic abuse, should disseminate to forces examples of how forces are targeting serial and repeat domestic abuse perpetrators in order to prevent future offending. The College's *What Works Centre for Crime Reduction* should provide to forces evidence about how effective programmes of managing perpetrators achieve reductions in domestic abuse. They should work with departments such as the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, academic institutions and organisations working with perpetrators to build a strong evidence base in this area.

## **Recommendation 9**

The Home Office should reconsider its approach to domestic homicide reviews. It needs to re-assess whether the current process, guidance and quality assurance arrangements provide the best opportunities for the improvement of forces' knowledge of and approach to domestic abuse cases. It should consider whether there is a better way of communicating the contents and conclusions of reviews and the lessons learned. Police and crime commissioners should track how and when recommendations from domestic homicide reviews are implemented.

## **Recommendation 10**

Police and crime commissioners should consider the findings and recommendations of this report when commissioning services for victims of domestic abuse. In particular, they should take note of the strong value placed on the role of independent domestic violence advisers by the victims, police and other criminal justice agencies.

## **Recommendation 11**

Tackling domestic abuse requires a number of organisations in both the statutory services (including health, local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service and probation) and voluntary and community services to work together. Following HMIC's inspection, there should be a further multi-agency inspection of these services. This should consider how local services provide advice, assistance and support to victims

of domestic abuse. The inspection should not only consider how individual services contribute to keeping victims safe, but also the quality of the partnerships and the ways in which joint working is scrutinised.

## Introduction

The Home Secretary commissioned HMIC to conduct an inspection into how police forces are responding to domestic violence<sup>11</sup> in September 2013. This inspection covered all police forces in England and Wales. We were asked to report on:

- 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.

This inspection programme has been developed with the Domestic Abuse Reference Group (with representatives from the police service, police and crime commissioners, the College of Policing, the Home Office and the voluntary sector). A full methodology is attached at Annex C.

Every force in England and Wales was inspected between October and December 2013. This involved several days of interviewing officers, holding focus groups and engaging directly with frontline practitioners to determine their knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The fieldwork in each force has focused on the following four areas:

1. Is the force effective at **identifying** victims of domestic abuse, and in particular repeat and vulnerable victims?
2. Is the initial force **response** to victims effective?
3. Are victims of domestic abuse **made safer** as a result of the police response and subsequent action?

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<sup>11</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence)

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

HMIC has also drawn on the following data sources:

- force **data on domestic abuse incidents, crimes, disposals and cases** collected by HMIC and supplemented with force level data provided by Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA);
- **600 case files** for the crime of actual bodily harm which were identified as relating to domestic abuse;
- nine **focus groups** attended by more than 70 victims of domestic abuse in all regions of England and Wales, and further focus groups and interviews with male victims, women in prison and black and minority ethnic victims;
- a **survey of over 500 victims of domestic abuse**, working with Victim Support to make sure that each force was represented;
- a **survey of almost 200 independent domestic violence advisers** and other domestic abuse workers; and
- **two stakeholder consultation events** with police forces, police and crime commissioners and their offices, and members of the voluntary community sector with 80 attendees in total.

## Domestic abuse in England and Wales

All figures relate to the 43 force data returns and are for the twelve-month period to 31 August 2013

### Volume police business

1,010,000	Calls for assistance to the police for domestic abuse related incidents
269,700	Domestic abuse related crimes
6,400	Domestic abuse related sexual offences
96,000	Domestic abuse related assault with injury crimes
27,300	Domestic abuse related harassment crimes

### Domestic abuse related crime is

8%	of total crime
11%	of all recorded sexual offences
33%	of all recorded assault with injury crimes
49%	of all recorded harassment crimes

### High risk police business

57,900	high risk of serious harm or murder cases referred to MARAC
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On average **every 30 seconds someone** contacts the police for assistance with domestic abuse

## Definition of domestic abuse

In 2012, a new government definition of domestic abuse was agreed.<sup>12</sup> This differs in a number of ways from the original definition (on which existing police guidance is based) and recognises the practical limitations of the previous working definition. It now explicitly includes patterns of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour as well as incidents, and relates to young people over 16 rather than adults over 18.

### **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:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

**Controlling behaviour** is 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 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.

Domestic abuse covers a wide range of different types of violence and behaviours and different perpetrators. The definition includes intimate partner violence, child abuse, elder abuse, sibling abuse, child to parent abuse, so-called 'crimes of honour', female genital mutilation, forced marriage and other violent acts within the family. There are marked differences between sibling abuse and intimate partner abuse. Intimate partner violence, which affects women disproportionately, includes a

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<sup>12</sup> The definition is taken from [www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse](http://www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse)

range of different types of violence including: physical and or/sexual violence; intimidation; isolation; control and the 'micro management' of everyday life.

We consider throughout this report the extent to which this definition has been understood by police officers and staff, and how the wide range of victims falling within this new definition are identified and kept safe by the police. Forces should not underestimate the challenge of educating their workforce in what coercive control means, particularly as some controlling behaviours do not manifest themselves as criminal offences and the pattern of incidents may include those not previously reported to the police. As one victim told us "*The psychological stuff is so difficult to explain to the police*". However, situations where there is currently no physical violence, but considerable control, can also ultimately be fatal. Police officers have a responsibility to prevent crime and keep people safe, so responding to abuse which is not necessarily criminal, but can be dangerous, is vital.

There is significant literature and research on the nature and extent of domestic abuse. This report does not seek to include all of it. However, it is important to set out clearly for the public and the police service what we know about this so the public can understand the prevalence of the abuse and the damage it causes.

## **Who are the victims of domestic abuse?**

The 2012-13 Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated there 1.2 million female victims of domestic abuse and 700,000 male victims<sup>13</sup> - this covers the entire range of types of domestic abuse<sup>14</sup>. While both men and women can be victims of domestic abuse, women are more likely to be victims than men. Women are also much more likely to be high risk victims; 96 percent of all referrals to MARAC were women.

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<sup>13</sup> 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](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> These estimates include any single act of violence, including physical violence, emotional threats and financial controls. It can provide an indication of the frequency and severity of the abuse, but there are limitations on the extent to which it identifies coercive control.

The risk of experiencing domestic abuse is increased if someone is; aged between 16-24 (women) or 16-19 (men);<sup>15</sup> has a long term illness or disability (which almost doubles the risk);<sup>16</sup> has a mental health problem;<sup>17</sup> and is a woman who is separated.<sup>18</sup> The risk may also be increased by pregnancy or having given birth recently.

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.

## How victims report?

Many victims do not report their abuse. It is vitally important that police officers understand why this might be the case. Of those that responded to HMIC's open on-line survey<sup>19</sup>, 46 percent had never reported domestic abuse to the police. The Crime Survey for England and Wales reported that while the majority of victims (79 percent) told someone about the abuse, for both women and men this was most likely to be someone they know personally (76 percent for women and 61 percent for men). Only 27 percent of women and 10 percent of men said they would tell the police.<sup>20</sup>

The reasons the victims we surveyed gave for not reporting the domestic abuse to the police were: fear of retaliation (45 percent); embarrassment or shame (40 percent); lack of trust or confidence in the police (30 percent); and the effect on children (30 percent).

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<sup>15</sup> Smith K, Osbourne, S., Lau, I., & Britton A. (2012) *Homicide, firearm offences and intimate partner violence 2010/2011*: Supplementary volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales. London.

<sup>16</sup> Smith K (ed), Coleman K, Eder S et al (2011) *Homicides, firearm offences and intimate violence 2009/10*: supplementary volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2009/10. London

<sup>17</sup> Trevillion K, Oram S, Feder G et al (2012) *Experience of domestic violence and mental disorders: a systematic review and meta-analysis*. PLoS ONE 7:e51740

<sup>18</sup> Smith K (ed), Coleman K, Eder S et al (2011) *Homicides, firearm offences and intimate violence 2009/10*: supplementary volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2009/10. London

<sup>19</sup> 122 victims responded to the open online survey. See methodology for more detail on victim survey.

<sup>20</sup> *Focus on violent crime and sexual offences 2012/13 – Chapter 4: Intimate Personal Violence and Partner Abuse*. Office for National Statistics, 2014.

[http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_352362.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

Many of the women we spoke to in our focus groups described some of these concerns to us in more detail.

***“You get stigmatised – sometimes you are not looked at as an individual. I think you are just put in a ‘box’ – along with everybody else and not looked at individually. You are just another woman that has been abused. It’s your fault. I felt embarrassed by the whole situation and blaming myself.”***

In the UK, 25 percent of those aged 10 to 24 reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood<sup>21</sup>. Victims of domestic abuse told us that they were scared of reporting abuse to the police in case their children were removed by social services. Often the perpetrator uses this to control the victim.

***“Part of the reasoning why a lot of the time I didn’t ring the police, [was] because I was scared for my son. A lot of the time it ended up in the bedroom and my son sat on the bed. My son was right there when things were happening. And in my head I was thinking if I ring the police and tell them that my son was sitting there they’d get the social and take him away. I would end up losing him so I put up with it.”***

The women that we met whose first language was not English, or who were not born in the UK, had particular concerns. They described feelings of being disempowered as they did not understand the police officer and were not able to describe what had happened.

***“Been here for seven and a half years. Called police after one and a half years. English not very good. Never asked me for interpreters. Would have made a difference. My ex always said you are foreign, you are nothing in this country – they won’t believe you. I could have asked more questions with interpreter. Didn’t ask me if help to interpret or***

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<sup>21</sup> Radford L, Corral S, Bradley C et al (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC.

*translate. They didn't want to help. My ex is English. He said they would always believe him because he's English."*

*"I didn't want to call police because I'm scared of them, each time they think I'm an illegal and they just scare me.... They don't give any sign that I can trust them or believe in them."*

In summary, there are many reasons why victims of domestic abuse may not feel able to engage with the police, or why they may change their minds about supporting any police action part-way through criminal proceedings. Our findings, from speaking with victims, reinforced the reasons summarised in academic research including fear of retaliation; intensified controlling behaviour from the perpetrator; pressure from the community or wider family to withdraw; and isolation from other sources of support for themselves or their family.<sup>22</sup>

Some of these barriers to reporting are particularly pertinent to different victims. Victims from minority communities may be subject to more intense pressure from their families or the wider community. Victims in same sex relationships may fear being "outed" by the process or fear being disbelieved.

*"There is a massive amount of shame. I didn't tell anyone, I couldn't because they wouldn't believe me..... I'm not stupid but I got myself in this situation. And domestic violence is something that men do to women, it's not something that gay people do."*

## **Who are the perpetrators?**

There is relatively little published information about domestic abuse perpetrators compared to victims. Men are more likely to be repeat perpetrators, and to use

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<sup>22</sup> Hoyle, C. and Sanders, A., *Police Response to Domestic Violence: from victim choice to victim empowerment?* British Journal of Criminology 40, 2000  
<http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/content/40/1/14.full.pdf+html>

physical violence, threats and harassment.<sup>23</sup> Women are more likely to use a weapon in self defence.

## What do perpetrators do?

Perpetrators seek to down play the impact of their abuse and fail to admit or acknowledge the extent of the harm that they cause. This can take many forms:

- complete denial;
- inclusion (perpetrators include only abuse that has become public);<sup>24</sup>
- forgetting, blanking out and ‘not knowing’;
- normalising (presenting behaviour as if it was not important):<sup>25</sup>
- denying the impact on children (evidence suggests that in 90 percent of domestic assaults, children are in the same or next room);<sup>26</sup> and
- denying that they have responsibility, instead blaming the victim or other problems, such as substance misuse, stress, or mental illness.<sup>27</sup>

Many women victims that we spoke to in our focus groups explained how perpetrators used various tactics to manipulate and control the situation if the police attended. This may include making a counter-allegation against the victim. In our review of 600 domestic abuse actual bodily harm case files, there was a counter-allegation made in 30 percent of the cases. Often the women we spoke to described how calm and plausible the perpetrator appeared to be on arrival of the police.

***“When the police turned up – he had been loud, violent, aggressive, smashing things and hitting me. By the time the police arrived – what***

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<sup>23</sup> Hester, Marianne, *Who Does What to Whom? Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators*, NR Foundation, June 2009.

[www.nr-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Who-Does-What-to-Whom.pdf](http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Who-Does-What-to-Whom.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Hearn, J., *Men's violence to known women*. In *Violence and Gender Relations*, (eds B. Fawcett, B. Featherstone, J. Hearn, et al). Sage, London. 1995

<sup>25</sup> Trew, T., *What the papers say: linguistic variation and ideology difference*. In *Language and Control*, (eds R. Fowler, R. Hodge, G. Kress, et al), Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1979, pp. 117–156.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, H. *Impact of spouse abuse on children of battered women*. In *Violence Update*, 1 August 1992, pp. 9–11.

<sup>27</sup> Blacklock, N., *Domestic violence: working with perpetrators, the community and its institutions*. In *advances in psychiatric treatment*, Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2001  
<http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/7/1/65.full.pdf+html>

*they would have met is me – very frightened, very panicky, very emotional, very trembley – house smashed, not making much sense and him a very gathered gentleman, fantastically well educated, calm, saying he'd never laid a hand on me."*

Police officers can also be both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse. Although not a major focus of this inspection, it is an uncomfortable fact that cannot be ignored. Some of the victims we spoke to in our focus groups had been in abusive relationships with police officers. They described their utter lack of confidence in the police response and fear that the service would "look after its own". It is vital for public confidence that those police officers who are perpetrators of domestic abuse are brought to justice. Forces should also have consistent and robust disciplinary policies to deal with this issue.

It is imperative that forces support officers who are victims themselves. There is likely to be significant under-reporting of this. However, a wealth of material exists to help organisations tackle domestic abuse in the workplace. Forces are encouraged to commit to the Public Health Responsibility Deal, which has a specific pledge on supporting victims of domestic abuse in the workplace.<sup>28</sup> Avon and Somerset Constabulary has already committed to do so.

## **Is the definition of domestic abuse fit for purpose?**

The cross-government definition of domestic abuse was developed and amended following extensive consultation in 2012<sup>29</sup> so as to include those aged 16 to 17 and to make explicit reference, for the first time, to coercive control. The new extended definition was implemented in March 2013. It is not a statutory definition but it is used by government departments to inform policy development, and by other agencies

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<sup>28</sup> <https://responsibilitydeal.dh.gov.uk/pledges/pledge/?pl=46>

<sup>29</sup> 506 respondents engaged with the consultation

*Cross-government Definition of Domestic Violence – A Consultation, Summary of Responses*, Home Office, September 2012

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/157800/domestic-violence-definition.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/157800/domestic-violence-definition.pdf)

such as the police, the CPS and the UK Border Agency to inform their identification of domestic violence cases.

During our inspection fieldwork, many officers expressed views that domestic abuse covered too wide a range of incidents and offences. Also, they told us that in some relationships and circumstances, although the behaviour may be criminal, there might not be the same risk of harm and control that exists with abusive intimate partner relationships. Officers frequently quoted the example of an argument between brothers, and expressed the view that the response the force expected of them (because the incident was classified as domestic abuse) was both unnecessary and inappropriate.

HMIC heard a range of views on whether a definition, which mixes intimate partner violence with violence involving broader family members, is helpful when seeking to identify and manage risk. The view was strongly expressed that the emphasis on family abuse, as well as intimate partner violence, has raised awareness of the need to support other vulnerable victims and tackle other crime types. Examples include elder abuse and crucially, so-called honour based violence (defined below). In these cases it is important to understand what is behind an incident, for example, involving siblings, or a mother-in-law towards her daughter-in-law.

#### **Honour-based violence (HBV)**

So-called honour-based violence is a crime or incident, which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the term 'honour' based violence, it is recognised that there is no honour in and no legal defence for committing offences against the person. It can be described as a collection of practices (some criminal and some not) which are used to control behaviour within families to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Honour-based violence can be distinguished from other forms of violence as it is often committed with some degree of approval and/or collusion from family and/or community members.

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<sup>30</sup> *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Violence*, National Centre for Policing Excellence for ACPO, 2004. [www.nordaf.co.uk/public/Editor/assets/Library/Centrex%20Guidance%20on%20Investigating%20DV.pdf](http://www.nordaf.co.uk/public/Editor/assets/Library/Centrex%20Guidance%20on%20Investigating%20DV.pdf)

While the definition of domestic abuse is broad, opposing views were expressed to us about the value of this, and in particular about the wide range of relationships covered by the current definition. There was a question raised about whether the risk factors in these different forms of relationships are the same, and whether the response should be the same. It was also suggested by some practitioners that when the force policy sets out that the police response to a range of very different situations should be identical, this risks making police officers increasingly cynical about supporting all victims of domestic abuse.

HMIC recognises the challenges of designing a definition that can be readily understood by the police service and other partners so that operational policy can be clear and unambiguous, while incorporating the complexities of domestic abuse and ensuring all victims are covered.

On balance HMIC is of the view that the current definition, which has been widely consulted on, should stand. However, it needs to be well understood so that domestic abuse and the risks to the victim can be correctly identified, with the response of the police targeted to address the particular risk that they find. This will require greater discretion from officers. However, in order for this to work, officers need to be well-trained, well-motivated and well-supervised. Based on HMIC's evidence this is not the case universally. This report sets out, in more detail, why this might be the case and the actions needed to improve the police response to, and investigation of, domestic abuse.

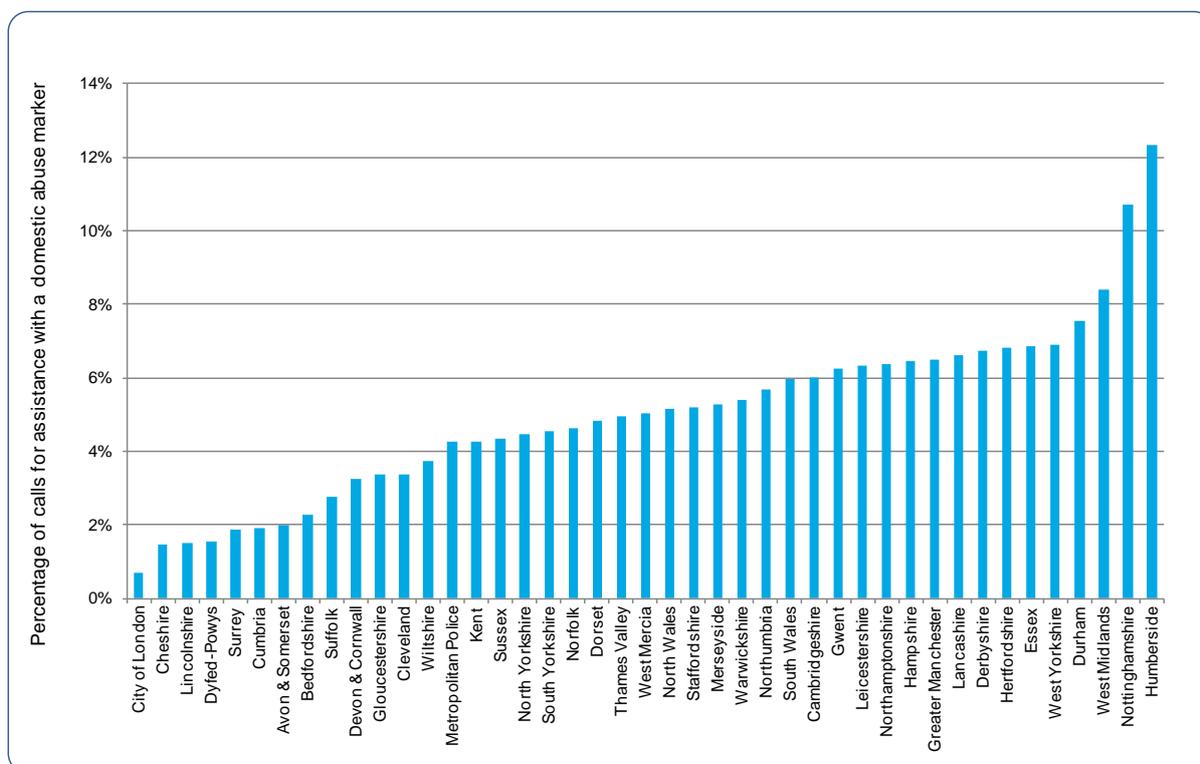
# Identifying victims of domestic abuse

## Front desk and call handler responses

This inspection has confirmed the important role of front desk and control room staff who are generally the first to receive reports of domestic abuse. While this may be the first time the victim has contacted the police, they are likely to have been experiencing abuse for some time.

Police forces in England and Wales manage approximately 58,000 calls for assistance every day. We asked forces how many of these calls relate to domestic abuse. In most forces this is between 2 and 7 percent of the total calls, as set out in Figure 1. On average **every 30 seconds someone contacts the police for assistance as a result of experiencing domestic abuse.**

**Figure 1 : Percentage of all calls for assistance which had a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>31</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

<sup>31</sup> Based on forces own definitions of domestic abuse and calls for assistance and the use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

## Responding to domestic abuse calls

It is important that when a victim contacts the police they have confidence that their call will be acted upon. The call handler should provide the necessary advice to secure the victim's immediate safety; get as much information to support the officers responding to call; and be aware that the call itself could include vital evidence to be used to charge and prosecute the perpetrator.

Call handlers need to be able to assess the level of risk to victim and how vulnerable they are, in order to decide how quickly an officer needs to respond. To carry out this role effectively, those responding to 999 calls must have good training and awareness which allows them to both recognise domestic abuse and to build trust and confidence with the victim. They need to be able to have access to force information systems to help them understand any previous history of abuse, assess risk correctly and to identify whether the victim is vulnerable.

HMIC's force inspections showed that in most forces call handlers have an adequate understanding of domestic abuse and have been trained in the definition and nature of domestic abuse. The majority of forces have trained at least some of their call handlers in the last 12 months. Most forces have reasonable processes in place to identify victims of domestic abuse. Many are able to access force systems to gather a range of information and intelligence. Our survey of victims found that three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the way in which the initial report was dealt with, including 15 percent who were very satisfied. Some of the victims we spoke to in the focus groups described how the call handler kept them on the line until the police arrived, which the victims found reassuring.

***"It was a man who answered so I put the phone down. A lady called me back and gave me good advice about how to protect myself and my daughter. Told me to hide in the toilet until the police arrived. The lady spoke to me slowly, used short phrases, really tried to understand."***

There are areas that need to improve including developing a good rapport with callers in some forces and assessing risk and vulnerability in a better way. During

some of the calls HMIC listened to call handlers were, on occasions, abrupt. Victims we surveyed said the main reason for dissatisfaction with how the initial call or report was dealt with, was because they had not been taken seriously enough; the police lacked interest or understanding; and little care or sympathy was shown.

Victims told us that sometimes call handlers did not recognise all forms of abuse, particularly abuse which was not physical:

*“...I wanted to be safe and believed. I was essentially told to stop calling unless he physically assaulted me or the children. Been going on three and half years. Now much better. He used to turn furniture upside down. Freaked me out. I rang police and was told that nothing could be done as it was the marital home unless there was an immediate threat to mine or my children’s life.”*

Several forces are unable to identify repeat victims consistently. There are a number of reasons for this including:

- a lack of awareness or confusion on the part of the call handler on how to define a repeat or vulnerable victim;
- control room staff failing to use a formal process to assess risk (for example, checklists or drop down menus that act as a prompt to ensure the main questions are asked);
- over-reliance on discretionary judgment, with insufficient training and understanding of domestic abuse (especially recognising coercive control and non-physical abuse); and
- limited time or capacity to carry out further checks on force systems.

Our inspection identified considerable weaknesses in some force information systems. Outdated and antiquated systems are hampering call handlers’ ability to make a rounded assessment of risk. In some forces, control room staff have to conduct time-consuming searches on multiple databases in order to gather important information about previous incidents. In many forces there is a dedicated

intelligence resource in the control room to conduct these searches, but at busy periods a more detailed search may not happen.

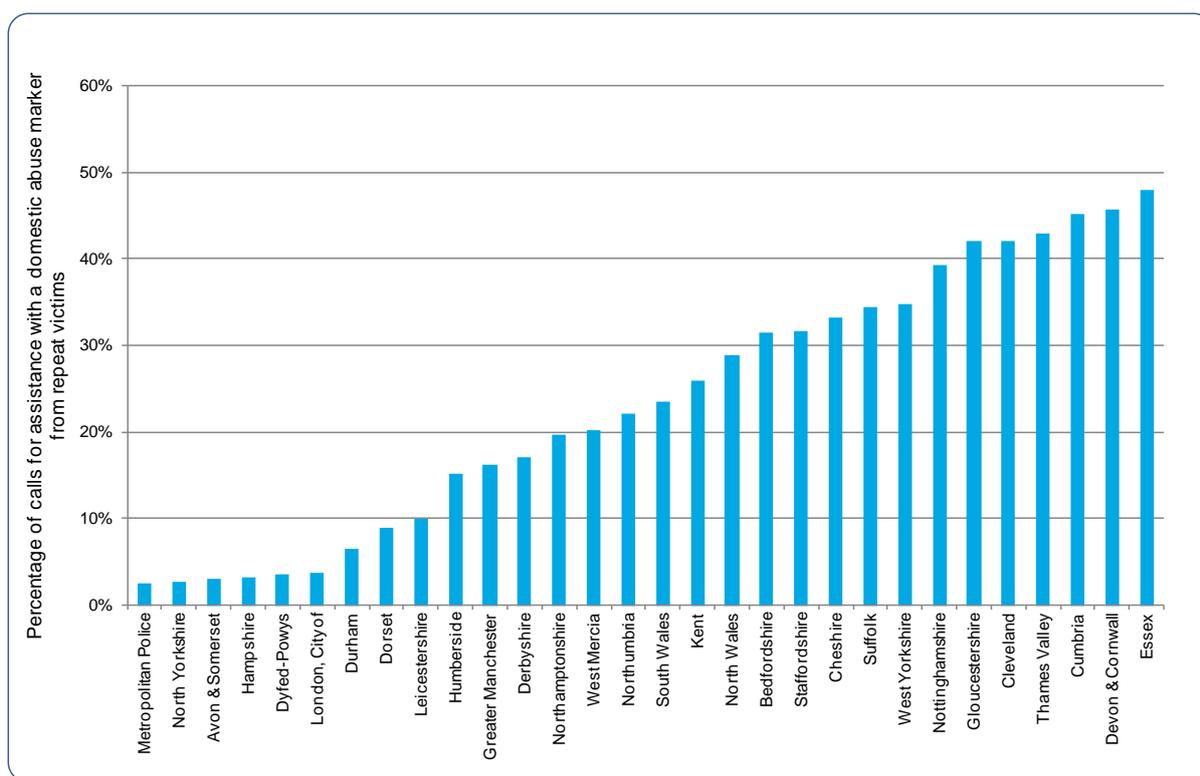
Some forces' systems only alert the call handler when there has been a previous incident at a specific address. This makes it difficult for call handlers to identify repeat or vulnerable victims if the victim calls from another address (for example, if they have fled to friends or family). Sixteen forces out of 43 do not have systems which 'automatically' identify potential repeat victims from the data that is entered.

We asked forces to tell us how many of their calls for assistance came from repeat victims; 13 forces were unable to provide this information (see Figure 2).<sup>32</sup> HMIC has serious concerns that one third of forces cannot readily provide data on repeat victims, not least because it suggests that forces are not tracking this important information themselves.

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<sup>32</sup> Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Gwent Police, Hertfordshire Constabulary, Lancashire Constabulary, Lincolnshire Police, Merseyside Police, Norfolk Constabulary, South Yorkshire Police, Surrey Police, Warwickshire Police, West Midlands Police and Wiltshire Constabulary.

**Figure 2 : Percentage of calls for assistance with a domestic abuse marker from repeat victims for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>33</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

In view of the extreme variation in the information provided it is unlikely that some forces' data accurately reflects the number of repeat victims.

## Sending officers to domestic abuse incidents

All forces told HMIC that force policy is that an officer will always attend a domestic abuse incident and will be dispatched immediately or within a non-emergency response time (typically one hour). In some cases the victim may not want an officer to attend, so an appointment at a police station may be arranged. In only a very small number of cases is a scheduled appointment appropriate. This should only occur after an effective risk assessment by the call handler. 77 percent of the victims of domestic abuse we surveyed, who reported their incident to the police, told us that police officers attended as a result of the initial call.

<sup>33</sup> Based on forces' own definitions of; calls for assistance, domestic abuse and repeat victims, and the use of a domestic abuse markers on IT recording systems.

It is important to victims, particularly when they are distressed or feel in danger, that the police respond quickly. When we asked victims what made them feel satisfied with the way in which the initial call or report was dealt with, one of the main reasons they gave was a quick response (18 percent). Some forces prioritise responses to domestic abuse incidents and many have the policy of sending the nearest available officers to respond. Where forces have technology which allows them to see the position of vehicles and officers, control room staff can more easily direct the nearest police car to attend.

If the perpetrator had left the home victims told us that on occasions officers could take some time (possibly hours) to arrive. The victims we spoke to were often very upset and fearful that the perpetrator might return while waiting for a responding officer. Where it is not possible to dispatch resources immediately it is important to remember the impact this may have on the victim. Just because the perpetrator has left the scene, those working in the control room should not automatically assume that the incident does not require an immediate response. Each situation will require careful assessment.

The amount of relevant information that is provided to officers attending domestic abuse incidents is extremely variable. In some forces, the plethora of systems on which information is held makes it difficult for call handlers to build a timely and comprehensive picture of a case.

All officers attending domestic abuse incidents should have, as a minimum:

- access to details of all previous incidents relating to the victim;
- records relating to the perpetrator;
- information about any risk assessments relating to the victim and any children; and
- details of any officer safety issues.

This information will be relevant to the investigation and the safety planning that takes place at the scene.

We spoke to responding officers who felt that information about the previous history in a domestic abuse case is sometimes lacking, particularly at times of peak demand. Some felt that the information provided focuses on officer safety rather than on risk to the victim.

Victims told HMIC that if responding officers do not know the main facts about their situation, this can significantly undermine their trust and confidence in the police.

*“Every time a new officer comes to the house they want to know the background. Very painful raking it all up. It would be useful if they took some background off the screen before coming to see me.”*

## **Supervision in the force control room or communications centre**

Supervision in the control room is critically important to ensuring that risk to victims is being effectively identified. Tensions exist in how the police manage calls for assistance.

It is important that call handlers deal with the call quickly so they can move on to answer other calls. However, in some cases, a longer call is necessary to reassure the victim, gather important information and provide advice to keep them safe.

Most forces have quality assurance processes and supervision arrangements in place which mean that call handling staff are given individual feedback.

HMIC observed some robust supervisory approaches including dip-sampling by supervisors who randomly select a number of calls to check. It is particularly important that high risk cases are identified for ‘live-time’ supervision wherever operationally possible. For example, in some forces, supervisors are made aware when an incident is identified as a potentially high risk domestic abuse. They then listen in to the call to ensure that timely and appropriate action is taken by the call handler.

## Police stations

While the majority of victims report incidents of domestic abuse through 999 or non-emergency calls, almost one in ten of the victims HMIC surveyed went to the police station to report domestic abuse.

*“Went to police station. Had no place to go and they helped me. They called in an interpreter.”*

Our inspection fieldwork found that some police stations or ‘front counters’ have experienced victims of domestic abuse attending to seek help (sometimes with children). Limited numbers of front counter staff, or those working on enquiry desks in police stations, have had any training in domestic abuse issues. While they demonstrate strong empathy and awareness, they do not necessarily have the knowledge and training needed to deal with a domestic abuse victims effectively.

*“The second time it happened I went to X police station while my husband and daughter were sleeping. I couldn’t speak English. This man in uniform on the counter, I felt he didn’t want to know until I showed him a non-molestation order, then he was more respectful. He told me to wait for an interpreter. I sat for over 2 hours and couldn’t wait any longer so went home. I was so scared going home.”*

The evidence from victims suggests the value of a police station as a place of safety. Many forces are changing their police estate in response to the spending reductions. This involves selling police stations and, in many cases, locating police services in buildings with other agencies (for example local authority partners). In doing so forces need to be aware that an easily identifiable police building, with public access, can be extremely important to victims in crisis.

## Action needed

The service that domestic abuse victims receive from the police when they first call, compared to a decade ago, has improved. Domestic abuse incidents are now being properly identified by call handlers, who have received better training to help them

deal with the call promptly, effectively and with appropriate empathy. However, forces need to take action to address problems that continue to undermine the effectiveness of this important first contact between the victim and the police.

Too many force IT systems do not allow call handlers to have all the necessary information they need to build a picture when they speak to the victim or to give those officers responding to a victim, the information they need to provide the best possible service when they arrive at the scene.

Not all call handlers have an adequate understanding of the broad range of domestic abuse, and how quickly things can escalate. Call handlers may fail to recognise abuse which is not physical, or they may not understand that there could still be a risk to the victim after the perpetrator has left the scene. **Recommendation 7** calls for a complete overhaul and review of training for frontline officers and staff, including those responding to calls.

Some forces are poor at identifying repeat victims of domestic abuse, with call handlers hampered by out of date information technology which is not fit for purpose. This problem is exacerbated by forces not having a consistent and well understood definition of repeat victims. **Recommendation 5** suggests the latter should be addressed when the College of Policing updates national guidance on domestic abuse.

## Responding to victims of domestic abuse

The initial police response to a domestic abuse incident is vital. It is the best opportunity to gather evidence to investigate the crime and bring the offender to justice. It can be the first face to face contact the victim has had with the police, often following numerous abusive incidents. Responding to victims of domestic abuse is a core part of the mission of policing – to prevent crime and disorder. Every police constable when taking office declares that they will “*cause the peace to be kept and preserved and prevent all offences against people and property*”.

In this interaction the response officer must also protect the victim from further harm, gain their trust and confidence, and assess what level of risk they face in order to help keep them safe in the future. This can be a complex task. Domestic abuse incidents are of a sensitive and personal nature, and many involve other issues, such as child welfare. The victim may feel petrified, intimidated and controlled by the perpetrator, and, as a result may be unable to support police action or co-operate with the police in the immediate aftermath. We reviewed 600 case files for the crime of actual bodily harm which were identified as relating to domestic abuse. In 56 percent of these cases the victim did not actively support police action. When the police arrive both people may be claiming to be the victim and the police must use all information available to them to assess the situation. Information on the previous history is vital if officers are to be able to identify who the victim is in instances of counter-allegations; our file review showed that in 30 percent of the cases there were such counter allegations.

Response officers have varying levels of skills and experience. They are often under pressure to deal with incidents as rapidly as possible, so they can be available to respond to other emergency and priority calls. They may attend a range of different incidents on the same shifts which require a different approach or level of empathy (for example breaking up a fight in a public place). Officers will carry personal views and bias (often reinforced by their experiences as police officers or indeed in their own personal lives and by the views of their colleagues) that they bring to these incidents, which can have an impact on their approach and attitudes.

As the next section sets out, significant improvements are required in the initial response to victims of domestic abuse. There are also fundamental questions that the police service should ask itself as it strives to move policing onto a more professional footing. In particular:

- what is it reasonable to expect of a response officer;
- given the breadth of tasks and duties that policing a modern society entails, what should we be asking a constable to do routinely and professionally on a response shift, and
- are we recruiting the right people and equipping them with the right skills to do this?

## **Overall quality of response and attitudes of responding officers**

The attitude of the attending officer is of vital importance in inspiring the trust and confidence of the victim. Those that we spoke to were very clear about what they expected of a responding officer. The table below summarises the consistent themes raised in all of our focus groups.

For many victims we spoke to, the priority was for the police to make them and their children safe.

*“To keep you safe. To make you feel safe. To help you. To be dedicated.”*

*“Make sure kids are fine – makes me feel safe. If you can hear his voice you are not safe. The next room is not far enough.”*

They wanted the officers to listen to their stories, know why they had contacted the police and understand more about what it might be like to be in an abusive relationship.

*“Be heard. Listen to what I’m saying to you – don’t just write it down. Take on board what I’m telling you.”*

*“You have to listen to her, she needs to be made to feel safe..... Focus on*

*creating a little space to hear her story.”*

*“More understanding around domestic abuse and [perpetrators] being manipulative”*

Victims wanted to feel like officers believed their stories. They wanted them to be sympathetic and crucially – non-judgmental.

*“Feel like I’m believed, really believed.”*

*“Be more empathetic and compassionate.”*

*“I think they need to leave their own emotions on the door step. Don’t judge.”*

The quality of initial police response can be varied. During the inspections HMIC found some examples of excellent understanding on the part of response officers of what constitutes domestic abuse and how quickly it can escalate. We heard many accounts of officers who had dealt with victims and their families in a sympathetic and supportive way. Our survey of victims of domestic abuse found that four fifths (79 percent) of those who had experience of police officers attending the incident, reported that they were satisfied with the initial response from the police, which is positive.

One of the reasons most victims gave in our survey for why they felt satisfied was a quick response (14 percent). While this is important, the speed at which an officer attends is only one element in the provision of a good and effective response. A less positive finding from our survey was that only 66 percent of victims felt safer as a result of the initial response.

We discussed the overall police response in considerable depth with the victims in our focus groups. The majority attending were women who had experienced multiple contacts with the police, and tended to be higher risk cases. We also surveyed IDVAs and other professionals who support victims of domestic abuse, and gave them the opportunity to comment on the behaviours and attitudes of responding officers. We asked officers about their attitudes and the attitudes of their colleagues during our inspection. We formed our own judgments when discussing issues with officers in focus groups and during unannounced visits.

One IDVA told us:

*“In our area, and I am sure in many others, it is still a bit of a lottery as to what kind of response you get. Some officers are absolutely brilliant and the feedback from victims is excellent, in that they felt they were listened to, questioned appropriately and sensitively and that officers keep them up to date with what is happening. Others are frankly diabolical and seem to have no understanding about what they are dealing with. Increasingly the former group are the majority but it only takes one single bad response to stop the victim from ever seeking help again.”*

A victim’s experience typified that of many others:

*“Last year one officer came out and his radio was going and I heard him say “It’s a DV, we’ll be a few minutes and we’ll go to the next job”. And I thought – thanks a lot, that’s my life.”*

From the broad range of evidence collected by HMIC, it is clear that the attitudes of responding officers are, on occasions, unacceptable. There is still work to be done before the police service routinely displays acceptable attitudes in respect of victims of domestic abuse.

A number of different concerns about attitudes were raised by victims in focus groups and by the practitioners that we surveyed.

In some cases responding officers were **not being seen to take the situation seriously**. Of those victims that we surveyed that expressed dissatisfaction, 36 percent gave the reason that the police “did not appear to take the matter seriously”.

*Victim: “They didn’t take it seriously until something happened in public. That’s what happened to me – me and my kids living in fear, being locked in rooms and stuff – police not taking it seriously until he*

*hit me in a club in the middle of everybody. Then they were there like that and arrested him like that. It was no different to what we experienced behind closed door. They didn't even once ask neighbours – they'd heard everything."*

*IDVA: "Many of the women I have worked with have reported to me that the police did not take them seriously. This made women feel like they were making mountains out of molehills and that they also are to blame."*

Victims described a **lack of empathy** demonstrated by officers, particularly when a victim remained with their partner or was perceived not to be actively supportive of police action. In some cases officers were said to have framed questions in a way that made victims feel it was their fault that abuse has occurred. Of those victims responding to our survey who were dissatisfied with the police response, 31 percent gave the reason that the police were not sympathetic.

*Victim: "Found them not very sympathetic and quite judgmental at times and very dismissive of the whole situation."*

*IDVA: "There needs to be a shift in focus from a culture of victim blaming - not necessarily for the abuse, but instead being unable to take action to one where the survivor is empowered. Every incident should be viewed as an opportunity to create change and empower survivors regardless of whether they support allegations or prosecutions".*

Officers could be **judgmental about the victim**. Examples were given where the victims perceived that their previous offending history, or misuse of drugs and alcohol, influenced how they were treated.

*Victim "When the police come out, because you've got a criminal record and they know you – they look at it differently. When I called for help and they came out and said 'I thought you could handle it yourself'. And*

*it's unfair, not right. Doesn't matter what record I've got. I'm ringing up for help."*

*IDVA: "Another concern is that the police are often judgmental when the victim has drug and/or alcohol issues. When I speak to the victims, the vast majority did not have substance misuse issues prior to the abuse and misused substances as a coping mechanism. This does need addressing further with police so that they see it as a factor which increases the vulnerability of a victim not as a cause of nuisance."*

Finally, victims described their **perception that the perpetrator (often a man) may have more influence with police officers** when they attend than the victim.

*Victim: "Across all my experiences with the police, both positive and negative, one connecting factor is they listen to the man. Even when he is the perpetrator. They always listen to the man."*

*IDVA: "Some officers can still be judgmental and appear to collude with the perpetrator (often only in the victim's eyes)."*

Officers also told us about their frustrations in attending domestic abuse incidents. Often there are complex underlying issues that a one-off response from the police cannot hope to address. For example, further support may be required from other agencies, particularly in relation to drug and alcohol abuse or where there are mental health issues. This frustration can be exacerbated in cases where the victim and their family are known to the police and multiple visits are failing to resolving on-going patterns of domestic abuse.

Victims are seen by some officers as being uncooperative or unwilling to support police action or may have previously withdrawn their support in other cases. Many officers feel that they are just reacting to a situation and have no lasting impact on the situation in question.

Poor attitudes and frustration on the part of the police, which can manifest in a lack of empathy, can lead to victims feeling that what they are saying is not important, or that they are not believed. This undermines victims' confidence and can increase the likelihood of them deciding not to support a prosecution. Responding officers need to appreciate that their approaches and attitudes can make an enormous difference to an individual - even in a case where a criminal prosecution does not take place. They also need to understand that gaining the trust of the victim is critical to their investigation.

In conclusion, the attitudes of some officers are not good enough. There are many reasons why victims remain with their partners and why they feel unable to support police action. A lack of understanding of many complex factors is, at least, in part responsible for the poor attitudes of police officers.

For this reason HMIC recommends a fundamental review of police training. Force inspections show that where training and understanding of domestic abuse is limited, officers are operating with a fear of 'getting it wrong', as opposed to having confidence in 'getting it right for the victim'. If officers lack confidence, so will victims. Several forces are trying different approaches to improve the awareness and knowledge of frontline officers.

**Durham Constabulary** has a safeguarding champions initiative, with additional training to selected staff from 24/7 response and neighbourhood teams. Training covers safeguarding issues including domestic abuse and these champions then cascade their learning to colleagues and act as a point of reference and guidance for all safeguarding matters. **Surrey Police** has also trained domestic abuse champions, who are mostly at supervisor level and have had enhanced training meaning they can offer, support, advice and guidance to officers dealing with domestic abuse issues. **Northumbria Police** told us it is planning to have an IDVA on duty in a police patrol car that responded to domestic abuse calls.

Training alone will not fix this vitally important issue. Robust supervision should reinforce the attitudes and behaviours expected of officers. In addition, forces should

not be afraid to use disciplinary proceedings when the conduct of officers falls below that which is acceptable.

## Quality of initial investigation: build the case for the victim

Our force inspections showed that the quality of the initial ‘golden hour’ investigation differs widely across forces and is often of an entirely unacceptable standard. Just as a first response officer’s attitude to the victim can make a difference, the initial investigation at the scene, is critical to a successful prosecution.

Officers need to see beyond the incident they are dealing with and look at the wider context of the situation they find. Responding officers should start to **build the case on behalf of the victim rather than rely on the victim to build the case for the police**. Where prosecutions are to be taken forward without the victim’s involvement, it is even more critical that the initial investigation is rigorous and extensive.

Basic first steps in any investigation are to secure the scene, safeguard any evidence and establish the main facts. Expected investigative action at scene is covered in initial police training and is set out in a range of approved professional practice. The *Joint CPS and ACPO Evidence Checklist – for use by Police forces and CPS in cases of domestic violence*<sup>34</sup> sets out a useful prompt.

First response officer should adhere to the *ACPO Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse 2008*.<sup>35</sup> This is not an exhaustive list but it sets out the following actions:

- Determine full facts including any history of domestic abuse.
- Reassess victim and officer safety, (immediate risk, access to or use of weapons/firearms).
- Assess need for first aid and/or other medical assistance (includes the needs of the victim, any children, any other persons and suspect).
- Recognise and provide for any cultural needs/need for interpreter.
- Separate parties, including any children (record details of children present).

<sup>34</sup> Joint CPS/ACPO evidence checklist for domestic violence cases found at: [www.cps.gov.uk/legal/assets/uploads/files/joint\\_cps\\_acpo\\_evidence\\_checklist\\_for\\_domestic\\_violence\\_cases.doc](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/assets/uploads/files/joint_cps_acpo_evidence_checklist_for_domestic_violence_cases.doc)

<sup>35</sup> *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse*, NPIA, 2008  
<http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2008/2008-cba-inv-dom-abuse.pdf>

- Confirm the identity of the suspect (if not at scene circulate a full description via the radio system).
- Establish who is or was at the scene, including any children.
- Request appropriate checks on the suspect and household (including warrants, bail conditions, civil orders and child protection register, ViSOR<sup>36</sup>, INI<sup>37</sup>, firearms licences or intelligence reports linking suspect and household members to weapons) if not already done.
- Make accurate records of everything said by the suspect, victim, children and any witnesses: include the demeanour of those present.
- Consider photographs and/or use of a video camera to record evidence.
- Obtain medical/photographic consent from victim if required.
- Obtain an overview of what has occurred taking into account established risk factors associated with domestic abuse.
- Secure the safety of victims in their home (make provision for an alternative place of safety/refuge).
- In cases of so-called honour-based violence (HBV) officers should be alert to additional risk factors.

Additional consideration should always be given to:

- Forensic opportunities from the victim with possible conveyance to a health establishment or Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).
- Request the attendance of a crime scene investigator or make arrangements for the capture of photographic evidence.
- Obtain a victim personal statement.
- Identify witnesses.
- House to house enquiries.
- CCTV opportunities.

As set out below, HMIC has serious concerns about the extent to which the police are following these well documented practices and procedures, therefore failing to carry out properly and professionally the initial investigation. Poor investigation decreases the likelihood of detection and a conviction.

<sup>36</sup> Violent and Sex Offenders Register.

<sup>37</sup> Refers to the Impact Nominal Index, now replaced by the Police National Database.

HMIC spoke to responding officers about the actions they take when attending crime scenes. We also heard from their colleagues in specialist investigative units about their perceptions of the quality of the evidence gathered. In addition, HMIC interviewed senior crown and district prosecutors from the Crown Prosecution Service. They raised repeatedly the lack of evidence in case files, giving examples such as detailed victim statements taken at the time or house-to-house enquiries to locate witnesses.

In our analysis of 600 case files for actual bodily harm we found significant weaknesses in the extent to which the evidence set out in existing police practice is routinely gathered at the scene. Table 1 summarises our findings.

**Table 1: Review of evidence contained in 600 domestic abuse actual bodily harm case files**

Evidence	Percentage of case files where activity completed
<b>Victim statement taken at time of initial police attendance</b>	80%
<b>Photographs of injuries taken at the time of the incident</b>	46%
<b>House to house enquiries completed</b>	23%
<b>Police officer statement providing detailed scene, injuries, demeanour of victim/suspect</b>	69%
<b>Body worn camera used to capture evidence from the victim and scene</b>	4%
<b>Was the 999 call recording listened to and exhibited</b>	16%

Evidence from focus groups showed that victims notice when an investigation is poor. This can contribute to their perception that they are not believed or that they are not being taken seriously. The domestic abuse practitioners that we surveyed assessed that initial evidence gathering by frontline officers required ‘some’ or ‘a lot’ of improvement in respect of photographs being taken (57 percent); telephone calls

and text messages being logged (57 percent); and house-to-house enquiries made (48 percent). One IDVA told us, in a comment that typifies the views of many others, that:

*“The biggest failing I have come across is lack of evidence gathering for cases going to court. In particular photographic evidence and witness statements have not been taken or the quality of the photographs is poor.”*

HMIC has very serious concerns about the quality of the initial investigation. For example the taking of a photographs of the victim and/or the crime scene. The offence of actual bodily harm, by its very nature, results in visible injury.

Photographs of the injuries sustained by victims were taken in less than half of the case files we reviewed. This is unacceptable.

In some forces, responding officers do not have access to cameras, or the camera functions on force issued devices are disabled, leaving some officers (in an attempt to do what they felt was right) using their own mobile phones for this purpose.

Victims may be offered the option of attending a local police station to have their injuries photographed, but this is often at times that many would find to be inconvenient. This is poor practice and can lead to important opportunities to capture evidence being missed.

Body-worn cameras are an important tool in gathering evidence at a domestic abuse incident. They can be used to record the behaviour of the offender, the responses of adult and child victims, and the scene itself. These are powerful sources of evidence in any prosecution. But we found that body-worn cameras are not routinely available for officers attending domestic abuse situations – and if they are, they are not always ‘fit for purpose’. For example if they are incorrectly fitted the footage is likely to be unusable. Officers need to understand what type of footage is admissible as evidence. For example, confessions from the perpetrator while not under caution would normally be inadmissible<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> By virtue of section 78 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Similarly, personal digital assistants (PDAs) are not always user-friendly, leading to officers manually filling in forms and returning to the station to input the information electronically. In some forces electronic forms are not available to responding officers at the scene (for example the risk assessment forms discussed later in this section), resulting in duplication of effort in terms of recording information.

Victims in focus groups raised concerns that they were being required to recount their stories repeatedly. In a police investigation it is important that the response officer hears directly from the victim, but they can establish important facts about any history of domestic abuse from police systems so that they have some understanding by the time they arrive on the scene. The words of a victim sum up the sentiments of many in relation to the positive impact this can have.

*“This female officer, who took my statement. She is the only one in the whole 12 years who actually read my case history before coming out. It was such a relief. Often you have to go through the whole thing over and over again. You feel like a broken record player. She made me feel I mattered.”*

It is also important that the victim and the perpetrator are correctly identified. We have already described that there are often a number of counter-allegations and that perpetrators can appear more composed at the scene than the victim. An understanding of the previous patterns of abuse can help the responding officer better understand a situation, particularly where such a counter-allegation is made. It is of concern that women in domestic abuse incidents are arrested to a disproportionate degree, and three times more likely to be arrested for a violent offence than men for a comparable offence.<sup>39</sup>

ACPO guidance recommends that the potential for using house-to-house enquiries should be identified early in an investigation, but recognises that it may require

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<sup>39</sup> Hester, Marianne, *Who Does What to Whom? Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators*, Northern Rock Foundation, June 2009.  
[www.nr-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Who-Does-What-to-Whom.pdf](http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Who-Does-What-to-Whom.pdf)

slightly different planning. It is important that officers gather information and statements from witnesses, and where possible conduct house-to-house enquiries to ensure any corroborating evidence is captured (for example from neighbours who may have seen or heard something). Our file review showed that house-to-house enquiries were only made in only 23 percent of cases. While there may be sensitivities about contacting neighbours, officers should consider it.

We found some evidence that actions by some officers at the scene could be adversely affected if the officer believed that the victim would not support a prosecution (for example if it was known that the victim had not supported action previously). This is not acceptable. All cases of domestic abuse need to be dealt with professionally and proactively.

Despite the shortcomings described, HMIC found that some forces, recognising that initial investigative actions required improvement, are taking steps to ensure this happens.

As a result of good working relations with the CPS, **Merseyside Police** identified a problem with the initial evidence collected by officers in domestic abuse cases and trained 1,500 frontline officers and staff to improve their investigation skills. **Essex Police** carried out an internal review of its investigation approach in one area and developed a series of actions to address the deficiencies identified. It has also established a scrutiny panel to review examples of domestic abuse cases which have not been successfully progressed to learn lessons.

Where there are indications that a victim might not support a prosecution, then the responding officer should be even more proactive in gathering evidence, rather than less so. Effective classroom (face-to-face) based training can help officers to understand why a victim may not support a prosecution (or may pretend to the perpetrator and others that they do not support one). It is critical that officers are alert to all of these possibilities when providing a professional and effective response.

## **Safeguarding the victim at the scene**

Developing rapport and building confidence is a critical element of the initial police response to domestic abuse. Officers should be considering how best to keep the victims safe as soon as they are called to an incident. This is as important as their initial investigation.

This section reflects one of the principal findings from our force inspections; the police response to domestic abuse is too often focused on the offender and the individual criminal offence under investigation, rather than looking at the situation as a whole, for example patterns of repeat offending.

What is known as safety planning is a process requiring officers to build a full picture of the nature of the domestic abuse occurring so that they are in a position to give advice and information, and work with the victim to keep them safe. This can include the involvement of partner agencies.

Safety for the victim and their children is the overriding priority. However, of the victims we surveyed, only two out of three said they felt safer because of initial police action.

The victims we spoke to in the focus groups were more positive about the police response when they had been made to feel safe and given confidence that their children would be safe.

*“Never had a bad experience. I had one child and was pregnant with another. One officer would always walk away with my child so I could speak to the other. Very good. Always took me somewhere and made me feel safe.”*

There are a number of standard and effective approaches to safety planning. Frontline officers should be aware of all of them and should be in a position to discuss the options with victims. Some forces have shared these with officers in an easy to remember way: **Durham Constabulary** has also published a toolkit to assist staff, which has been assessed to find out which elements work best for victims. These successful outcomes are then identified and communicated back to officers. Below is a good example of a toolkit that **Cambridgeshire Constabulary** developed in response to HMIC's recent inspection.

## **Domestic Abuse Safeguarding – Tactical Toolkit from Cambridgeshire**

### **Constabulary**

- Identify, locate and arrest perpetrator.
- Relocate victim and family.
- Security of property – ensure doors and lock are secure and consider Bobby Scheme referral.
- Installation of alarms.
- Notify force control room so force puts warning markers on address in their systems.
- Discuss with your sergeant or inspector for advice and to ensure on-coming shifts are briefed.
- Other support for victim – contact neighbours/friends/other family.
- Take children into police protection.
- Consider referrals to other agencies.
- Advise victim to contact National Domestic Abuse helpline.
- Provide details for further support services.
- Ask victim if neighbours know what is happening and whether they can be asked to call police if the perpetrator returns.
- Ask if victim is willing to have further contact from local neighbourhood officers? If so contact local policing team.
- Advise victim they can self-refer to outreach advisers such as Women’s Aid.
- Ask whether victim is willing to log mobile phone number with the police in case they need to abandon 999 calls.
- Place security device on door.
- Is victim willing to share information with schools?
- Establish a rota of repeat visits, or drive-bys, by local policing teams.
- Victim contact local housing/council to change locks, repair broken locks/doors/windows.

We found examples of frontline response officers being unable to advise effectively on safety planning due to lack of training and our file review only found evidence of safety measures being considered and documented in 42 percent of cases. Our focus groups provided further evidence that safety planning is not routinely taking

place. In some cases, victims are being left to research the options for themselves. This is not acceptable.

***“After they came out to that incident, nobody ever contacted me about what was going to happen next. I would have expected them to secure my property. But then he got back into the house. I would have expected some advice and guidance towards pointing me towards some assistance like Women’s Aid and some advice about injunctions. Nothing.”***

In some forces frontline staff lack knowledge about what domestic abuse services are available locally, including refuges and outreach services that will support victims. All frontline staff need a good understanding of local services in order be able to deliver a professional response. Different force areas are served by different support agencies and voluntary groups. It is the responsibility of a responding officer to ensure a victim is aware of the available support, even if the detail is provided by specialist officers or support workers later. We asked whether victims had been informed of support groups in our on-line survey and 29 percent of those who reported their incident to the police had not been informed of such support. Also victims in our focus groups told us that they had not been referred to refuges or other forms of support

***“Think they should have told me about place like this [refuge] sooner. Places I would be safe. Waited six and a half years. Didn’t know about this. If I’d known in the past I would have left sooner – not six and a half years.”***

There are a range of civil remedies that can keep victims safe and officers should be able to sign-post victims to these. For example, some officers referred to the National Centre for Domestic Violence<sup>40</sup> which supports victims of domestic abuse to apply for an injunction.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.ncdv.org.uk/>

## **Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs)**

DVPOs are a new power designed to provide protection to victims by enabling the police and magistrates courts to put in place protection in the immediate aftermath of a domestic abuse incident. Where there is insufficient evidence to charge a perpetrator and provide protection to a victim via bail conditions, a DVPO can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days, allowing the victim time to consider their options and get the support they need.

Following an evaluation<sup>41</sup> which found that DVPOs reduced re-victimisation compared to cases where arrest was followed by no further action, the Home Secretary announced her intention to roll-out DVPOs across England and Wales from March 2014. Forces are now working towards being ready to support this national roll-out. Full implementation is expected by July 2014.

The victims we spoke to in focus groups told us how they would value time and space to plan their next steps and how they wanted to stay in their homes, so their children can stay at the same school and they can be near their existing support network.

*“They should be held for longer periods of time for the woman to have a bit of space – that’s so important. You’ve got to walk out and leave everything you’ve got and worked for over last 30 years or whatever. Leave it all and start with nothing. You have to leave. I think the police really need to be thinking about giving women time to make decisions.”*

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<sup>41</sup> Kelly, L., Adler, J.R., Horvath, A.H., Lovett, J., Coulson, M., Kernohan, D., Gray, M., Hillier, J., & Nicholas, S. (2013). *Evaluation of the pilot of domestic violence protection orders*. London: Home Office. Available online: <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/260897/horr76.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/260897/horr76.pdf)>

## **Risk identification and assessment in domestic abuse**

Risk identification is another fundamental element of the initial police response. Done correctly and in conjunction with immediate safety planning, it should safeguard the victim and ensure a good handover to specialists. It also provides a wealth of important evidence about the behaviour of the perpetrator and the impact on the victim. Making judgments regarding risk requires skills and experience as well as having a full picture of the victim and the behaviour of the perpetrator.

Responding officers have a crucial role to play in the initial identification and assessment of risk, but the specialist police teams and IDVAs will have all the necessary information, skills and experience to make a full assessment. In order for responding officers to initially identify and assess risk well, they need to:

- understand the history of the abuse and establish whether this is a pattern of events. It is extremely important that officers view the single incident they are attending against the wider history of abuse or criminal behaviour;
- explore the main categories of abuse, whether that is physical, sexual, stalking and whether there is coercive control;
- understand the circumstances in order to identify potential trigger factors for escalation of abuse, for example separation, perpetrator's loss of employment; and
- explore with the victim their perceptions of danger and how fearful they are.

### **Risk assessment tools and processes**

In recent years the police approach to risk assessment has been largely based on sharing multi-agency risk identification and assessment formats. Tools such as the DASH form have become an established part of the police response to domestic violence. This tool aligns with the non-police risk identification checklist CAADA-DASH which is used by IDVAs, other specialist domestic abuse practitioners and multi-agency partners.

Having a risk assessment tool that is aligned across agencies is a major step forwards in the police and multi-agency response to domestic abuse, but there are still many issues to be addressed by the police service to ensure that risk

assessment is routinely effective and useful in increasing the safety of victims and improving the management of risk.

### **Domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk identification, assessment and management model**

In March 2009, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Council accredited the DASH model to be implemented across all police services in the UK. The DASH checklist provides officers and staff with a practical tool to assist in the early risk identification. It comprises 27 questions. With appropriate training, the application of the DASH checklist enables officers and staff to identify high risk cases, identify dangerous and serial perpetrators, and determine which cases should be referred to a MARAC. After initial risk identification, and assessment cases will be classified into three risk levels:

- **Standard** – current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.
- **Medium** – 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, and drug or alcohol misuse.
- **High** – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.

A risk of serious harm is: *'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'*. Home Office 2002 and Offender Assessment System 2006

HMIC found that police forces are adopting a range of different and inconsistent practices when assessing the risk to victims.

The variations in practice are as follows:

- 28 forces use the DASH form, but ten use an amended form and four use an entirely different form that they have developed within the force;
- some forces rely on the DASH questions but do not issue forms for officers to fill in, instead they have to note down the information in their pocket notebook and then transfer it onto an electronic form when they get back to the station;
- not all forces require the DASH form (or force risk assessment) to be completed in all domestic abuse cases. There are some incidents where forces require a limited record of risk assessment to be made;
- some forces allow their response officers to decide whether a DASH form needs to be filled in at all, using their professional judgment;
- in the majority of forces, response officers make an assessment of risk when they are at the incident, which is vital if they are to protect the victim and keep them safe. However, some officers do not do the assessment until much later (which is of considerable concern to HMIC); and
- in a number of forces, the identification of risk is based solely on the number of ticks on the DASH form, rather than on an officer's professional assessment that allows them to weigh the different risk factors.

There has been considerable debate within policing about the so-called bureaucracy associated with the domestic abuse risk assessment process. Officers told us that the form can be lengthy to complete and that some of the questions are not relevant in particular circumstances. Because of this, some forces have developed a policy of not completing the full DASH form in certain circumstances. This includes: 'single incidents' where no crime has been committed and the incident is described as not being part of a pattern (according to force data); domestic abuse within families rather than intimate partner violence; and, in one case, only for certain types of intimate partner violence.

HMIC recognises the issues that officers have raised about the DASH form and the recommendations in this report call for a review of the current approach. In the meantime HMIC has significant concerns about forces adjusting the approach without fully understanding the risk factors involved and without proper training for

frontline officers. In particular it is unclear how forces who have a policy of not using the DASH form when attending so called 'single incidents' will be able to build a proper picture of the possible pattern of abuse that may be emerging, and may fail to spot a potentially dangerous escalation in that abuse.

### **Inconsistencies of approach**

Response officers often have a limited understanding of what it means to assess risk in a domestic abuse case and a limited awareness of the force's risk assessment process. We found examples of risk being simply associated with the seriousness of the offence committed, rather than the nature of the ongoing abuse.

We also found that some officers are completing risk forms from memory, and 'cutting and pasting' from previous forms, without paying sufficient attention to questions afresh. A principal point about risk in domestic abuse situations is that it can escalate suddenly. Spotting this escalation requires up-to-date information and a fresh look at the situation each time the police are called for assistance. Officers who approach risk assessment with a 'cut and paste mentality', risk making poor decisions. They may also miss opportunities to work with victims to increase their safety. Risk identification forms are simply a means of focusing officers on the main issues.

In some forces, some officers are making decisions about when to complete the DASH form based on whether they thought a criminal prosecution would progress. This is unacceptable. Risk assessment is a vital part of the response to all reports of domestic abuse whether they are incidents or crimes, and whether or not a criminal prosecution is likely to go ahead.

HMIC found that risk assessment is sometimes seen by officers as a 'tick box' process rather than as an activity designed to help officers take the right decisions and thus enable them to help keep victims safe. There are some officers who do not even understand why they are carrying out a risk assessment.

We saw high levels of compliance, in terms of officers completing the DASH form, but generally low levels of appreciation as to why it is important, and a poor understanding as to what officers should do beyond the completion of the form.

A force's success in tackling domestic abuse should not be measured by the completion rate of the DASH form, but sometimes it is. This serves to keep the 'compliance culture' and to narrow officers' understanding of the original purpose of the DASH form; an aid to help officers to investigate, spot risk and act to keep the victim safe.

HMIC also found inconsistencies in the process forces use to assess risk. There are different interpretations of the number of identified risks or 'ticks' that constitute a high risk case; how risks should be weighted (if at all); and when professional judgment should be used.

HMIC's answer to this confusion is clear. Professional judgment is the linchpin of effective risk assessment. In some forces a computer-based, 'tick box' approach to risk assessment undermines the professional judgment that requires officers to make the ultimate decision about the risk level and actions required. Inflexible risk 'scoring systems' mean that real risks can go unrecognised, leading to victims not getting the support and intervention they need, either from the police or other agencies.

It is important that response officers make an initial assessment of the risk level immediately after completing the risk identification form. This can always be revised after reflection or after discussion with colleagues. Completing the risk assessment at the scene means that the responding officer can take any urgent actions that are necessary to keep the victim safe. Even a delay of a matter of hours in identifying a high risk case can make all the difference to a victim's safety and that of their children.

HMIC found instances where responding officers had applied their professional judgment in assessing the risk as high, only to have the case downgraded to medium risk by specialist officers later, often without explanation, and without the specialist officer gathering any further information other than that already set out on

the DASH form. Several response officers we spoke to had challenged the specialist unit on this point, but none had done so successfully. Specialist units may on occasions reduce the level of risk on the grounds that they do not have the capacity to manage the case, rather than on the basis of an objective assessment of the actual level of risk to the victim. This is not acceptable and the practice should stop.

## **Supervision of risk assessment**

There is poor supervision of the risk assessment process in a number of forces. HMIC's file review found that the risk assessment undertaken by responding officers was only supervised in 54 percent of the cases. In forces where specialist staff or supervisors do routinely review the level of risk, this is sometimes just an exercise of 'counting the ticks' rather than looking at the details of the case. There are forces where the supervising sergeant is not able to amend the risk level on the DASH form, but has to enter another form on the force system. This creates an unnecessary bureaucratic barrier to supervising officers being able to do their job.

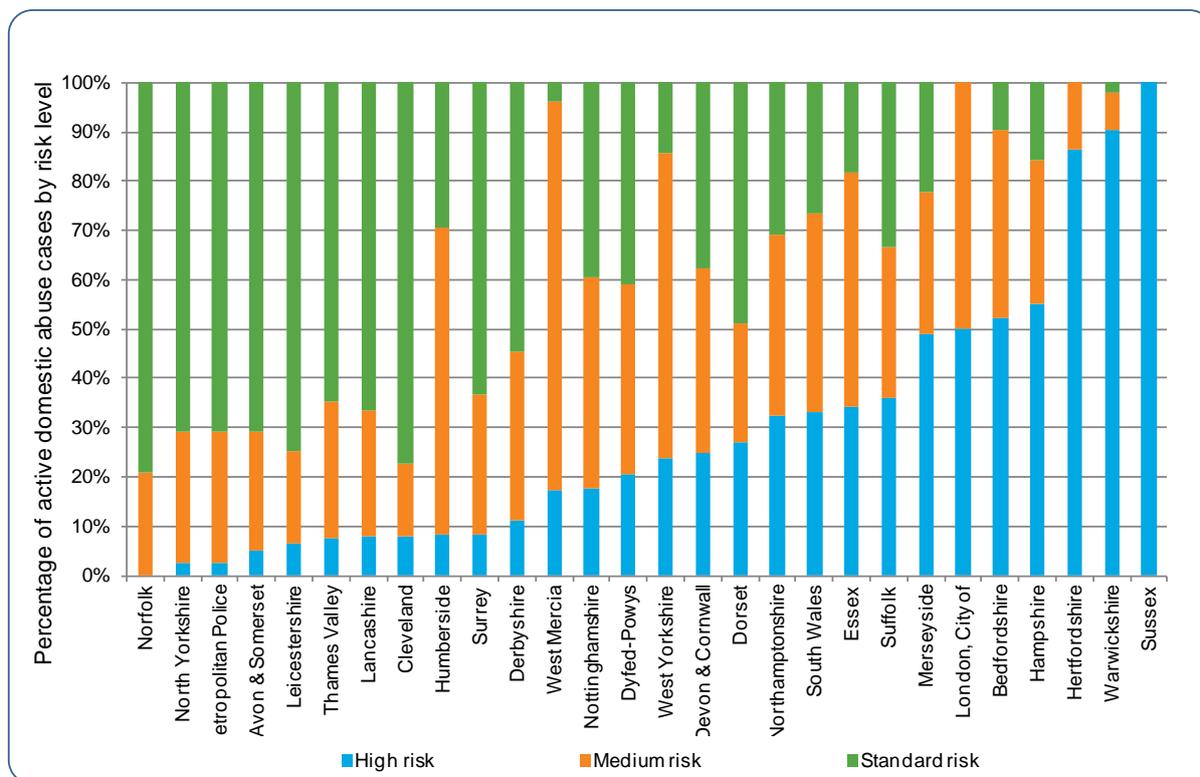
The question of the effectiveness of the risk assessment process requires urgent attention. **Recommendation 6** addresses this.

The inconsistency in forces' data on the number of domestic abuse cases with different levels of risk exacerbates HMIC's concerns further. We asked forces for a snapshot of their domestic abuse caseload on a single day last year. Disappointingly 13 forces were unable to supply this data.<sup>42</sup> For those forces that could, there are extreme variations in the proportion of standard, medium and high risk cases as set out in Figure 3. This gives rise to questions about the quality of the data that forces hold about domestic abuse, and how they are able to supervise this vital area of public protection.

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<sup>42</sup> Cheshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumbria, Durham, Gloucestershire, Greater Manchester, Gwent, Lincolnshire, North Wales, Northumbria, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands and Wiltshire

**Figure 3: Percentage of active domestic abuse cases by risk level on 31 August 2013<sup>43</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

## Children at domestic abuse incidents

A separate HMIC inspection on child protection is currently underway. It will review how effective the police are at keeping children safe.

In this inspection HMIC has considered the extent to which police officers consider the children in cases of domestic abuse and what further action they take to safeguard them. There is a strong association between domestic abuse and other forms of child maltreatment. In a recent assessment of serious case reviews (local enquiries into the death or serious injury of a child where abuse or neglect are known

<sup>43</sup> Thirteen forces were unable to provide data, eight of the forces who provided data, gave data for a date between 22 October and 8 November 2013. Based on forces own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse marker on the IT recording systems

or suspected) demonstrated that domestic abuse was a feature in the family life in 63 percent of them<sup>44</sup>.

We found that even where training is limited, response officers generally make sure that children at the scene are safe and well. This includes checking on children upstairs if the officers are told they are sleeping, and if necessary, ensuring that they are safe if they are at a relative's house. In most forces prompt referrals are made to children's social services where appropriate. In a very small number of forces we found that referrals to children's social care are not being completed as a matter of course and we have raised this with individual forces. Another concern highlighted was a case where a child was used as a translator for their parent. This is not appropriate.

Many forces are adopting or trialling new approaches to improve how children who witness domestic abuse are better identified and supported.

**Cumbria Constabulary** is currently running a pilot in one area of the force. For medium and high risk cases involving children the force will make contact with a nominated person at the child's school to alert them that the child has been at home when a domestic abuse incident took place and any associated risk. **Leicestershire Police** is also piloting a similar approach with a number of schools in Leicester, where the force notifies the school if the child has witnessed a domestic abuse incident.

**Hertfordshire Constabulary** has established strong joint working with the local authority with two members of police staff based in the Council's "Target Advice Service". This provides advice, support and referrals in response to concerns about vulnerable children and families. The force is also piloting an information sharing approach with the education service. By midday on the day following a domestic abuse incident the children's school is notified.

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<sup>44</sup> Brandon M, Sidebotham P, Bailey S et al. (2012). New learning from serious case reviews: a two year report for 2009-11. London: Department for Education.

Finally, **Durham Constabulary** has introduced an initiative called “through the eyes of the child” to prompt officers to think about the child’s perspective when witnessing domestic abuse.

## **Positive action and powers of arrest**

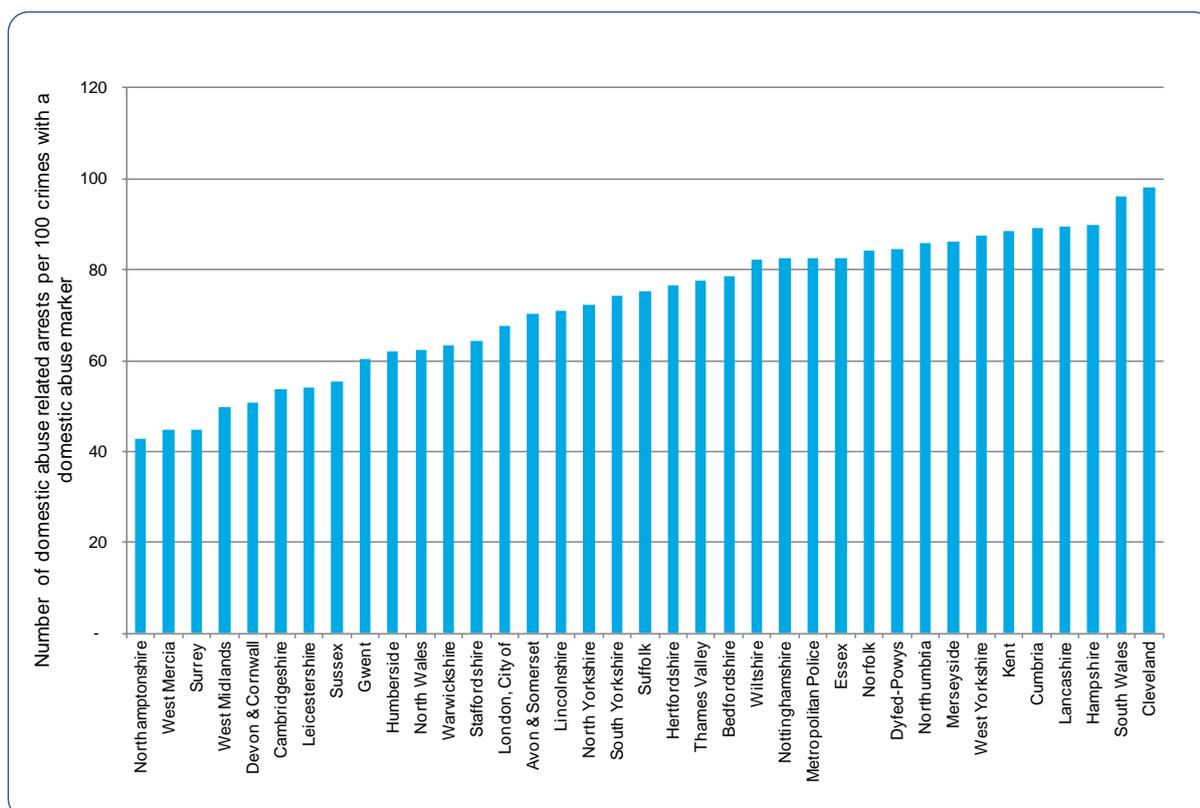
Most forces told us they have a positive action policy in respect of domestic abuse, but few could articulate what this means in practice. HMIC’s discussions with responding officers about what positive action means revealed that there is a great deal of confusion about the term.

The term ‘positive action’ originates from the *ACPO Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse 2008*, which refers to a duty on police officers to take positive action in domestic abuse cases (this includes by making an arrest where there are grounds to do so) pursuant to positive obligations to protect human rights including the right to life (Article 2 EHCR), the right not to be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3 ECHR) and the right to private and family life (Article 8 ECHR).

Notwithstanding this guidance, we found that there is unacceptable variation in how forces are dealing with domestic abuse offenders at the scene. This is due to a number of factors including: poor training and awareness; mixed messages about whether to arrest or not; confusion about current guidance on arrest policy; and contested evidence about the effectiveness of the arrest policy.

This confusion is manifesting itself in significant and highly concerning differences in arrest rates for domestic abuse crimes (see Figure 4). We would expect to see far greater consistency in the number and rates of arrests across forces. Forces at the lower end of arrest rates should review why this is the case.

**Figure 4: Number of domestic abuse related arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>45</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

The power of arrest is an important part of the investigatory and criminal process. An officer must demonstrate that they have reasonable grounds for believing that the arrest is necessary for one of the reasons listed in section 24(5) PACE<sup>46</sup>. These grounds include protecting a child or vulnerable person; preventing the suspect causing injury; and/or to allow for the prompt and effective investigation of the offence.

The ACPO guidance states that where there are “*grounds for arrest in the context of domestic abuse, it will normally be necessary for the officer to exercise that power*”.

The decision to arrest lies with the arresting officer at the scene, based on the

<sup>45</sup> Based on forces’ own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse flag on the IT recording systems. Excludes; Cheshire Constabulary, Derbyshire Constabulary, Dorset Police, Durham Constabulary, Gloucestershire Constabulary and Greater Manchester Police (GMP). GMP has subsequently provided data which is contained in its individual force report.

<sup>46</sup> 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](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions)

circumstances of the offence, and their professional judgment about whether this power should be exercised. This is not a mandatory arrest policy, but a policy with a strong expectation that where arrest is justified it will be carried out, and if the arrest is not made it needs to be justified and reasons recorded. Where the decision is made not to arrest, there are still likely to be other actions that the officer needs to take in order to meet the requirements of a positive action policy. These will include actions to ensure the safety of the victims and of any children.

That decision on whether to arrest must not be influenced by questions of police resources, or the concern that an arrest will mean the responding officer will have to spend time in custody. Nor should it be influenced by the willingness of the victims or witnesses to testify or otherwise participate in a judicial proceeding. The current guidance emphasises that the decision to arrest rests with the police and that “... victims should not, therefore, be asked whether they require an arrest to be made.”<sup>47</sup> Research, and our own focus groups shows, that some victims may wish the perpetrator to be arrested, primarily for temporary respite from the aggression, to calm the perpetrator down or to emphasise the severity of the abuse to the perpetrator.

***“I wanted him removed from the property. That’s what I expected – him to be taken away.”***

It is also clear that many women do not want their violent partners or ex-partners to be arrested and, for many, this is because of controlling behaviours and the fear of retaliation.<sup>48</sup> The victims we spoke to in our focus groups reinforced this concern:

***“Immediately after the police have been around it makes things much more dangerous with the perpetrator. The beatings are much worse afterwards – double as bad. It puts you and the children at greater risk.”***

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<sup>47</sup> *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse*, NPIA, 2008  
<http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2008/2008-cba-inv-dom-abuse.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Hoyle, C. and Sanders, A., *Police Response to Domestic Violence: from victim choice to victim empowerment?* *British Journal of Criminology* **40**, 2000, pp. 14-36.  
<http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/content/40/1/14.full.pdf+html>

If the police are to implement a positive action policy with confidence, they need to understand the impact that coercive control has on a victim. While there is a concern that the arrest of a perpetrator of domestic abuse may increase the risk to the victim, it is the responsibility of the police to take effective action to safeguard the victim and their family (including letting the victim know when the perpetrator has been released).

*“They told me they had taken my husband to the police station and that I should go to bed. But then they called me again at half past midnight to say he’d been given a caution and was likely to come back home. I was terrified. I grabbed the children and we fled to a hotel”.*

Of the victims that we surveyed, there are noticeably higher levels of satisfaction with all elements of the interaction with the police when the officer arrested the perpetrator, as set out in Table 2. Seventy-two percent of victims felt safer following arrest compared to 48 percent where no arrest was made.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 2: Victim satisfaction levels with police performance**

	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of respondents in cases which were <b>reported to police and arrest made</b>	Percentage of respondents in cases which were <b>reported to police but no arrest made</b>
Were satisfied with the initial call/report	74%	86%	64%
Were satisfied with the initial response/action	79%	88%	70%
Were satisfied with further action taken by the police	85%	87%	81%
Felt safer because of initial police action	66%	75%	59%
Felt safer because of whole police experience	58%	72%	48%

Source: HMIC Survey

In summary, the duty of police officers when attending the scene of domestic abuse is to protect the victim and any children from further harm. Where a power of arrest

<sup>49</sup> Some care must be taken in interpreting these figures. Satisfaction could be due to the arrest but there could also be other factors not explored by the survey.

exists, the alleged offender should normally be arrested.<sup>50</sup> Police officers should not base a decision to arrest or not to arrest on the willingness of a victim to testify in subsequent proceedings.<sup>51</sup> Here, as in all other areas of police work, the focus should be on investigating and prosecuting offences (and preventing further offences against persons or property) in the public interest. Officers need to be clear that the decision to arrest rests with them rather than with the victim and they need to follow the clear guidance given by ACPO that where an offence has been committed in a domestic abuse case, arrest will normally be necessary.<sup>52</sup> Forces must articulate this policy clearly and ensure that it is followed in practice, including backing this up with strong supervision and a review of the circumstances if the decision not to arrest is taken.

## **Supervision of officers**

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents will have a wide and varied workload and differing levels of experience. It is crucial that the officers who supervise them reinforce positive attitudes; tackle poor performance; provide them with adequate support; and develop response officers' understanding to help them deal with these often complex and, in some cases, high risk situations with confidence.

Supervisors need to provide adequate support and motivation to officers, particularly where officers may feel that they are failing to make a lasting impact. It is the job of the supervisor to recognise and reward the excellent work of frontline officers when it occurs.

HMIC found that frontline supervisors are not routinely and actively supervising officers attending domestic abuse incidents. This has an impact not only on the attitudes of officers but on actions taken at the scene, including initial investigation, safety planning, risk assessment and the exercise of police powers.

Effective supervision involves supervisors attending domestic abuse incidents. This is an extremely important factor in getting the police response right. There are many

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<sup>50</sup> Indeed, this was the position set out by the Home Office as far back as 2000: Home Office Circular 19/2000, paragraph 4 (Role of the Police and Other Agencies).

<sup>51</sup> ACPO guidance, 2008, section 3.10.

<sup>52</sup> ACPO guidance, 2008, section 3.1.

options open to a supervisor who identifies poor performance by a member of staff at a domestic abuse incident. These include: one-to-one coaching; team training exercises; individual access to training and knowledge; and, giving officers opportunities to spend time with IDVAs and other partner agencies, in order to learn more about domestic abuse.

Focus groups with victims of domestic abuse (where officers can hear about the impact of their response first hand) is a very effective means of helping them better understand how important their role is in keeping victims safe and reassured.

## **Action needed**

The initial response from police officers is a vital factor in the success or otherwise in keeping domestic abuse victims safe. The responding officer is expected to be professional and competent in completing an initial investigation. **Recommendation 5** proposes that the College of Policing includes these matters in its updated guidance; the purpose of **recommendation 6** is to ensure that officers have the training and understanding to equip them to provide a professional response.

However, guidance and training on its own is insufficient unless it is backed by: strong supervision; clear leadership on the importance of doing things right first time; reward and recognition for officers who do these things well; and challenging poor officer attitudes. **Recommendation 3** is designed to help police leaders to ensure they have the right culture and positive attitudes throughout the force.

The emphasis on risk assessment is welcome, but its implementation requires further attention; five years on from the accreditation of the DASH model, HMIC believes the service must look again at the effectiveness of its approach to risk assessment. **Recommendation 6** addresses this issue.

## Action taken

Following the initial action by responding officers, the force must continue to work to keep the victim safe to prevent further harm and, where appropriate, support them through the criminal justice process. Where domestic abuse has not manifested as a crime, supporting the victim and managing risk of further harm is equally important. To provide effective support forces tend to use a range of specialist officers and work in partnership with other local statutory services and the voluntary and community sectors.

Many forces have restructured recently to respond to reductions in funding. HMIC found that this has led to some changes in the specialist units dealing with domestic abuse, although, encouragingly forces have largely protected their specialist resources.

### **Keeping the victim safe and engaged**

An important stage in the police response to domestic abuse is when the responding officers leave the scene. Usually the case is handed over to other departments in the force, who will investigate the crime, protect the victim from further harm and manage the perpetrator. Different forces have different arrangements, and internal structures, so there are a variety of different models for which part of the force takes over at this point and assumes responsibility for:

- supporting and keeping the victim safe;
- investigating the crime; and
- managing the perpetrator (including locating them if they have yet to be arrested).

The responsibility and oversight of a case often fragments at this stage, with no one individual having overall responsibility for making sure there is a successful outcome for the victim.

The handover of the cases from the responding officer is not seamless and often can **leave gaps in service and uncertainty as to where responsibilities for investigations, risk assessment and safety planning process lies**. When responding officers hand over a charged suspect, it was not always clear whether they retain responsibility for safety planning, risk assessment and communication with victims. This may mean that victims fail to receive important updates, for example, on whether the suspect had been released from police custody after the initial arrest.

*“It was about 11pm when he was arrested and taken out of the house. But he was allowed back in the house. In the morning he turned round and said “Do you realise I was sat outside at 5.30am” because the police had said he had calmed down. So they let him out, but he was sat in the cul-de-sac at 5.30am. I didn’t know he was there. It was quite frightening. I wasn’t informed that he’d been released.”*

Sometimes the confusion is exacerbated by **disagreements between teams about who is responsible for managing the investigation or supporting the victim**. In most forces the level of risk will determine who supports the victim and who investigates the offence. We have seen examples of reassessments of risk taking place - not for the purpose of safeguarding the victim, but for the purpose of justifying the case being made ‘someone else’s responsibility’.

In some cases there is a risk that **the investigation or victim care is not necessarily handled by the people with the best skills and the experience for the job**. We found that allocation to investigators is often based on the seriousness of the offence rather than the overall level of risk in that particular case of domestic abuse. This may mean that those investigating what is perceived to be a low-level offence, but where the risk to the victim is high, may not have the skills and experience necessary to manage the sensitivities and complexities of a vulnerable victim, or be in a position to support an evidence-led prosecution.

We identified forces who are tackling this issue such as **Dorset Police** where detectives from the criminal investigation department undertake a six month attachment to domestic violence teams in Weymouth and Poole before returning to their posts as force champions. They have the responsibility to educate others and ensure compliance with procedures, particularly guidance to others on the investigation.

## **Checking initial risk assessment and reviewing**

HMIC considered the effectiveness of some forces' quality assurance process and their arrangements for checking risk assessments following the initial work at the scene. Although most force procedures involve an initial check by the supervising sergeant, force practices differ considerably in terms of what further checks are actually applied, if any. HMIC has concerns about: the extent to which the initial risk assessment is checked and the case is correctly allocated; what processes and procedures forces have in place to review the levels of risk; and how forces effectively review standard and medium risk cases when there is an emerging pattern of repeat incidents

Many forces have a central team that checks the initial entry by the responding officer (sometimes against the paper record which is also submitted). The case is allocated to relevant teams or units within the force based on the number of identified risks or the professional judgment of the responding officers. These teams often carry out additional checks (for example on the Police National Computer) and ensure that there is a correct referral to social services where children are involved, and to victim support agencies. In some forces, the people in these teams have experience and knowledge about domestic abuse, so they can also provide a level of quality assurance in respect of the initial risk assessments, in other forces they simply apply the 'tick box' formula.

Different forces have different policies for further checking the initial risk assessment. We saw some good practice, such as the dip-sampling of cases by experts, to ensure risk assessments are checked and completed. This is important as in some forces a specialist may not even see, let alone manage or check, a medium or standard risk case. We also saw examples of good feedback from specialists to

responding officers on their approach to risk assessment, or feedback and mentoring by IDVAs to improve the quality of the initial risk assessment.

We saw less effective practice as well:

- in some forces there are multiple reassessments of risk. The victim could be risk assessed three times by three different sets of people in rapid succession;
- forces with no clear trigger points for reassessment of risk, even at some of the most dangerous points in a case, for example when the perpetrator is released on bail or when known repeat victims cease calling the force;
- in the case of standard and medium cases, risk is often not reviewed at all or at best reviews are inconsistent. Even where forces have guidelines in place, such as reviewing cases that are a standard risk within seven days, these are not always adhered to;
- some forces review standard and medium risk cases following a pattern of repeat incidents, but often the number of incidents that have to occur before a review is triggered is unacceptably high. Even more concerning is where forces have no policy of review after repeat incidents at all; and
- in a number of forces we found examples of where apparently non-crime repeat incidents of domestic abuse are not subject to specialist intervention. We see this as a significant missed opportunity for forces to tackle a pattern of abuse, possibly in its earlier stages.

In conclusion, forces' approaches to managing risk assessment, once the case is passed from the responding officer, is often bureaucratic and duplicates effort. It does not necessarily improve the quality of the risk assessment or provide a better service to the victim. Given that the original risk assessment helps decide the level of support the victim receives in the vast majority of forces, it is critical that forces have systems in place to reassure themselves that the assessment is robust and all victims are receiving appropriate support.

## **Specialist domestic abuse teams and ongoing case management**

Almost every force has a domestic abuse specialist unit. They are made up of police officers and staff, many of whom have had specialist detective training. In some forces officers and staff moving into these units have enhanced training on domestic abuse, while in other forces they learn on the job. The roles and responsibilities of the specialist teams vary from force to force, as do their relative sizes, their structure and the other units, particularly those dealing with public protection.

These specialist teams represent a very small proportion of forces' overall resource. The police spend on average about 4 percent of their budget on public protection, which equates to just over 9,000 officers and staff across England and Wales. The actual number working on domestic abuse is even smaller than this, as the figure includes those working on child abuse and other forms of adult abuse; missing persons; witness protection; and the management of violent sex offenders.

In all forces we found staff in specialist units who have a real commitment to providing a high quality of service and are devoted to delivering safer outcomes for victims and their family. Some victims told us that they had a much better service delivered by specialists.

*“A police officer just sees it as a small spat. If you get through to a specialist the help is so much better than the miserable response from the first officer. That specialist officer I spoke to understood the context; she joined up the picture and connected to the police officers in other regions where my husband now lives.”*

*“An officer [specialist] came around, he sat down with me – wanted to know the background – was positive from the start. I was lucky with the police officer I got.... I was surprised at his sensitivity – he looked at the situation as a whole – he assessed it and said it was serious. I was surprised. I felt safer as well. I was put on ‘high alert’ – very comforting. He went through all the procedures with me and asked questions. He*

*got his sergeant involved. He gave me contact details for women's support."*

However, despite the sometimes excellent work of the specialist teams, the level and extent of expert support for victims varies from force to force. We also found considerable variations in the working patterns of specialist staff, with little or no cover on occasions, for example weekends or the late evenings, when many incidents of domestic abuse occur.

We found similar areas of concern about the effectiveness of specialist units in many forces. In some forces we were extremely concerned to find a very high level of risk often characterised by:

- specialist units not being staffed or resourced to the level originally intended. These units are often under-resourced due to high levels of vacancies, maternity leave or long term absences. This can result in a backlog of work with no-one reviewing risk assessments or safety plan actions for several days and no action being taken on the high risk cases referred to the unit;
- significant levels of stress being experienced by individuals within these units. Staff (often of a relatively low rank) may be carrying unacceptable workloads with high levels of responsibility. In one force, just one police constable had responsibility for reviewing all high-risk cases;
- in some forces those working in specialists roles receive no additional training. Our survey of domestic abuse practitioners suggested that increased training in the dynamics of domestic abuse is a priority even for specialist staff; and
- there may be insufficient support or oversight by senior managers.

In summary, HMIC has concerns about the extent to which public protection experts have sufficient capability and capacity to support a whole force response to domestic abuse. In too many forces, public protection, and in particular, domestic abuse is still seen as attracting less kudos and is less valued than other detective roles (for example, those in major crime or serious and organised crime).

We saw examples where forces are working creatively to increase the profile and value of the work of the specialist teams and spread skills across the whole organisation. Examples include short term attachments or rotations to public protection units, often as an integral part of detective training. Senior leaders in forces need to reassure themselves that staff working in these areas are adequately supported and that excessive vacancies are not carried.

## **Keeping the victim informed**

It is important that victims of domestic abuse are given all the information they need about the status of their case. Not least as this helps them to plan for their own safety better. Victims should receive information about the criminal justice process, who is responsible for doing what within the force, and any actions relating to the suspect (for example, bail conditions or release from custody). All victims of crime need to understand what they can expect from the investigation and court process. Where domestic abuse is concerned, this information can make all the difference to victim safety.

A common and worrying area of confusion in forces relates to officers knowing whose is responsible for informing the victim that the suspect has been released on bail. In a number of forces we found a disjointed approach where police and partner agency's contact with the same victim is not co-ordinated. This is a particular problem if a remand hearing takes place on a Saturday. Sometimes victims are not informed of the outcome of court cases which result in a perpetrator's release. This is often because Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCS) has not passed on the information to the police, or because there has been a delay in updating police systems

For some victims, being given timely information about a perpetrator being released from custody will be sufficient; they are entitled to this information under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. Other victims may require immediate practical support such as refuge in accommodation.

## **Role of neighbourhood policing teams in victim safeguarding**

Force inspections revealed that full use is not always being made of forces' neighbourhood policing teams in the fight against domestic abuse. This is a major missed opportunity. All forces should have minimum standards for the management of domestic abuse cases, with a clear role for neighbourhood policing teams. In some forces neighbourhood teams are properly fully involved. But in many they are not.

HMIC saw examples of forces where neighbourhood and local policing teams are being used to support the force's priority on domestic abuse. We also saw examples where neighbourhood officers and PCSOs have good local relationships with other statutory partners or community groups.

However, we also met neighbourhood officers and PCSOs who told us that they have no role in tackling domestic abuse at all, or had been allocated responsibility for domestic abuse without appropriate explanation or support.

### **Neighbourhood policing and supporting victims of domestic abuse**

In **North Yorkshire Police** cases of domestic abuse assessed as standard or medium risk are followed up by specially trained PCSOs in the neighbourhood teams. All the PCSOs trained in this activity have volunteered for the role, rather than all PCSOs being trained. The PCSOs develop safety plans for victims and are able to dedicate time and local knowledge to support the victim. They report updates to the local domestic violence officer (DVO) and both specialist officers and frontline officers reported positively on this approach.

In **Staffordshire Police** all incidents of domestic abuse are referred to local policing areas to review with other partners on a daily or weekly basis. All victims, irrespective of level of risk, will be contacted and any victim support will be co-ordinated with the knowledge of all partners.

**Nottinghamshire Police** is developing an approach where those victims who are classified as medium risk are visited by both the neighbourhood “beat managers” but also a Women’s Aid officer to provide a more enhanced safeguarding service.

It is accepted practice that neighbourhood teams should be directed to support force priorities. For example, neighbourhood officers and PCSOs are expected to carry out activities to tackle perpetrators of volume crime (like shoplifting) and to understand who the main offenders are. They also carry out preventative work with and will be engaged in intelligence gathering and targeted operations against serious and organised crime groups and urban street gangs.

Neighbourhood teams should support tackling domestic abuse in similar ways. For example:

- neighbourhood officers and PCSOs need to know which victims are at greater risk in their area; which domestic abuse offenders are the most dangerous; and where there are ‘hotspots’ for repeat victimisation (such as particular home addresses where domestic abuse-related calls are common);
- local officers and PCSOs should also be aware of prolific domestic abuse perpetrators so they can support any targeted disruption activity (we discuss

tackling prolific perpetrators later in this report). Just as they are expected to know the details of prolific burglars in their area, they should know which perpetrators of domestic abuse present the highest risk; and

- supervisors should assign this work to neighbourhood and local policing teams in their daily meetings, where they share intelligence and local priorities for that day. Several forces explained how, at the beginning of the shift, supervisors allocate individual cases to neighbourhood officers or share intelligence about particular suspects.

## Working in partnership to protect victims from harm

### **Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)**

MARACs are multi-agency meetings where statutory and voluntary agency representatives share information about high risk victims of domestic abuse in order to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase victim safety. The role of the MARAC is to provide a forum for effective partnership working among a diverse range of adult and child focused services in order to enhance the safety of high risk victims and their children.<sup>53</sup>

The main focus of the MARAC is on managing the risk to the adult victim but in doing this, it will also consider other family members, including any children involved, and managing the behaviour of the perpetrator. At the heart of a MARAC is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. The MARAC is not an agency and does not have a case management function. The responsibility to take appropriate actions rests with individual agencies.

MARACs have become an established part of the police response to domestic abuse nationally. The recent lessons to be learned document the Home Office published about DHR highlights the importance of sharing information between agencies to better assess and manage risk. HMIC found examples of excellent practice, such as MARACs where multi-agency relationships are good and a conflict resolution model is used to keep participants tightly focused on risk and outcomes. In most MARACs the police take a lead role. It is a positive reflection on the police that they are chairing the MARACs and in doing so promoting and overseeing an effective collective response to keeping victims of domestic abuse safe.

This inspection raises some concerns about how effective these arrangements are in all areas. We found cases where other partner agencies are not properly engaged in

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<sup>53</sup> *Research into Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)*, Home Office Violent and Youth Crime Prevention Unit (VCYU) and Research and Analysis Unit (RAU), July 2011 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/116538/horr55-technical-annex.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116538/horr55-technical-annex.pdf)

the MARAC process. Staff in some forces do not understand the role of the MARAC, what a MARAC 'marker' actually means and what outcomes are achieved by a domestic abuse case being referred to a MARAC.

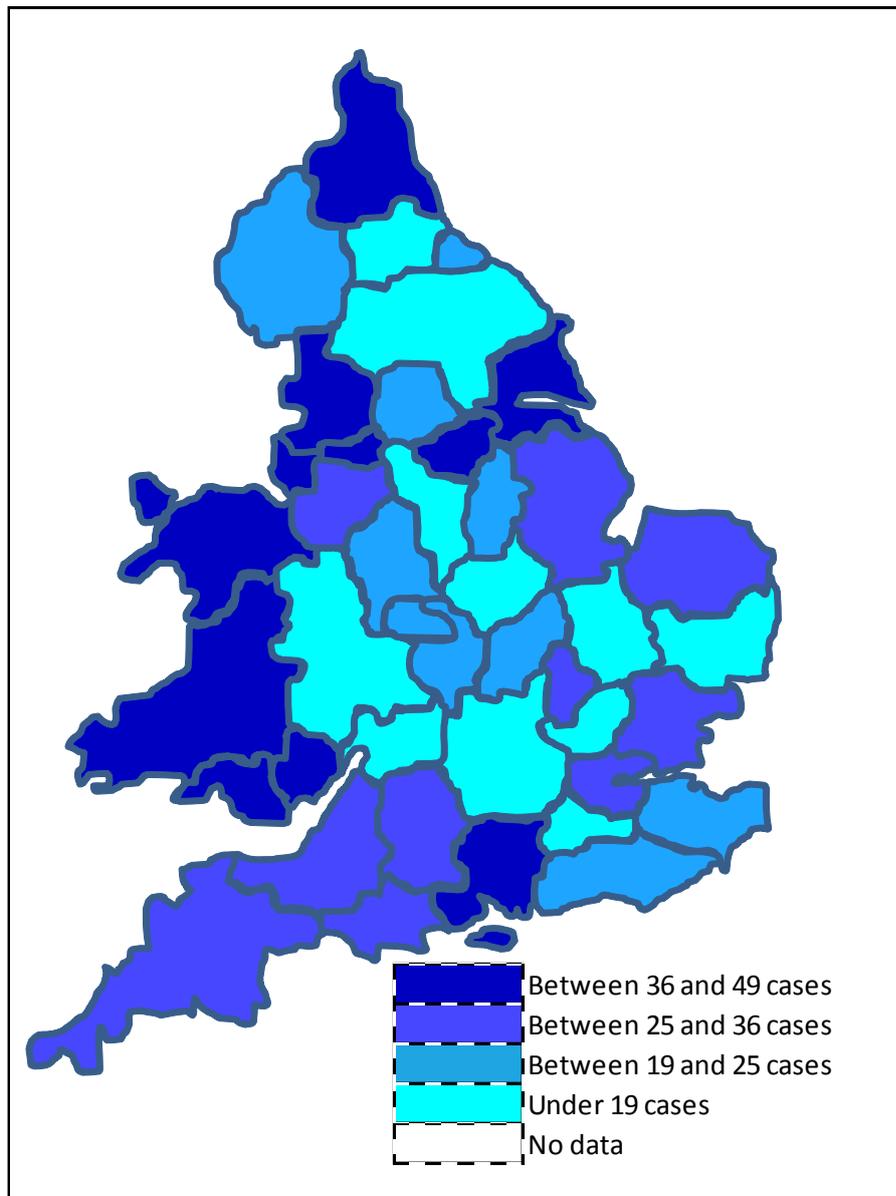
An important aspect of MARACs is that they facilitate information sharing but that is not their reason for existing. MARACs need to be measured by their risk management actions and the outcomes of their multi-agency activities. We found examples of MARACs that did not monitor risks or did not properly track the actions that had been agreed. There are significant resources that forces can access from CAADA to improve the approach of their MARACs<sup>54</sup>.

HMIC has concerns relating to the caseload of MARACs. On the one hand we saw examples of cases being screened by MARACs according to the resources available rather than the risks being managed: for example, applying 'quotas' to the number of high risk cases managed at a particular time. On the other hand we saw MARACs which had unmanageably high workloads. CAADA collates data on the number of cases that go to MARAC per head of adult female population. There is considerable variation in this data from 9.8 cases per 10,000 to 48.9 per 10,000. Figure 5 shows this variation in more detail.

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<sup>54</sup> See for example: toolkit for MARAC Chairs (<http://www.caada.org.uk/marac/Toolkit-MARAC-Chair-Feb-2012.pdf>), Chairs Aide Memoire ([http://www.caada.org.uk/marac/MARAC%20aide%20memoire\\_Jan%202012.pdf](http://www.caada.org.uk/marac/MARAC%20aide%20memoire_Jan%202012.pdf)) and to the guidance for MARAC reps more generally (<http://www.caada.org.uk/marac/Toolkit-MARAC-Representative-Mar-2012.pdf>)

Figure 5: MARAC cases per head of female population



Source: CAADA

A review of MARACs in 2012 found that information sharing, appropriate agency representation and the role of the IDVA in representing and engaging the victim in the process are vital to their effectiveness<sup>55</sup>. The review also identified the challenge

<sup>55</sup> Steel, Nerissa; Blakeborough, Laura and Nicholas, Sian: *Supporting high-risk victims of domestic violence: a review of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) Research Report 55*,

for agencies in balancing the need to maintain a workable caseload with the wish to increase referrals to MARACs from a range of agencies.

Forces are considering how else to develop multi-agency working practices so that information can be better shared by partners, helping them to build a more complete picture of the victim, and better identify risk as a result.

Many forces are adopting similar approaches to those seen in child protection work – the multi-agency safeguarding hub or MASH. While there appear to be different structures and models being adopted for the MASH in different areas, the following characteristics are important factors for a successful approach. These are reflected by some interim work from the Home Office on multi-agency safeguarding.<sup>56</sup>

- Co-location of the different agencies. This has been a successful approach in a range of multi-agency settings, and supports information sharing, swift decision making, better understanding and trust between different partners and developing a shared culture and set of objectives.
- Approaches to overcome the barriers around information sharing. This is consistently cited as a problem with multi-agency working. Co-location appears to offer one way of helping to overcome this hurdle, as might establishing information sharing protocols.
- Good engagement from all partners and a shared approach to risk assessment. Also it is important that partners, while located in the MASH, continue to have reach back into their 'home' agencies to 'lever in' the specialist support and link across to other agendas and initiatives. Some areas use a rotating team approach so those working in the MASH transfer knowledge back to their home organisation when the secondment ends.

HMIC welcomes the commitment that forces and partners have demonstrated to promote multi-agency approaches with a view to ensuring that victims of domestic abuse are identified earlier and safeguarded appropriately. However, there is considerable variation in the multi-agency approaches. Some forces have told us, for

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Home Office, July 2011

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/116537/horr55-report.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116537/horr55-report.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> *Multi-Agency Working and Information Sharing Project – Early Findings*, Home Office, July 2013  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/225012/MASH\\_Product.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225012/MASH_Product.pdf)

example, that they operate a “virtual MASH” for domestic abuse victims. This seems to entirely miss the point of the value of co-location and closer joint working across local partners.

We recognise that due to different size of, and challenges in forces, the precise structures of multi-agency units may vary, but it is important that these arrangements are based on what works; that their link with the MARACs is clear to all practitioners; and that the risk assessment approach continues to be shared.

**Recommendation 7** suggests that multi-agency working to support victims of domestic abuse should be covered in the guidance currently being refreshed by the College of Policing.

**Norfolk Constabulary** has a well established MASH which incorporates the safeguarding of both children and adults. The MASH has been in place since June 2011 and increases cooperation between partner agencies currently with representatives from the police, children’s services, adult services and the community health team. All staff are located in the same office which means intelligence is shared rapidly and more effectively. Safeguarding decisions can be made on the best available information leading to better support for victims. The MASH staff review and undertake a secondary risk assessment of all DASH risk assessments and put in place a safeguarding plan for all victims of high, medium and standard risk.

During the course of this inspection HMIC identified several multi-agency issues that require further review. For example, there is variation in the extent to which forces can refer victims to further support from statutory and voluntary partners. This has a direct impact on the options for the police in terms of onward referral, risk management and safety planning.

Where local areas lack a clear multi-agency strategy (together with well defined structures and governance arrangements) the result can be fragmented and uncoordinated responses. For example:

- a plethora of multi-agency forums and working groups with no clear relationship between them;

- multi-agency action plans without clear responsibility for specific actions;
- areas where partners have not been able to overcome the difficulty with non-coterminous boundaries between the police and other agencies, and so struggled to provide multi-agency responses.

## **The role of IDVAs and other specialist services**

HMIC found very strong support for the role played by IDVAs. They are specialist case workers who focus on those victims most at risk of homicide or serious harm. They offer personalised support and draw on multiple resources to help victims. For example, they can co-ordinate the response of a wide range of agencies who might be involved with a case. IDVAs work in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies but are independent of any single agency; their overall goal is to improve the safety of victims.

The introduction of IDVAs and independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs) was part of a national response to fragmented services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. In 2005, CAADA introduced an accredited IDVA training course and a common framework of standards for practice.

An evaluation in 2009 found that intervention by IDVAs had a measurable impact on the safety of victims and on their well-being in terms of improved social networks and coping abilities.<sup>57</sup> This study indicated that the more intensive the support received and the greater the range of services offered, the safer the victim was.

One of the many benefits of IDVAs is their ability to offer a full range of choices and support that cover the wide range of issues that victims face (with criminal justice actions being one option among many). In 2012 CAADA estimated that there were 500 IDVA posts across the country (with an estimated 650 needed to support all high risk victims in the UK).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Howarth, Emma; Stimpson, Louise; Barran, Diana and Robinson, Amanda: *Safety in Numbers: A Multi-site Evaluation of Independent Domestic Violence Advisor Services*, The Henry Smith Charity, November 2009. [http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/Safety\\_in\\_Numbers\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/Safety_in_Numbers_full_report.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> CAADA *Insights 1: A place of greater safety*, CAADA, November 2012 [www.caada.org.uk/commissioners/A\\_Place\\_of\\_greater\\_safety.pdf](http://www.caada.org.uk/commissioners/A_Place_of_greater_safety.pdf)

Our inspections found that IDVAs play a critical role in supporting the police's response to domestic abuse. It is impossible to imagine how forces could provide an effective service to high risk victims of domestic abuse without them. Forces and officers value highly the expertise, knowledge and skills that IDVAs bring to protecting and engaging with victims.

We saw excellent examples of how IDVAs based in police stations and with access to police systems support forces in identifying and managing victims in a better way, as well as supporting police officers in identifying victims at risk.<sup>59</sup>

HMIC has concluded that **Lancashire Constabulary** has a good response to victims of domestic abuse. Part of its strength is its ability to deliver a service in partnership with a comparatively high number of IDVAs, who are funded by a range of partners and are able to support a range of cases not just the high risk ones.

HMIC found a worrying picture in terms of the overall capacity of IDVAs and the extent to which this provision varies across the country. IDVAs are funded by a variety of sources, including through statutory services (such as local authorities and the police), while IDVAs with a charitable status may obtain funding through grants and trusts. There is a lack of robust data on the number of IDVAs but the best estimates from CAADA suggest that there are insufficient IDVAs to support all high risk MARAC cases adequately. CAADA holds data from 2012-13 and 2013-14 on the number in IDVAs based on response from 71% of MARACs. In these areas the data suggests that the IDVA capacity is only 64% of that required to manage MARAC cases. This does not include high risk cases which do not get referred to MARAC and any broader roles and responsibilities IDVAs may take on locally.

The CAADA data also suggests a significant variation in IDVA capacity. Only a fifth of areas reported to CAADA that they had adequate capacity and a further fifth reported they had less than half the recommended capacity. However, this is another

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<sup>59</sup> Coy and Kelly summarise the advantages of locating IDVAs in police stations as: access to police information systems which is useful for risk assessments; daily contact with police and prosecutors build strong relationship and changed practice; and associating with police enhances credibility and responses from other agencies. Coy and Kelly (2010). *Islands in the Stream: An evaluation of four London independent domestic violence advocacy schemes*.

area where better data is required. CAADA is working to improve the robustness of the MARAC reported data by forces and their partners, to allow police and crime commissioners to compare their respective capacities in force areas.

Victims also told us about the value of other specialist services, in particular for male victims; victims from minority communities; and victims from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities.

## **Action needed**

In the last decade the experience of those victims assessed as high risk has been transformed. Specialist domestic abuse units are generally skilled in supporting victims and have developed their expert investigative skills to detect cases better and support prosecutions. High risk cases should have support from IDVAs, will be considered at MARACs and can be heard at specialist courts for domestic abuse victims.

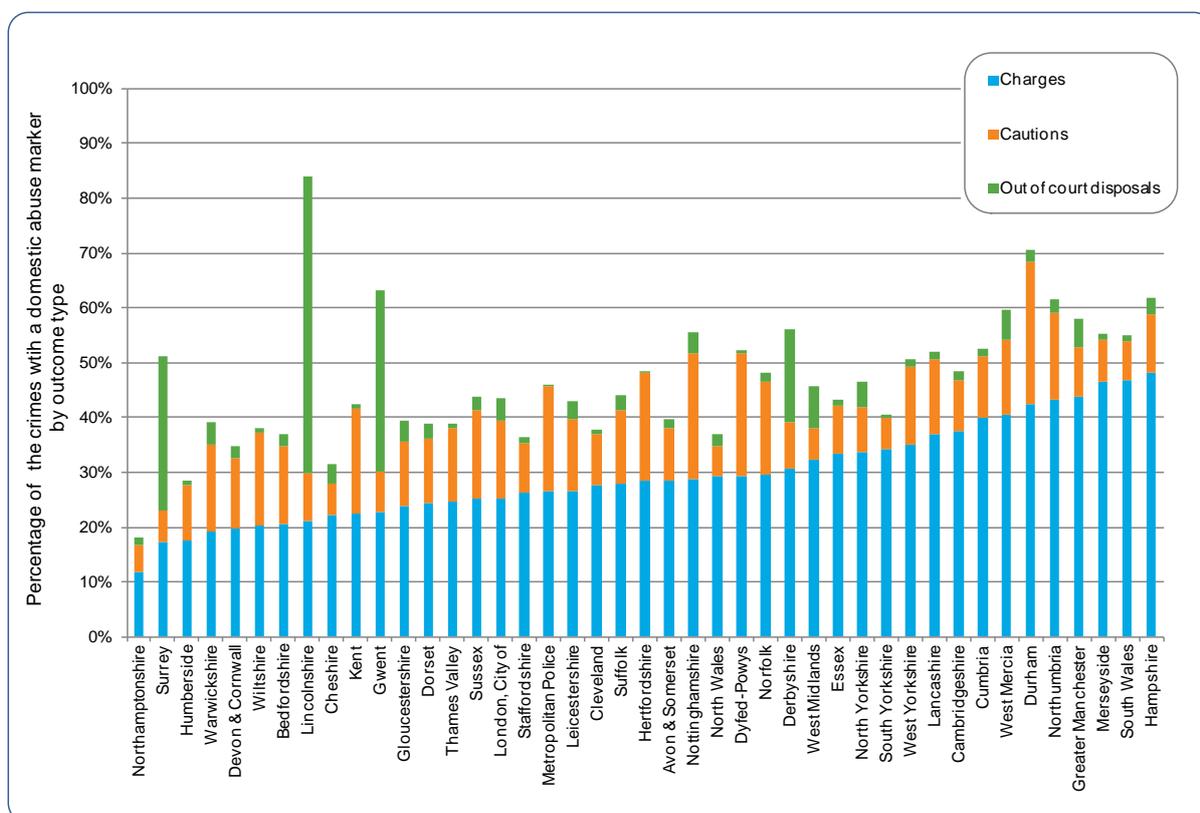
This support is only for those high risk cases which are an estimated small proportion of all domestic abuse victims. In some forces, HMIC identified concerns about the capability and capacity of these units, which make up only a small fraction of the overall police resources. There are also gaps and deficiencies in how standard and medium risk cases are managed in forces, with fragmented and confused responsibilities.

For domestic abuse to be tackled effectively it needs to be everyone's business. It cannot remain the preserve of the specialist. The significant capability that exists in other areas of the force, for example neighbourhood policing teams, needs to support the whole force effort. **Recommendation 3** is designed to encourage leaders to ensure that this happens. Where HMIC has identified specific issues in the capability of an individual force these should be tackled in the actions plans proposed in **Recommendation 2**. The inspection recognises the vital role that IDVAs play in supporting victims. **Recommendation 10** suggests police and crime commissioners take this into account when commissioning services for victims of domestic abuse in their force areas.

## Investigating crimes and bringing offenders to justice

Earlier in this report we set out the different levels of expertise in a force to investigate crimes and engage with victims of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse crimes need to be addressed and investigated as seriously as other victim-based and violent crimes. Where there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction, and it is in the public interest, these alleged perpetrators should be charged and brought to justice through the criminal justice system.

**Figure 6: Percentage of the crimes with a domestic abuse marker by outcome type for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>60</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

Currently, there is an unacceptable degree of variation in the extent to which alleged perpetrators of domestic abuse are charged for criminal offences (see Figure 6). In some forces there is a high level of cautioning. And in some there are comparatively

<sup>60</sup> Based on forces own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse marker on the IT recording systems

fewer charges for domestic abuse crimes compared to other victim based crime or violence against the person offences.

Our force inspections and our interviews with crown prosecutors reinforced the patterns observed in the data. There are mixed practices, including the excessive use of simple cautions in cases of domestic abuse. CPS guidance states that a simple caution is rarely appropriate in these circumstances. There appears to be a number of reasons why officers are issuing cautions rather than charging. These include:

- a lack of understanding about the current procedure for charging and the use of simple cautions in domestic abuse cases;
- different approaches in forces in terms of who is involved in the charging decisions. Differences arise, for example in the extent to which specialist units are involved in charging decisions; or whether that decision sits with the team investigating volume crime (who may be managing the investigation if it is a lower level offence) or with the custody sergeant. Specialist units, which have greater expertise in working with victims of domestic abuse, may be able to have a more informed conversation with CPS about charging offences relating to domestic abuse and, where appropriate, to challenge CPS decisions not to charge;
- officers taking the view that if the victim has said that they do not want to go to court, then it is not in the victim's interest to charge the suspect. If the perpetrator admits the offence, then the caution remains on their record and can be used as evidence when they offend again. Many officers told us a caution "is better than nothing at all: as there is at least something on the record of the offender";
- perceived difficulties with the new arrangements in the CPS, and CPS Direct (CPSD). Despite the fact that CPSD is a single national service (with domestic abuse specialists) and should provide a more consistent approach nationally, there is a misapprehension among officers that different people will give different advice. Officers who think that the CPS is unlikely to charge, but where the offender has admitted the offence, told us that they thought cautioning is a better option; and

- in some cases, officers are more inclined to caution (which counts as a detection) because force performance management systems measure success in terms of the numbers of detections achieved. A simple caution can be seen by officers as quicker and easier route to achieving a detection.

It is important that domestic abuse offences are treated as seriously as other crimes. Where the threshold is met, suspects should be charged and referred to the CPS. While the police need to perform a robust 'gate-keeping' role to prevent an unnecessary number of referrals to the CPS, it is important that police officers do not 'screen out' cases which have a prospect of progressing through the courts. They must have the ability to challenge CPS decisions when they are concerned about the CPS advice not to charge.

HMIC is gravely concerned that the approach to charging and cautioning is highly inconsistent across the country. Forces need to consider whether high rates of cautioning, taking no further action and out of court disposals (such as restorative justice) may be contributing to the falling referral rates highlighted by the CPS<sup>61</sup>. It is important that the revised guidance being produced by the College of Policing, reiterates the correct policy and procedures. If there is sufficient evidence to caution, then there is sufficient evidence to charge.

*“I wanted to charge him yet I was talked out of it. I had physical evidence to say he'd hit me. To him [the police officer] it was a waste of time, or she'll only drop the charges or I can't be bothered with the paperwork. That's how I felt.”*

It is important that there are good working relationships between the police and the CPS and, where possible, joint scrutiny of data. The CPS has a wealth of consistent and comparable data that should be routinely used by forces to scrutinise and manage their own performance. We heard some good examples of this joint approach. For example, in **Cheshire Constabulary**, the District Crown Prosecutor conducts a dip sample of files where the police have taken no further action and

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<sup>61</sup> The government has set out a six point action plan to address this issue. See Hansard 22 October 2013: Column 141W

feeds back to the force which cases would have been suitable for charge and prosecution.

Crown prosecutors also told us that it is important that there are strong partnerships with other agencies where issues of domestic abuse can be discussed in a strategic way. They expressed concern that, in some cases, the police are increasingly absent from local domestic violence steering groups.

## **Restorative justice**

In general, forces are following the long established national policy position, that police use of restorative justice interventions in domestic abuse cases concerning intimate partners is inappropriate, ineffective and potentially dangerous. However, there are a few examples from the force inspections where use of restorative justice in intimate partner abuse was happening routinely. This was raised with the forces concerned.

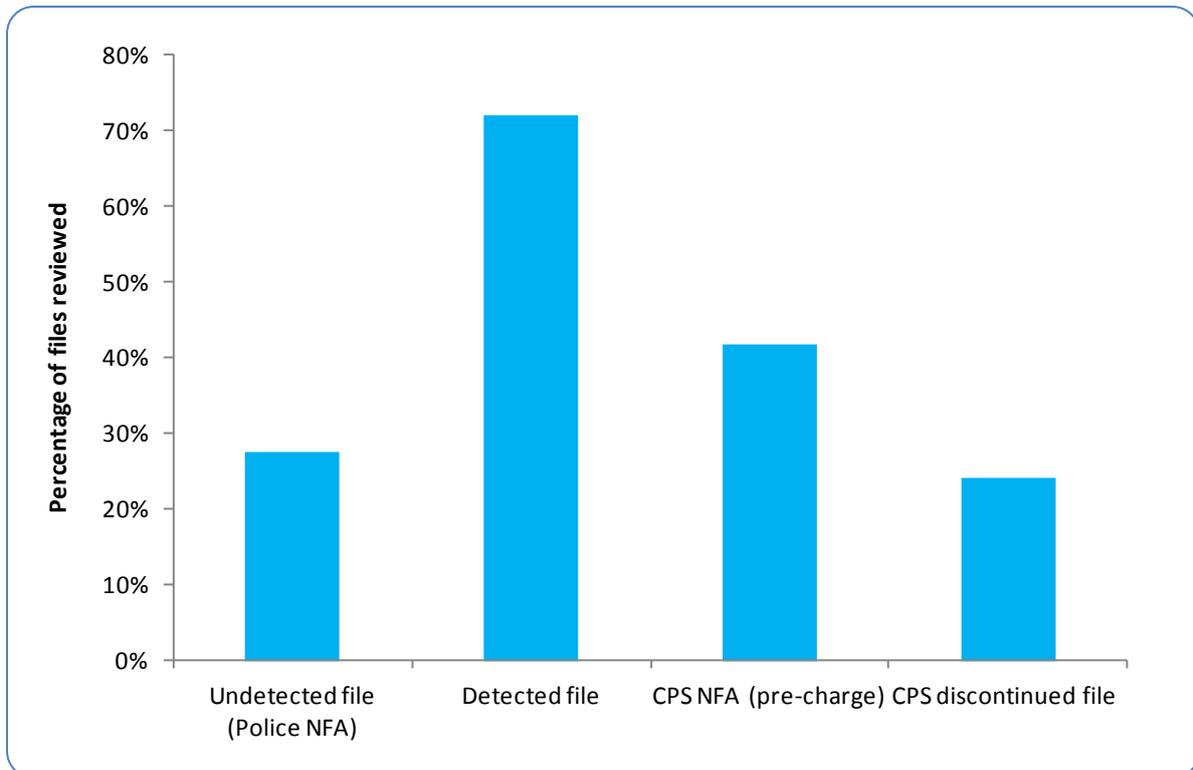
The police should not use restorative justice in intimate partner domestic abuse cases and should do so with extreme caution in other forms of domestic abuse. Without a full understanding of a particular case, informed by multi-agency discussions, condoning an apology, or gift, or discussion between the parties could increase the risk to the victim. Even where, on the surface, this kind of response appears to be viewed as a positive outcome by the victim, a police officer can never know the extent to which the perpetrator's coercive control is having an impact on the victim's behaviour.

## **Evidence-led prosecutions**

It is a long standing national policy for the police and the CPS, that prosecutions will take place without the victim's support in appropriate cases (evidence-led prosecutions). This is in accordance with the position that the police are exercising their powers in the public interest. The decision to prosecute should not depend primarily on the views of the victim in domestic abuse or any other cases. All staff need to view evidence-led prosecutions as a realistic option from the moment a report of domestic abuse is made, and act accordingly.

HMIC understands that it is harder to secure a conviction of the guilty without the engagement or the support of the victim. Our file review data shows that a considerably larger proportion of offences were detected when the victim supported police action (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Percentage of cases where victim supported police action**



Source: HMIC file review

If a victim expresses a wish that they do not want the offender to be brought to justice, this is not a reason in itself for the police to step back. In fact it is a reason to gather evidence more proactively. It makes a huge difference to frontline officers when they see cases being prosecuted that do not rely on the victim's evidence. It needs to be made clear through police action and behaviour, that it is not the victim's responsibility to bring domestic abusers to justice; this is the job of everyone who works in the criminal justice system. It is also critically important that police officers understand why a victim may withdraw support for a prosecution.

We heard disappointingly mixed reports about the extent to which forces and the CPS are pursuing evidence-led prosecutions. Forces often refer to these as

'victimless prosecutions' – unfortunate shorthand that can tend to suggest there is no victim.

A number of forces told HMIC that the CPS is unwilling to support such prosecutions. This is not the case. The CPS will support these cases but it needs proper evidence gathering and investigation by the police to be in a position to do so.

### **Examples of successful evidence-led prosecutions**

The victim reports to police that she has been assaulted by her ex-partner, the defendant then goes to tell a friend that he will "slit her throat". Both the victim and witness are unwilling to support a prosecution and do not give a statement. However the victim does provide a photograph of her injury. There are some admissions from the defendant in interview, and the CPS advises to charge, relying on bad character and photographic evidence. The defendant entered a guilty plea at the first court hearing.

The victim reports a violent, unprovoked attack to police where she has been dragged by her hair onto the kitchen floor and washing-up liquid squirted into her eyes and mouth by her boyfriend. The victim's initial account was captured on body-worn video; however, she is intoxicated and will not make a statement the following day, due to being in fear of the perpetrator. There is photographic evidence of her injuries. The perpetrator denies the assault and fails to give any account for what happened. The CPS advises to charge, even though there are some quality issues with the body-worn video footage. The defendant pleads guilty at the first court hearing.

The victim was pregnant and assaulted by her partner, in front of their 10-month old child. The victim would not make a statement, however her injuries were captured on body-worn video. The CPS advised they would proceed with prosecution as the victim was pregnant at the time. They relied on the 999 call, body-worn video, and hearsay evidence from the victim as documented by the responding officer. The defendant pleaded not guilty and the case proceeded to trial, where the magistrates returned a guilty verdict.

## Women offenders as victims of domestic abuse

Women offenders are far more likely to have experienced domestic and sexual violence than the general female population. Evidence suggests that between 50 percent and 80 percent of women in prison have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse.<sup>62</sup>

HMIC spoke to women in prison to understand their experiences of the police. Many of the issues they raised were similar to those raised in other focus groups:

- they described the **controlling nature of the perpetrator's behaviour**, and how the abuse could be non-violent. One described how the abuser had taken her phone and credit cards; another told us how her boyfriend had said: *"I'm not stupid enough to hit you"*.
- they told us that **officers did not always recognise non-violent abuse**: *"If I'm bleeding then he'll get nicked"* another told us *"the officer said to me 'you're pretty stupid not to have left earlier'"*. They also told us that officers could be more judgmental if the victim was a known offender or drug user.
- Specific issues relating to the arrest of victims of domestic abuse were raised for example, the **control the abuser had over the woman could persist during arrest, questioning, throughout the criminal justice process and while in prison and on release**. One woman described the fear she felt in custody: *"just seeing his shoes outside the cell next to me was enough to keep me quiet"*.

It is also important that officers understand the nature of domestic abuse when the victim may present as a suspect. Many of the women we spoke to would have

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<sup>62</sup>Corston, Jean (2007) *The Corston Report: A review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system* (London: Home Office); Hooper, C. (2003) *Abuse, interventions and women in prison: A literature review* (London: Home Office); Social Exclusion Task Force (May 2009) *Short study on women offenders* (London: Cabinet Office and Ministry of Justice) [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/209663/setf\\_shortstudy\\_womenoffenders.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/209663/setf_shortstudy_womenoffenders.pdf); Rungay, Judith (2004) *When victims become offenders: In search of coherence in policy and practice* (London: Fawcett Society); Ministry of Justice with National Offender Management Service and National Probation Service (May 2008) *Offender Management Guide to working with women offenders* (London: MoJ) <http://www.southwest.csip.org.uk/silo/files/management-guide-to-working-with-women-offenders.doc>

welcomed an opportunity to disclose the domestic abuse if they felt the officer was more supportive or understanding.

## **Action needed**

Domestic abuse manifests itself in a variety of ways. Domestic abuse related crimes are high volume and often very serious. Forces told us for the twelve months from 31 August 2012 there were 269,700 crimes flagged as domestic abuse. Half of these were assault.<sup>63</sup> Of these, 6,400 were sexual offences and rapes. While the victims may find it difficult to support police action and they may not seem to want the offender charged and prosecuted, criminal justice agencies have a responsibility to seek criminal justice sanctions.

The wide variation in cautioning and charging rates from force to force is of concern. There are worrying examples of well-intentioned, but potentially dangerous approaches to alternative ways of dealing with offenders (such as restorative justice) and insufficient examples of evidence led prosecutions progressing through the criminal justice system.

Improved initial response and victim support (covered in the earlier chapters) will strongly contribute to better prospects of progressing cases through the criminal justice system. It is important that there are consistent approaches from police officers and staff. **Recommendation 5** proposes this should be dealt with as the College of Policing updates its national guidance.

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<sup>63</sup> Assault with intent to cause serious harm (1 percent); assault with injury (27 percent); and assault without injury (23 percent).

## Reducing risk by managing perpetrators and learning from previous mistakes

So far, this report has focused on how the police service responds to victims of domestic abuse and keeps them safe. It has tracked the police response from the moment the police are contacted. However, there is much more that the police service can do (both on its own and in partnership with others) to minimise the risk of someone becoming a victim of domestic abuse in the first place and protect victims from repeat incidents of abuse.

This section considers how forces could improve the targeting and management of perpetrators of domestic abuse to reduce victimisation, and better learn from previous incidents – particularly domestic homicides – to reduce the chances of the same mistakes being made again.

### **Disrupting and targeting domestic abuse perpetrators**

HMIC found that while forces are beginning to think about how to improve the management of the risk presented by perpetrators of domestic abuse, there is still significant work to be done to translate their plans into a reality.

Most forces do not have a systematic approach to targeting repeat or prolific perpetrators of domestic abuse through techniques which have been used successfully to reduce other offending types of behaviour. This includes, where appropriate and justifiable, disruptive and covert tactics (such as surveillance<sup>64</sup>) similar to those used to tackle members of serious organised crime groups. The multi-agency work seen in integrated offender management (IOM) to reduce the risk of prolific or persistent offenders continuing to commit crime is transferable to domestic abuse offenders.

Almost all forces have started to consider how best to target perpetrators of domestic abuse – although for the majority this is at an early stage of development. This is in

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<sup>64</sup> ACPO guidance provides details of when covert surveillance may be appropriate

stark contrast to the management of prolific offenders in respect of shoplifting, for example, or other volume crimes.<sup>65</sup>

Even where forces have developed a list of their most prolific domestic abuse perpetrators, this is known largely only to the specialist domestic abuse teams. Some forces have established small teams to carry out dedicated work which disrupts the activity of these offenders; others use their specialist domestic abuse units. In the vast majority of forces, the systematic targeting of prolific domestic abuse perpetrators has yet to be routinely included in the daily briefings and the allocation of duties to response officers and neighbourhood teams.

### **Tackling domestic perpetrators in Scotland**

Police Scotland has developed a targeted approach to tackling domestic abuse perpetrators. The Domestic Abuse Task Force officers work alongside their frontline colleagues and partner agencies to target perpetrators and proactively investigate every aspect of their criminal lifestyle. These include connections to other offences including drug dealing, gang violence and driving offences. This is conducted with a view to removing them from the abusive situation as swiftly as possible.

It is a tactic previously only used in murder or other serious crime investigations. Supplementing this approach are multi-agency tasking and co-ordinating (MATAC) meetings, aimed at addressing the behaviour of serious offenders through the assistance of multi-agency partners.

Much of the work in forces in identifying serial perpetrators is carried out by the specialist teams. We saw very limited examples of intelligence capability in forces being used to identify the main offenders and action being taken to disrupt their activity more effectively.

CAADA has developed some supporting resources for those chairing MARACs, on actions needed from representatives, to address the behaviours of alleged

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<sup>65</sup> Volume crime or Serious Acquisitive Crime (SAC) are terms used in forces to tackle certain categories of crime which contribute most significantly to their overall levels of recorded crime. These tend to be burglary, vehicle crime and robbery.

perpetrators. These fall under the four main headings of divert, manage, disrupt and prosecute.<sup>66</sup>

## Perpetrator programmes

Many forces are keen to use ‘perpetrator programmes’ to manage offenders’ behaviour and encourage perpetrators to stop further offending. Officers often see this approach more positively than pursuing a conviction through the criminal justice process. While domestic abuse perpetrators can access these programmes after a conviction, there is very limited provision for them as part of a wider offender management strategy, prior to conviction.

Encouraging perpetrator programmes is part of a genuine desire by the police service to provide a lasting solution. However, HMIC is concerned that in some cases, ill-thought through programmes are being developed on an ad hoc basis by forces, and are not based on evidence of what works. Introducing these programmes requires specialist knowledge and should not be left to the “enthusiastic amateur”; otherwise victims may be put at more risk.

Currently, the research is fairly mixed about the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes. There is a general lack of evidence, particularly in the UK. A recent systematic review of 10,446 papers from across Europe, found only 12 studies that attempted to evaluate a perpetrator programme. Of those 12, none was of sufficient quality decisively to attribute a positive (or negative) effect to a perpetrator programme.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See [www.caada.org.uk/marac/Resources\\_for\\_MARAC\\_Chairs\\_and\\_Coordinators.html](http://www.caada.org.uk/marac/Resources_for_MARAC_Chairs_and_Coordinators.html)

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, Leah; Koehler, Johann; and Lösel, Friedrich. *Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs in Europe, Part I: A survey of Current Practice*, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, Sage Journals, 2012; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23267241>; Akoensi, Thomas D; Koehler, Johann A; Lösel, Friedrich; Humphreys, David K: *Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs in Europe, Part II: A Systematic Review of the State of Evidence*, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, Sage Journals, October 2013 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0061317/>

There is some evidence to suggest that voluntary perpetrator programmes are generally less successful than mandatory interventions.<sup>68</sup> This may be seen as counter-intuitive, as it may be thought that perpetrators who self-refer might be more willing to change. Possible explanations include perpetrators denying the extent of the harm their abuse is causing; perpetrators manipulating the system and not really being engaged (including not finishing the programmes); and the programmes tailored more for perpetrators who must attend.

There are also challenges associated with evaluating these programmes. Often the numbers involved in, and completing, these programmes is very small. Many studies look at a relatively narrow range of outcomes (for example, subsequent repeat incidents), and do not consider what the victim actually wants to happen as a result of the intervention.<sup>69</sup>

The organisation RESPECT is funded to accredit domestic abuse perpetrator programmes and is continually adding to the evidence base on effective programmes. The National Offender Management Service also delivers programmes to domestic abuse offenders as a condition of their sentence in certain cases<sup>70</sup>.

Different approaches are being tested and evaluated in forces. One example is the CARA project in Hampshire. However, as the current research base indicates, the evidence around the efficacy of perpetrator programmes in domestic abuse is patchy, but crucially their success may be dependent on how they are implemented. Trialling such approaches both safely and in a way that will provide a valuable addition to the evidence base requires skilled support for professionals (in both the statutory and voluntary sector) and academics.

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<sup>68</sup> Donovan, Catherine. and Griffiths, Sue. *Domestic Violence and Voluntary Perpetrator Programmes: Engaging Men in the Pre-Commencement Phase*. British Journal of Social Work, 2013 <http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2013/12/02/bjsw.bct182.full>

<sup>69</sup> Westmarland, Nicole; and Kelly, Liz: *Why Extending Measurements of 'Success' in Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes Matters for Social Work*. British Journal of Social Work, 2012 <http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2012/04/16/bjsw.bcs049>

<sup>70</sup> A process evaluation of these programmes can be found at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/research-and-analysis/moj-research/delivery-domestic-abuse-programmes.pdf>

## Domestic Homicide Reviews

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were established on statutory basis under section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, which came into force on 13 April 2011. 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. The Home Office provides statutory guidance to support DHRs.

DHRs are an important means of measuring performance and improving practice. However, HMIC has concerns that the current approach may be limiting their effectiveness:

- the DHRs we reviewed vary significantly in terms of structure and level of detail;
- the time taken for the DHR to be carried out and then to go through the Home Office's quality assurance process, means that there is often a significant time lag between the initial event and completion of the DHR;
- the way DHRs are conducted in forces may feel like an exercise in apportioning blame, rather than trying to prevent the issue occurring again. This reduced the likelihood that participating officers and staff will be as open as they need to be. As a result they might not deliver challenging or difficult messages in respect of the force's approach; and
- there is a lack of force level arrangements to disseminate learning from DHRs. Often the responsibility to review and implement the recommendations sits with the head of public protection (or equivalent level) rather than the chief officer team.

Forces and other local partners raised the concern of limited opportunities to share the learning from DHRs.

There is real appetite from all partners for a more open and facilitated approach to support local partners to learn from all DHRs, including those that do not relate specifically to their own or to neighbouring forces.

The Home Office is committed to supporting this process shown by its recent publication on the lessons learned so far.<sup>71</sup> However, many forces and partners commented that there is limited new insight provided by the current lessons learned work. Because of the understandable sensitivities in the details brought to light by DHRs, the lessons learned, as described in the public documents, are somewhat general.

Partner organisations also highlighted further constraints in the current approach to DHRs:

- there is no way of getting all of the organisations involved to implement the decisions arising out of the DHR, particularly without the sort of statutory duty which sits behind a serious case review.
- there is an argument for more of a focus in the reviews to be on offenders (e.g. whether the offenders is a serial perpetrator; whether they have convictions for other offences; and whether they suffer from mental health problems) and what can be learnt from that.

HMIC understands and supports the rationale for the use of DHRs but evidence suggests that despite the resources invested in the reviews, they may not be having as much impact as they could.

## Action needed

Forces are still missing opportunities to tackle domestic abuse perpetrators, although all recognised that it needs to be done and many are starting to develop their own approaches. **Recommendation 8** suggests that these approaches are shared between forces, and that more evidence is needed on effective approaches to perpetrator programmes. This is a shared responsibility between the College of Policing and the Home Office, working with other departments such as the Ministry of Justice and voluntary sector partners such as RESPECT.

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<sup>71</sup> *Domestic Homicide Reviews Common Themes Identified as Lessons to be Learned*, Home Office, November 2013  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/259547/Domestic\\_homicide\\_review\\_-\\_lessons\\_learned.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/259547/Domestic_homicide_review_-_lessons_learned.pdf)

The Home Office has recognised in its 2014 Action Plan<sup>72</sup> that elements of DHRs require some further work. We welcome these commitments and suggest a more comprehensive review by the Home Office of its approach to DHRs in

**Recommendation 9.**

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<sup>72</sup> *A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls: Action Plan 2014*, Home Office, March 2014.

## Force performance

HMIC recognises that different forces, facing different challenges, will adopt various approaches to keeping victims of domestic abuse safe. Forces have different levels of demand and financial challenge.

Domestic abuse is both high risk and high volume. Our data shows domestic abuse related crime was 8 percent of overall recorded crime in 2012 to 2013. This is comparable to other volume crimes such as burglary (13 percent), vehicle crime (11 percent) and robbery (2 percent). Domestic abuse can also be high risk and some of the most dangerous cases may not be reported to the police, or may not be criminal in nature – but just as dangerous. Domestic abuse is just one area of risk that forces have to manage. All forces have faced spending reductions and have to do more with less.

HMIC examined the effectiveness of the police response in the 43 forces in England and Wales. In this report we have drawn on the findings in individual forces in order to draw a conclusion on how well the service as a whole is responding to domestic abuse; where the service collectively does well; and where improvements are needed.

There is significant variation between forces in terms of the quality of their overall response to tackling domestic abuse. Even within the same force there are often some aspects of the service to victims that may be effective and other areas where it is falling short

During this inspection HMIC identified four forces where we had serious concerns about the service they provide to victims of domestic abuse. These forces are Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Gloucestershire Constabulary and Greater Manchester Police. Given the level of risk identified in these forces HMIC required each to develop an action plan immediately following the inspection. The forces were asked to describe how they would address the shortcomings identified in the inspection. Of these four forces, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and

Bedfordshire Police have already been subject to a re-inspection. Gloucestershire Constabulary and Greater Manchester Police will be re-inspected shortly.

Throughout this report we highlight common areas of risk and concern. Forces should examine their own working practices to test whether these apply to them.

The areas that caused particular concern in the forces we inspected included:

- weaknesses in the risk assessment process, for example poor or no supervision of the initial risk assessment or no mechanism to check the quality of the initial risk assessment;
- little or no responsibility for victim safety in medium or standard risk cases;
- a lack of capacity in specialist units leading to back-logs of high risk cases with outstanding safety plans; and
- a focus on the single crime and managing the offender rather than keeping the victim safe

We have also identified a number of forces that are providing a better service to victims of domestic abuse or have some particularly noticeable practice. Lancashire Constabulary stood out as the strongest example and other forces demonstrating a good response when inspected are Dorset Police, Durham Constabulary, Norfolk Constabulary, Northumbria Police, Suffolk Constabulary, Thames Valley Police and Warwickshire Police.

These forces' stronger performance is characterised by some or all of the following:

- effective strategic direction set by the police and crime commissioner in their police and crime plan, and strong personal leadership from the chief constable. Domestic abuse is reinforced as a force priority through a number of tangible means, such as: securing investment in public protection units in the context of overall budget reductions; communications from chief officers about domestic abuse; and the behaviours and expectations reinforced by supervisors throughout the organisation;
- evidence that the whole force has a role in tackling domestic abuse, most noticeably through good engagement of neighbourhood teams, ensuring that there are domestic abuse experts or champions supporting response officers

and investigators and ensuring the existing successful approaches such as integrated offender management (IOM) is used to tackle domestic abuse;

- a focus on understanding the needs of the victim and keeping the victim safe, this often sits within a broader set of priorities around supporting vulnerable people;
- an investment in training which engages the staff directly and develops a better understanding of coercive control and an expectation that competence in tackling domestic abuse is a minimum for all officers; and
- investment in IDVAs to support victims of domestic abuse.

As regards the rest of the forces in England and Wales, their service to victims of domestic abuse is mixed. HMIC identified a number of areas for improvement in each of the forces and corresponding recommendations. Detailed reports for all forces are available at [www.hmic.gov.uk](http://www.hmic.gov.uk)

This brief analysis highlights a number of characteristics of an effective approach to domestic abuse, as well as common issues of concern. The next section of the report considers these areas in more detail.

## Making domestic abuse a force priority

Most police and crime commissioners' police and crime plans express strong commitments to tackling domestic abuse and chief officers confirmed that domestic abuse is regarded as a force priority. However, HMIC found few examples where this translates into an operational reality. Practical action across the police service on a par with tackling other crime types, such as burglary or other serious acquisitive crime is lacking still. Police leaders need to make a concerted effort to address domestic abuse on a range of levels, including a focus on reducing repeat abuse; increasing reporting; and publicising cases where offenders are brought to justice. Determined, visible and consistent leadership is needed to ensure that domestic abuse is seen as a priority and acted on as such. Police and crime commissioners need effective mechanisms for holding chief constables and senior police leaders to account.

### **Leadership in police forces and by police and crime commissioners**

The majority of police and crime commissioners show a strong commitment to tackling domestic abuse. An analysis of the initial Police and Crime Plans shows it is the second most common crime type mentioned as a priority, appearing in 93 percent of plans. Targets for reducing domestic abuse appear in about a third (32 percent) of plans and in all cases this is expressed as a directional target (for example increase the reporting of domestic abuse or decrease the number of repeat incidents). No numerical targets have been set in the plans.

Many police and crime commissioners have chosen, rightly in HMICs view, not to set a target of reducing recorded domestic abuse crimes as they recognise that this is a significantly under reported area. Indeed 42 per cent of plans contain a commitment to increase the reporting of this type of offence.

Our inspection found too many forces where some or all of the following were true:

- senior management teams are unable to articulate an overarching strategy for tackling domestic abuse;
- management teams, are aware of particular issues or gaps in their existing strategy, but have not taken action to address them;
- operational staff describe domestic abuse as a priority but are unable to explain what this means in practice. While there is clarity that volume crime is a priority, we found few forces with a clear strategic message about how domestic abuse should be dealt with and the minimum standards expected;
- evidence that domestic abuse is not in fact a priority is revealed in the way that frontline officers are briefed and assigned tasks. Many neighbourhood policing teams across the country do not know their highest risk domestic abuse offenders, whereas they do know the identity of prolific burglars;
- fragmented and poorly understood organisational structures, units and departments, each of which contributes something on domestic abuse, but the arrangements fail to join up effectively; and frontline staff do not know who in the organisation is responsible for what in pursuing an investigation and criminal prosecution, and keeping victims safe;
- failure to deploy one of policing's principal assets, neighbourhood policing teams, in the fight against domestic abuse; and
- failure to engage with the right partners at chief officer level which means that opportunities to develop strategic partnerships are sometimes lost.

Strong and effective leadership is vital if forces' response to domestic abuse is to improve. This starts from the messages at the top of the organisation and must be reinforced by the attitudes of managers and supervisors.

Our inspection found that many chief constables and their top teams still focus more on volume and acquisitive crime reduction than they do on domestic abuse. Even where strong messages and priorities are given from the top of the organisation, the engrained culture of performance management still means officers of all ranks focused on volume crime but not domestic abuse. Force inspections found little

evidence of domestic abuse problem profiles, which analyse the problem in such a way that enables organisations to plan a strategic response.

In summary, there is evidence that forces were failing to treat domestic abuse as part of their critical core business, even though it is a significant proportion of their violent, complex and resource intensive demand. Effective leadership in this area means:

- making domestic abuse a priority, with officers understanding what this means in practice;
- being clear that domestic abuse is everybody's business, it is not just for the specialist units;
- reinforcing a positive culture and attitude;
- rewarding and recognising people who support victims of domestic abuse, with incentives from commendations to promotion prospects. We have “police bravery awards” should there be “victim care awards”?
- ensuring there is focus on and effective performance management in this area; and
- ensuring that there is effective supervision in place to reinforce a professional and competent approach.

In December 2013 the three police and crime commissioners for **Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria** launched a regional strategy to tackle violence against women and girls in the North East. **Sussex Police** is the first force in the country to receive white ribbon status for their response to domestic abuse. The white ribbon campaign is designed to ensure that men take more responsibility for reducing the level of violence against women. The fact the force has this status recognises all their work in raising awareness which includes working closely with other partners including education programmes in schools, the community and the local sports organisations.

## Measuring performance

How the force measures its own performance and, how in turn, the police and crime commissioner holds the force to account for delivering against his or her priorities is an essential element of what steers operational business.

Many forces have a good set of measures for tracking the reduction in recorded crime. We found little evidence of this being the case for domestic abuse. In part, this is because traditional measurements do not hold for a crime that is significantly under-reported and under-recorded, and where a successful outcome is sometimes hard to measure and count. For example, an increase in recorded levels of domestic abuse may indicate success; and more victims are coming forward due to increased confidence in the police. A traditional detection measure, such as a caution, may not necessarily keep the victim safe.

There is an absence of a national framework for measuring domestic abuse performance. As domestic abuse covers a range of crimes, it is up to individual forces to identify and track domestic abuse crimes and incidents on their own force systems (including in a very small number of forces who do this using their own definitions of domestic abuse). The data that forces hold on domestic abuse is in some instances of very poor quality, or not readily available at all.

There is no central requirement to report domestic abuse crimes alongside other returns of data on crimes. Unlike sexual offences or rape (which are specific crime types) there is an unacceptable lack of transparency for police and crime commissioners and the public as to the nature and extent of domestic abuse, unless the force chooses to publish it. Even if this happens, the information the force publishes will not be consistent with what another might publish. This makes it extremely difficult for one force to compare itself with another force. There is also a serious lack of force level comparable information on the victims of domestic abuse, particularly broken down by gender and ethnicity.

The Home Office requires forces to survey victims of certain crime types for their overall satisfaction. Victims of car crime, burglary and violent crime are all surveyed.

However, victims of domestic abuse are specifically excluded, in part due to some of the sensitivities of surveying these victims. HMIC recommends that the Home Office should change this, and with the appropriate safeguards in place, victims of domestic abuse should be routinely surveyed to establish how satisfied they are with the police response.

There needs to be a clearer focus on positive outcomes beyond criminal justice resolutions, such as number of charges or successful prosecutions. For this to happen, forces need to have access to qualitative information in order to understand their own performance. Vital to this is the feedback and views of victims who have experienced police responses. It is disappointing that victims' voices are not yet central to force's strategic plans to improve police responses to domestic abuse. However, we did find encouraging examples of victims' views being brought to centre stage in some forces.

**Leicestershire Police** undertakes dedicated surveys of domestic abuse victims to help establish levels of satisfaction and identify how the service to victims could be improved. It is one of a very few forces adopting this approach. This is a complex and sensitive area but one which has the potential to yield much valuable insight into the victims perspective.

Safety considerations are embedded within the survey arrangements, for example by making contact through an agreed safe contact number and ensuring an immediate police response should the line go dead. The force uses its own staff to carry out the surveys so that it can pick up and quickly address any issue that needs an immediate response.

As part of this inspection, HMIC invited interested parties (from police forces, office of police and crime commissioners and the voluntary and community sector) to consider how current practice could be improved.

The ideas they suggested include:

- use of scrutiny panels to get informed views from a range of victims and their representatives: These are already used extensively by the police and

partners in dealing with hate crime cases. The CPS already has a scrutiny panel approach to domestic abuse;

- focus groups with victims to seek their views about the service offered by the force, attended by senior members of the command team, to demonstrate clear and committed leadership in this area;
- asking voluntary and community sector groups locally to help forces engage with victims from the local area (including victims from minority communities and with different needs); and
- surveys conducted with victims facilitated by IDVAs – this also helps to inform the victim about what sort of service they should expect.

## **Action needed**

There needs to be increased emphasis on improving the service to victims of domestic abuse at national and local level. **Recommendation 1** calls for a renewed national commitment to improve services and **Recommendation 2** requires specific local action in all forces.

**Recommendation 3** places a responsibility on chief constables to review the leadership in their forces to ensure the priority for domestic abuse set out on paper becomes an operational reality. We have also developed a checklist for police and crime commissioners to support them in holding their forces to account.

There are numerous ways in which forces can broaden their current approaches to managing performance. Forces need to start adopting these approaches so they can improve the services that they offer to victims of domestic abuse. HMIC also recommends that action needs to be taken at a national level to improve the quality of data for the public and police and crime commissioners on domestic abuse.

**Recommendation 4** provides suggestions on how this could be achieved.

## Awareness, culture, attitudes and training

The last decade has seen considerable development in policies, practice and approaches to tackling domestic abuse. However, despite these advances, insufficient progress has been made by the police service. As the Southall Black Sisters put in its submission to HMIC:

*“Our concern about the policing of violence against women is not so much about the lack of laws and policies but about the implementation of these laws and policies. Consistently effective and sensitive implementation of criminal law and policies on domestic violence remains an elusive goal.”*

From our inspection fieldwork, listening to victims of domestic abuse, surveying those working with those victims and from our engagement with practitioners, campaigners, academics, support networks and other service providers, the message is clear. There is insufficient awareness and understanding of domestic abuse by the police and the attitudes of some police officers are unacceptable. Attitudes and cultural issues need to be challenged properly and addressed by force leaders and supervisors, and officers need to be better equipped with the right skills and knowledge.

There are several reasons why many of the problems that HMIC identified a decade ago remain unchanged today. These include:

- police officers and staff lack a proper understanding of domestic abuse especially the elements of coercive controlling behaviour. There is also poor understanding of how this coercive control impacts on the actions taken by domestic abuse victims such as:
  - remaining with the partner;
  - not wishing to support police action; or
  - withdrawing from supporting a criminal case.
- police officers lack a level of basic competence in too many cases when it comes to the initial investigation of domestic abuse. The ability of an officer to

conduct an investigation at the scene is the minimum that the public expects of a competent and professional police officer. We found this is lacking too many times in files that we reviewed; and

- police officers do not have all the specialist knowledge themselves, they need to know where to refer the victim. For example, specialist domestic abuse support services are often run by community groups for BME, male, and LGBT victims. Another example is the range of civil disposals that a victim can apply for, to make them safe. Often IDVAs, victims groups or bodies such as the National Centre for Domestic Abuse, can provide support with information on and access to these services.

Police training is failing to address these issues. Our inspection revealed considerable weaknesses in the current approach to training on domestic abuse. We received feedback that:

- reliance on e-learning to train officers on domestic abuse, coercive control and harassment is not appropriate. It can be complied with, but not understood. It is possible for officers to click through the training packages. Misunderstood or incorrect answers are not picked up and explained. Critically, it does not encourage self-reflection or the ability for peers, trainers or supervisors to challenge inappropriate attitudes or behaviours in the way that face to face training would do;
- training is too infrequent. There is limited training throughout the career of an officer. Often training is updates to legislation or force operating practice delivered through e-learning. This approach does not tackle the so called “desensitisation” that many people referred to in dealing with victims of domestic abuse. This can often be best addressed by hearing from victims themselves; and
- there is a lack of emphasis on broader communication skills and engaging with vulnerable people in related training programmes. For example, detective training places a greater emphasis on managing an exhibit than managing a victim.

It is clear that there is an urgent need to overhaul domestic abuse training in all forces. HMIC recognises that many forces have scaled back their training departments significantly as part of their response to the funding pressures. The age of austerity has also made it more challenging to take large sections of the workforce away from their work for long periods of time on training.

However, HMIC sees only limited value, if any, in forces relying on e-learning as a means of training officers and staff on domestic abuse. It is possible to arrange for face-to-face briefing on domestic abuse without significant additional investment or abstraction of officers from front line duties. Some forces have successfully built in short training sessions as part of their daily briefing process.

There is now the opportunity to think differently about how training can be delivered even within these constraints. HMIC's events for interested parties resulted in a wealth of valuable suggestions on how training could be transformed. These include that:

- training needs to show officers the results of their actions in domestic abuse cases. This can be achieved by working through case studies and scenarios in real time;
- victims should be at the centre of the training. Voluntary and community sector groups are well placed to facilitate victims' testimonies or their direct engagement in training options;
- training needs to challenge officers' existing attitudes and bias. Again, working through scenarios and discussing decisions collectively is seen as a good way of doing this;
- forces need to recognise when delivering training in police forces that both victims of domestic abuse and perpetrators could be attending. Sensitivity is therefore required during the training. Some forces draw explicit attention to this at the beginning of the session and use this as an opportunity to signpost support;
- there needs to be visible commitment by force leaders to the training. This can be by means of supporting podcasts or messages from the chief officers

at the start of training, or by their attendance on the training programme with other officers; and

- learning from training and awareness in other public protection areas should be drawn upon. For example, successful approaches to challenging myths and stereotypes in rape and sexual offences may be worthy of consideration in respect of domestic abuse.

**Thames Valley Police** has trained officers and staff over the last two years on risk assessment, honour based violence, stalking, harassment and coercive control. The training was notably comprehensive with detail on the history of domestic abuse, issues around children, practical examples and guidance for discussion and feedback.

**Durham Constabulary** is piloting an approach in one of its neighbourhood policing teams to support officers' continuing professional development in domestic abuse. Officers are required to complete a portfolio to evidence their competency in managing cases of domestic abuse. The constabulary also has a comprehensive training programme for all new officers including a three week attachment to the safeguarding teams of which one week is with the domestic abuse specialist team.

As the College of Policing continues to develop its work in the area of protecting vulnerable people, it has the opportunity to overhaul fundamentally the approach to domestic abuse training and to support the work to professionalise policing practice in this area.

The College should do this by engaging with a wide range of experts from across policing, victims groups, and academia and from other organisations delivering training in comparable settings. **Recommendation 7** suggests such an overhaul.

The evidence collected in this work suggests that any training should:

- be delivered through face-to-face rather than through e-learning;
- be embedded into core training through the foundation and specialist thresholds;
- be for all officers at all ranks; and

- be repeated throughout an officer's career.

## **Action needed**

Improved training is not the panacea. On its own it is insufficient to overcome the significant challenges that this review has uncovered. The knowledge and attitudes promulgated through the training programme need to be reinforced by leadership and supervision at all levels. However, there is a pressing need to address the many deficiencies identified in the current approach to training. **Recommendation 7** proposes a fundamental overhaul of training, supported by the College of Policing

## Conclusion

While much has changed since the publication of the HMIC's 2004 thematic inspection report<sup>73</sup> in the multi-agency and police landscape, some major challenges remain. The police service still needs to focus on getting the basics right to make sure it does its job well. This means effective investigations that build strong cases which do not rely on a victim's support for a prosecution, and safeguarding victims and their children.

There are several issues raised in the 2004 report which still require action today by police forces. For example, the report recommended that force systems needed to provide frontline officers with routine access to all the previous history information which they require to make good decisions and take effective action.<sup>74</sup> The report also emphasised the need for supervisors to monitor proactively the investigations and decision-making of frontline officers.<sup>75</sup>

In 2004, inspectors found that *"all too often, policies and rhetoric are not matched on the ground by effective responses and solid investigative practice"*<sup>76</sup> Sadly, our report finds that ten years on this is still the case.

Leaders in the police service now need to set the example and live the standards, professionalism, competence and behaviours that effectively tackle domestic abuse and support victims. Where officers maintain and exceed these standards they should be rewarded. When they fall short, they need to be held to account and, if appropriate, disciplined. It is only by having strong leaders who hold officers and staff to account, that we can make the progress that the public deserves.

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<sup>73</sup> *Violence at Home: A joint thematic inspection of the Investigation and Prosecution of Cases Involving Domestic Violence*, HMCPSI and HMIC, February 2004.  
[www.hmcpai.gov.uk/documents/reports/CJJI\\_THM/BOTJ/DomVio0104Rep.pdf](http://www.hmcpai.gov.uk/documents/reports/CJJI_THM/BOTJ/DomVio0104Rep.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Recommendation 4, pp.14

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Recommendation 6, pp.14

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19.

## 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 initial 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](http://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.

## Annex A

### Background on the police response to domestic abuse

HMIC conducted a joint inspection with HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) of domestic abuse. The report, *Violence at Home*, was published in February 2004.<sup>77</sup> There has been a significant amount of change in how the police service approaches domestic violence over the ten years since our last inspection. The list that follows is not exhaustive but illustrates considerable activity on the part of both forces and other agencies aimed at improving the response to victims of domestic abuse.

### Changes to definitions and new laws

There is now an agreed common definition of domestic.

The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 introduced a number of changes to the law in relation to domestic violence. These included:

- making breach of a 'non-molestation order' under the Family Law Act 1996 a criminal offence, and making common assault an arrestable offence. Both of these strengthened and clarified police powers of arrest. Since then, the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 has introduced two new stalking offences to supplement those already found in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
- Introducing a statutory duty on the Secretary of State to issue a Victims' Code of Practice. The first Code of Practice was introduced in April 2006, and established national minimum standards for the treatment of victims by the police and other agencies. A new Code of Practice came into force in December 2013<sup>78</sup> and aims to improve victims' contact with the criminal

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<sup>77</sup> *Violence at Home: A joint thematic inspection of the Investigation and Prosecution of Cases Involving Domestic Violence*, HMCPSI and HMIC, February 2004.  
[www.hmcpsi.gov.uk/documents/reports/CJJI\\_THM/BOTJ/DomVio0104Rep.pdf](http://www.hmcpsi.gov.uk/documents/reports/CJJI_THM/BOTJ/DomVio0104Rep.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, October 2013.  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf)

justice agencies by providing them with the support and information they need.

- establishing, with effect from 2011, statutory multi-agency domestic homicide reviews which are supported by statutory guidance and national training.<sup>79</sup>

## 1. Changes to policing policy and practice

The decade that followed the 2004 joint inspection saw a number of changes in training, policy and practice that were specific to policing. In 2004, the police service had just been provided with the **National Police Training Authority's Modular Training Programme: Responses to Domestic Violence**. This included modules for call handlers, first response officers, specialist officers and police leaders. The basic awareness module on understanding domestic abuse was designed to be delivered locally by refuge workers and police trainers. When the programme was updated in 2005, it included a module on prosecuting domestic violence, which was produced jointly with the CPS, and aimed to facilitate local joint training between the police and prosecutors.

In 2004, the first **national police guidance on domestic violence** was published by the National Centre for Policing Excellence (NCPE)<sup>80</sup>. This was updated and republished by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) in 2008.<sup>81</sup> The guidance provided a public statement of expectations in relation to all aspects of policing domestic violence.

**Improved tools for risk assessment and risk management** have been developed in the last decade. Previously the focus was on first response officers identifying risk factors, with specialist officers undertaking more detailed risk assessments. There has been a major change in policing to establish formal risk identification and

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<sup>79</sup> *Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews*, Home Office, March 2011.  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97881/DHR-guidance.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97881/DHR-guidance.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Violence*, National Centre for Policing Excellence for ACPO, 2004.  
[www.nordaf.co.uk/public/Editor/assets/Library/Centrex%20Guidance%20on%20Investigating%20DV.pdf](http://www.nordaf.co.uk/public/Editor/assets/Library/Centrex%20Guidance%20on%20Investigating%20DV.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse*, NPIA, 2008  
<http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2008/2008-cba-inv-dom-abuse.pdf>

assessment as a core element of the police initial response. Shared multi-agency tools have been developed to facilitate the assessment of risk. Sharing information about domestic abuse victims and the level of risk identified with other agencies is now a well-established element of the police response.

**Development of the role of the specialist officers**, in particular, strengthening the investigative response to domestic abuse, rather than concentrating on a victim support focused role. As an illustration of the nature of this change, in 2004, 78 percent of forces responding to the HMCPSI and HMIC thematic inspection survey indicated that the role of their domestic violence officers (DVO) was primarily one of support for victims and 53 percent indicated that involvement in the investigative process was not part of the officers' role.<sup>82</sup> There has been a sea change in the way specialist officers work. They now have responsibility for working with other agencies to help keep victims safe and they will also be skilled detectives investigating domestic abuse crimes.

## **2. Enhanced and multi-agency support to high risk victims**

The **multi agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)** have also been established since the last HMIC report. MARACs are meetings where statutory and voluntary agency representatives share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse. The model was developed in Cardiff in 2003 and now approximately 270 MARACs provide co-ordinated action plans designed to support and keep safe the nearly 60,000 high risk victims of domestic abuse a year.

**Independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs)** have been established in a number of areas. IDVAs work with high risk victims and, in conjunction with the MARAC process and specialist courts (as described later in this section), are part of the wider infrastructure to support victims of domestic abuse. Some IDVAs work directly alongside police specialist teams in forces.

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<sup>82</sup> *Op cit*, p.139

### 3. Changes in other criminal justice partners

After 2004 the role of the CPS and its national network of CPS co-ordinators became a more prominent part of the criminal justice response to domestic abuse. The implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 transferred the police power to charge for all but the most minor offences to the CPS.

The first specialist domestic violence court was set up in 1999. By 2004 these were growing in number. Research indicated the positive benefits of specialist domestic violence courts in getting cases to court more quickly and having trained prosecutors. This included improving the support services for victims, making advocacy and information-sharing easier to accomplish, and improving victim participation and satisfaction.<sup>83</sup> By 2013, there were more than 130 specialist domestic violence courts in operation across England and Wales.

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<sup>83</sup> Cook, Dee; Burton, Mandy; Robinson, Amanda; and Vallely, Christine. *Evaluation of Specialist Domestic Violence Courts / Fast Track Systems*. Crown Prosecution Service, Department for Constitutional Affairs and Criminal Justice System Race Unit, March 2004  
[www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/specialistdvcourts.pdf](http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/specialistdvcourts.pdf)

## Annex B

### **Holding to account: tackling domestic abuse Checklist for police and crime commissioners**

This toolkit is designed to support police and crime commissioners in holding the force to account for the delivery of improved services to victims of domestic abuse.

It falls into two parts:

- Nine questions for the force
- Nine pieces of data for routine scrutiny.

#### **Nine questions for the force**

##### **1. How well does the force deal with initial contact?**

- What are the force's definitions of what constitutes a repeat victim of domestic abuse and vulnerable victim of domestic abuse, and are they understood well by staff?
- Are call handlers able to identify repeat and vulnerable victims of domestic abuse consistently?
- To what extent do call handlers have access to relevant and reliable information to provide an accurate history to responding officers?
- What information on previous history will a responding officer have each time they attend a domestic abuse incident? Is this sufficient and is it guaranteed to be provided?

##### **2. How effective is the force's initial response?**

- How much emphasis is placed on the quality of the responding officer's initial investigation and how is this assessed?
- How does the force ensure that standards of the initial investigation meet the requirements of national policy?

- What does the force's policy on positive action mean in practice; do staff understand it; and how does the force measure whether positive action is keeping victims safe?
- Has the force reviewed its arrest rate for domestic abuse related crimes and how does it keep this under review?
- How does the force satisfy itself that the risk assessment process is well understood and conducted effectively by responding officers?
- Is the force using body worn cameras and how is the force evaluating their effectiveness?

### **3. How effective is the force in investigating crimes and safeguarding victims?**

- Following handover by responding officers, is it clear who is responsible for what element of victim care and investigation, and is this well understood by staff across the organisation?
- How is the repeat 'handover' of victims minimised by the force, and how are any risky gaps closed?
- How effectively are victims kept informed on the progress of their case by the force?
- How is risk reassessed for standard, medium and high risk cases? What are the trigger points and how many repeat incidents are required before there is a review of standard and medium risk cases?
- Are specialist domestic abuse units properly resourced and are staff well trained and supported?
- Is it possible that risk levels are downgraded on the basis of the capacity of the specialist team or the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) (rather than on the basis of risk to the victim? Is the force in a position to be able to spot this and address it?
- To what extent is the force using cautioning and restorative justice as a means of resolving domestic abuse incidents and is this appropriate?
- How successful is the force at bringing offenders to justice?
- What is the force's approach to securing evidence led prosecutions and how successful is this?

- How does the force use the Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) review process and data to assess the effectiveness of MARACs?

#### **4. How well does the force work with partners?**

- How is the force engaging with local voluntary and community sector groups as it develops its service?
- Is the Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) provision in the force areas appropriate? How can a long-term commitment to funding the IDVA posts be achieved?
- What other multi-agency approaches does the force support, for example, a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)? Do the multi-agency arrangements have good buy in from other partners?
- How do the force and the CPS work together to support evidence led prosecutions? How successful has the approach to evidence led prosecutions been so far?
- To what extent does the force review, with the CPS, the reasons for low conviction rates in domestic abuse?

#### **5. How is effectively is victim feedback obtained and used?**

- How does the force routinely survey victims of domestic abuse?
- How does feedback from victims help to shape the service the force provides?
- How is the force fulfilling its statutory responsibilities under the Victims' Code?

#### **6. How effective is the force in preventing domestic abuse?**

- What is the force's strategy for dealing with serial perpetrators of domestic abuse?
- Does the force have an active and well-managed approach to targeting domestic abuse perpetrators and how does it measure its effectiveness?
- To what extent are the force's neighbourhood policing resources deployed in preventive activity in respect of domestic abuse, and safeguarding victims?

- To what extent does the force deploy similar tactics used against members of organised crime groups in its fight against domestic abuse?

**7. How effective are the force's mechanisms for ensuring that the stated priority translates into an operational reality?**

- How does the force ensure that domestic abuse is an operational priority?
- How does tackling domestic abuse feature in the priorities for the day-to-day activity of frontline officers and assignment of work?
- How widely known is the force policy on domestic abuse and when was it last reviewed?
- How does the force's performance management regime promote tackling domestic abuse as a force priority?
- Who has responsibility for domestic abuse at the ACPO level, and how do they ensure effective oversight?
- How effective are the force's IT and information systems in supporting officers in their jobs?
- How does the force deal with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse employed by its force?
- How does the force promote and value the work of officers and staff who work well with victims of domestic abuse?
- How are successful interventions by staff in keeping victims of domestic abuse recognised and rewarded? For example, when was the last time a chief constable's commendation was awarded for keeping a victim of domestic abuse safe?
- How is poor performance of officers and staff and inappropriate attitudes in respect of domestic abuse identified and dealt with by the force?
- How important is expertise in understanding and dealing with domestic abuse in the force's selection and promotion arrangements?
- How is the force responding to the recommendations of HMIC's national and force reports?

## **8. How effective is the force's training on domestic abuse?**

- Do officers have the skills and knowledge necessary to engage confidently and competently with victims of domestic abuse, and how does the force assess this?
- How does the force provide training on domestic abuse? Is this for all frontline officers at all ranks? How regular is this training?
- How does the force measure the effectiveness of this training?
- How much training is face to face as opposed to e-learning? What are the opportunities for extending training?

## **9. How effective are the force's supervision arrangements in respect of domestic abuse?**

- What are the principal responsibilities of frontline supervisors and how does the force establish if they are effective?
- Does the force check or dip sample any of the following:
  - Control room logs and recordings to check the correct identification of victims of domestic abuse and in particular vulnerable and repeat victims?
  - Decisions by call handlers to make a scheduled appointment?
  - DASH forms to check the quality risk assessment, especially in standard or medium risk cases?
  - Officer justifications for a decision not to arrest when a crime has been committed?
  - Case files to provide assurance on the quality of initial investigation?

## **Nine pieces of data for routine monitoring**

1. Can the force provide data on domestic abuse incidents and crimes and on victims (broken down by ethnicity and gender)?
2. Does the force have a clear definition of repeat victims and can it access data that tells it the number of repeat victims?

3. How does the force describe a positive outcome in domestic abuse cases and what data does it use to demonstrate this?
4. Can the force provide accurate data on the arrest rate where a domestic abuse related crime has been committed?
5. What does the force measure in terms of domestic abuse outcomes and how does this compare with other victim based or violent crimes?
6. How does the force use data from the CPS to track successful criminal justice outcomes?
7. Can the force measure its domestic abuse cases at every level of risk?
8. How does the force use the data provided by CAADA?
9. Does the force have victim satisfaction data for domestic abuse?

## Annex C

### HMIC's Domestic Abuse Reference Group

HMIC had the following people on its Domestic Abuse Reference Group. The reference group was chaired by HMI Zoë Billingham and met four times during the inspection programme.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Vera Baird QC	Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria
Diana Barran	Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse
Katy Bourne	Police and Crime Commissioner for Sussex
Mark Cooper	Home Office
Hilary Fisher	Women's Aid
Giles Herdale	College of Policing
Carolyn Hodrien	Victim Support
Jane Keeper	Refuge
Claire Laxton	Women's Aid
Emily Murch	Home Office
Nikki Norman	Women's Aid
Mark Norris	Local Government Association
Christian Papaleontiou	Home Office
ACC Louisa Rolfe	Avon and Somerset Police and the national policing lead on Domestic Abuse
Jo Silver	Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse
Isobel Shirlaw	Refuge
Betsy Stanko	Formerly Metropolitan Police Service, now Mayor's Office for Police and Crime
Jo Todd	Respect

We held two stakeholder events, one in Birmingham on 12 February 2014 and one in London on 25 February 2014. We asked delegates in these events to focus on the issues of:

- Leadership
- Performance management
- Victim engagement
- Developing expertise and specialist support

Overall 86 delegates attended both events. We had attendance from:

- 37 out of 43 forces in England and Wales and the Police Service of Northern Ireland
- 12 out 43 OPCCs
- AAFDA, Broken Rainbow, Children's Commissioner, Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse, Lamplugh Trust, Lighthouse Women's Aid, National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Network for Surviving Stalking, Rights of Women, Southall Black Sisters, Stonewall, the Survivor Trust, Welsh Women's Aid,

A final stakeholder engagement event was held with representatives from other government departments and national bodies. These included: the Crown Prosecution Service, Department for Education, Ministry of Justice, National Offender Management Service, and Public Health England.

HMIC is extremely grateful for the time and expertise that all individuals and organisations gave to support the development of the inspection programme.

## Annex D

### About the data

The information presented in this report comes from a range of sources, including inspection fieldwork, data collection from all 43 geographic police forces in England and Wales, file reviews from 40 forces, surveys of the public and focus groups with victims of domestic abuse.

This annex explains the origins and background to each of the data sets that have been analysed by HMIC. These support the conclusions in the report, along with any caveats and limitations that should be noted.

Where HMIC has collected data directly from police forces, we have taken reasonable steps to agree the design of those collections of data with practitioners from forces, and to verify the data we have collected, mindful of the burden that responding to one-off data collections imposes on forces.

### Data on domestic abuse calls for assistance, crimes, arrests and outcomes

Data	Source	Timing
The number of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- calls for assistance;</li><li>- calls for assistance with a domestic abuse marker;</li><li>- calls from repeat domestic abuse victims;</li><li>- crimes with a domestic abuse marker (all crime, sexual offences, assault with intent to cause serious harm, assault with injury, assault without injury, harassment);</li><li>- arrests with a domestic abuse marker;</li></ul>	HMIC-designed data collection from forces	12 months to the end of August 2013

and - outcomes (charges, cautions and out of course disposals) with a domestic abuse marker.		
Recorded crimes (all crime, sexual offences, assault with intent to cause serious harm, assault with injury, assault without injury, harassment).	National crime statistics, ONS	12 months to the end of August 2013
Number of detections by type (cautions and charge summons) for victim-based crime, violence against the person and sexual offences. Note that this includes crime data for the same time periods for comparison.	Crimes detected, Home Office	12 months to end of March 2013

### **Data verification**

For data from HMIC's data collection:

- HMIC reviewed the data forces submitted and raised queries with forces where, for example, their figures were considerably different from others.
- In March 2014, all forces were asked to check the specific final data used to support the analysis, and correct any errors in their figures.

For external data sources, the providers carry out their own checks before publication.

### **Data completeness**

Number of calls for assistance from repeat victims – 13 forces were unable to provide this data: Cambridgeshire, Gwent, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Norfolk, South Yorkshire, Surrey, Sussex, Warwickshire, West Midlands and Wiltshire.

Number of arrests with a domestic abuse marker – six forces were unable to provide this data (including forces that provided the data too late for this publication):  
Cheshire, Derbyshire, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Greater Manchester and Durham.

### Note on the use of data

All data is based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

### Data on domestic abuse caseloads

Data	Source	Timing
<p>The number of active cases at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- high risk;</li> <li>- medium risk; and</li> <li>- standard risk .</li> </ul> <p>Proportion of forces where the command and control incident and/or crime system "automatically" flag potential repeat victims from the information entered.</p> <p>Details of risk assessment form/systems forces use (such as DASH).</p>	HMIC-designed data collection from forces	As of 31 August 2013
Percentage of call handlers trained in dealing with domestic abuse.	HMIC-designed data collection from forces	12 months to end of August 2013
The number of high risk cases referred to MARAC.	CAADA data	12 months to end of June 2013
Workforce full time equivalents (FTEs) in	CIPFA Police	2013/14

public protection. Total net revenue expenditure (NRE) and that in public protection.	Objective Analysis (POA)	estimates
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### **Data verification**

For data from HMIC's data collection:

- HMIC reviewed the data forces submitted and raised queries with forces where, for example, their figures were considerably different from others.
- In March 2014 all forces were asked to check the specific final data used to support the analysis, and correct any errors in their figures.

### **Data completeness**

Number of active cases – 13 forces were unable to provide this data:

Cheshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumbria, Durham, Gloucestershire, Greater Manchester, Gwent, Lincolnshire, Northumbria, North Wales, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands and Wiltshire.

Case files reviewed from 40 forces. Data from Sussex, Cleveland and City of London was not able to be used in this publication.

### **Note on the use of data**

All data is based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

### **Data on victims' experiences**

#### **Survey data**

In January 2014, BMG Research was commissioned to undertake the quantitative research which fed into the review. In order to qualify for the survey, respondents had to have been a victim of any form of domestic abuse in the last 12 months. The national definition of domestic abuse was included as part of the survey.

HMIC worked with the national Victim Support Service so domestic abuse volunteers and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers could contact individuals who were currently receiving support or who had received support within the last 12 months. In addition to this, HMIC worked with organisations providing support in this area to encourage those with experience of domestic abuse more broadly to participate in an open online survey.

Fieldwork was undertaken from mid to late January and, in total, a sample of 537 respondents was achieved.

The surveys were completed both on paper and online:

- Interviews were undertaken by Victim Support staff with their clients, writing the interview on paper and these were then input into the online survey by Victim Support staff; a total of 411 eligible respondents were interviewed via this method;
- Interviews were also undertaken online by visitors to relevant websites; a total of 126 eligible respondents completed the survey via this method.

An outline of the questionnaire was supplied with the project brief, and BMG worked with HMIC to develop this into a final questionnaire. The College of Policing were involved in this process. This questionnaire is available from HMIC on request.

Given the particularly sensitive nature of the topic and concerns over anonymity, respondents were not 'forced' to answer any questions. They were allowed to answer those questions they felt comfortable about and skip those which they preferred not to respond to. Forcing responses may have resulted in respondents dropping out of the survey, reducing the number, and hence the representation of the response. Within this survey, less than five percent of the sample skipped past any of the questions, giving us confidence in the representativeness of the results.

In addition allowing respondents to skip past questions, the online survey provided participants with advice as to how to 'cover their tracks'. Therefore, at the end of the

survey, respondents were provided with instructions on how to clear their browser history.

### **Focus group data**

HMIC conducted focus groups in nine regions. Eight of these focus groups were conducted with the support of Women's Aid and one with the support of Refuge. Women's Aid and Refuge were responsible for selecting the women who attended. In total 70 women attended these focus groups. HMIC notes that the selection may have included a higher number of high risk cases and victims who have had multiple contacts with the police.

All focus groups were facilitated by a member of Women's Aid or Refuge and followed a set script of questions (this is available from HMIC on request). HMIC were present at all focus groups and also took notes.

In order to get the views of victims from a range of backgrounds, HMIC also conducted:

- One male victim/survivor group plus some individual interviews with a total of five participants, facilitated by HMIC
- One group to get the views from the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender community with two victim participants, facilitated by HMIC and Broken Rainbow
- A series of interviews with victims from black and minority ethnic communities, facilitated by Imkaan.

This brought to total number of victims taking part in the HMIC research to 80, with a 24 percent black and ethnic minority representation.

HMIC also facilitated a discussion in a women's prison, organised by the Prison Reform Trust. This followed a similar script to the other focus groups and was attended by between ten and fifteen women at any one point.

### **Data on experiences of practitioners**

In January 2014, the Home Office Insight and Evaluation Executive acting on behalf of the HMIC, conducted an online survey of practitioners who work with domestic abuse victims. HMIC worked with a number of organisations that support victims of domestic abuse to promote the survey amongst their networks.

In total 197 respondents completed the survey with 120 respondents identifying themselves as an independent domestic violence adviser. Respondents were asked to consider areas for improvement for frontline officers and specialist officers and investigators based on their experience during the last 12 months.

### **Data on the quality of initial investigation**

HMIC reviewed files in all forces and 40 out of 43 were incorporated into our file review data. The file review methodology was based on the joint ACPO/CPS Evidence Checklist and was designed to consistent data about the evidence collected at the scene and the circumstances of the case.

Forces were asked to select 15 files in total. The criteria prescribed were:

- All files to be reviewed will be for crimes committed in June 2013.
- All crimes will be recorded as section 47 Offences Against the Person Act 1861, i.e. assault occasioning actual bodily harm (ABH). They may have been disposed as another offence such as battery.
- Each file should be from a different geographical area.

Of the 15 files provided, they needed to break down into the following criteria.

- 4 police no further action (pre charge)
- 3 CPS no further action (pre charge)
- 3 CPS discontinuances (post charge)
- 5 detected (any disposal, in or out of court)

Based on a sample, the proportion of files where:	600 Police force case files on the crime of actual	June 2013
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the victim did not support police action;</li> <li>- a counter-allegation was made by the suspect;</li> <li>- house-to-house enquiries were carried out;</li> <li>- evidential photographs of injuries were taken at the time of the incident;</li> <li>- a body worn camera was used to capture evidence from the victim and the scene;</li> <li>- safety measures for the victim were considered;</li> <li>- the 999 call recording was listened to and exhibited as evidence;</li> <li>- a victim statement was taken at the time of the initial police attendance; and</li> <li>- the police statement provided details of the scene and injuries.</li> </ul>	<p>bodily harm which were identified as relating to domestic abuse</p>	
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**Note on the use of research evidence**

This report draws on existing academic literature and data sources. These were: identified by members of the reference group or the organisations they represent (set out in Annex C); suggested to HMIC in meetings; and taken from existing guidance and research such as the National Institute for Clinical Excellence’s guidance on domestic abuse (<http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=14384>). However, a full or systematic literature review was not carried out.