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Leicestershire Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This report details what HMIC found in Leicestershire Police and at the end of the report we set out some recommendations. These recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for all forces made in the national report.⁶

A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

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

Domestic abuse in Leicestershire⁷

Calls for assistance



In Leicestershire, domestic abuse accounts for 6% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 10% were from repeat victims.

Crime

9%

Domestic abuse accounts for 9% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

16%

Leicestershire recorded 125 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 20 were domestic abuse related. This is 16% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Assault with injury

37%

The force also recorded 4,482 assaults with injury, of these 1,643 were domestic abuse related. This is 37% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

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

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

Harassment

41%

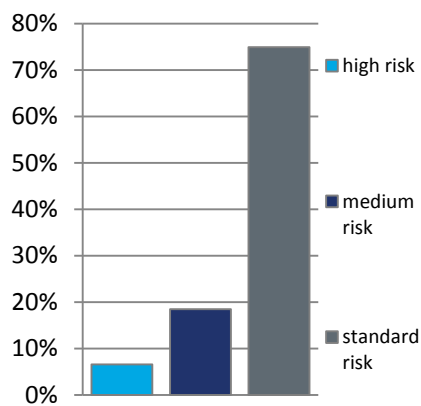
The force recorded 867 harassment offences, of these 352 were domestic abuse related. This is 41% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

16%

The force also recorded 1,048 sexual offences, of these 165 were domestic abuse related. This is 16% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



On, 31 August 2013 Leicestershire had 942 active domestic abuse cases; 7% were high risk, 18% were medium risk, and 75% were standard risk.

Arrests



For every 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker, there were 54 arrests in Leicestershire for the 12 months to 31 August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

Outcomes



Leicestershire recorded 5,429 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 27% resulted in a charge, 13% resulted in a caution and, 3% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the force. Staff throughout the organisation understand the importance of their role in supporting victims and keeping them safe.

There is a good standard of service for victims assessed as high risk (of serious harm or murder), but for victims assessed as medium and standard risk the service is less consistent. In particular, service is less well developed for repeat victims of domestic abuse who report a number of incidents which are assessed as standard risk. Leicestershire Police recognise this and is working to secure improvements.

There is effective partnership working in the county with good, timely information sharing. The multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) are working well.

The force is one of the few nationally that is asking victims of domestic abuse for feedback to understand how it can improve the service it provides. This additional insight is intended to help the force to enhance the service that it currently delivers.

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

Identifying victims

Leicestershire Police has good systems in place to identify victims of domestic abuse when calls are received by the force control room. Control room staff are effectively trained and to gain as full a picture as possible to help assess the risk to victims, and ensure the appropriate response from the police. The force intelligence systems allow them to readily gather available information about a caller, perpetrator, family or address. They are also alerted to any previous history of domestic abuse and relay this information to the officer attending the incident. This helps officers attending to build a picture of the threat of harm to a victim and their children.

Responsibility for carrying out more detailed background checks is less clear. The force has recently started to provide information on repeat victims to local commanders, and now needs to ensure that this information is used effectively to reduce the risk to victims. There is room for improvement in the supervision of call taking, to ensure appropriate oversight of the initial response to domestic abuse.

Keeping victims safe

Domestic abuse is a priority for Leicestershire Police. The PCC has set a strategic priority within his police and crime plan, to increase reporting of domestic abuse, and ensure a positive outcome for victims and witnesses of domestic abuse. For a number of years, the force has provided training for staff in identifying and protecting vulnerable people. This has given staff a good awareness of these issues. However, specific training on domestic abuse has been limited, and non-specialist staff have variable levels of understanding of the risk assessment tool used by the force. There are weaknesses in the supervision of the risk assessment process, which means that the force cannot be confident that accurate assessments are made of all victims.

Staff attending reports of domestic abuse have a good appreciation of the actions they need to take to help protect the victim. Investigations are generally well managed. However, as cases are passed between teams and departments, responsibility for contacting victims is not always clear, which is a concern.

Management of risk

All cases assessed as high risk as well as those medium risk cases where serious crimes are involved, are reviewed and investigated by specialist officers in the domestic abuse investigation unit (DAIU). However, some staff are concerned that the downgrading of some initial risk assessments by the DAIU may be influenced by their capacity.

Specialists in the DAIU are either accredited detectives, or are working towards this, and in addition to their investigative training, they have received an enhanced level of training in the domestic abuse, stalking, and harassment risk assessment (DASH).

There are good examples of the police working effectively with partners, although the shortage of dedicated domestic abuse support services in some parts of the force area presents a challenge in sharing information and responding to the needs of victims. Multi-agency risk assessment conference arrangements are said to be effective.

The force is in the process of establishing a new specialist team which will review repeat domestic abuse cases and act as a link into a range of other agencies. However, the threshold for consideration by this team has been set high, at seven incidents of domestic abuse in a 12 month period. This is too high. It excludes victims who are still being subjected to frequent and escalating abuse.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

There is a good level of understanding about domestic abuse across the force, and there are appropriate systems in place to review risk and safeguard victims, although there is room for improvement. The force does not currently have a structured process to identify and manage serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.

There is a good process in place to review any learning from domestic homicide reviews, and the force is considering how these issues could be better communicated across the force as a whole.

The performance framework in relation to domestic abuse is based on a combination of encouraging more reporting, improving the outcome rate and increasing victim satisfaction. It is supported by a comprehensive performance report which the force is hoping to develop further, for example, by including partner data. Leicestershire is one of very few forces who specifically survey victims of domestic abuse to provide an insight into the victim's perspective of services, and to identify areas for further improvement, which is good practice.

Findings

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

Leicestershire Police has good systems in place to identify victims of domestic abuse when calls are received by the force control room. Control room staff are effectively trained and to gain as full a picture as possible to help assess the risk to victims, and ensure the appropriate response from the police. The force intelligence systems allow them to readily gather available information about a caller, perpetrator, family or address. They are also alerted to any previous history of domestic abuse and relay this information to the officer attending the incident. This helps officers attending to build a picture of the threat of harm to a victim and their children.

Responsibility for carrying out more detailed background checks is less clear. The force has recently started to provide information on repeat victims to local commanders, and now needs to ensure that this information is used effectively to reduce the risk to victims. There is room for improvement in the supervision of call taking, to ensure appropriate oversight of the initial response to domestic abuse.

Most incidents of domestic abuse are notified to the force via its control room. Staff working in the force control room have a good understanding of what constitutes domestic abuse. The approach taken by the force does not rely on call takers using a series of prompts or drop-down menus of questions to ask callers about why they have called. Instead, staff are trained to use the national decision model⁸ as a framework for asking open questions of the caller, to assess the level of risk present and determine the appropriate police response. Generally this works well, although it does rely entirely on the skills, expertise and training of the call taker. Some less experienced call takers feel that they would benefit from having more specific guidance in relation to domestic abuse incidents available to them. HMIC reviewed a number of calls relating to domestic abuse made to the force control room. Call takers are skilled in asking appropriate questions to establish if the caller or any other person, such as a child, was at immediate risk. Callers are kept on the line where risk was

⁸ The national decision model is the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) decision making tool, which has been adopted nationally for use by police forces. It provides a framework of steps to assist an officer in assessing a situation and deciding on appropriate action (including gathering information, assessing risk, and identifying options).

identified, and given appropriate advice to reduce this risk. This enables the force to identify and manage risk at the first point of contact.

When a call is received in the force control room relating to a domestic abuse incident, the call taker carries out initial checks on the force's command and control computer system to establish if there have been any similar incidents at the same location, or reported from the same telephone number. They are also automatically alerted to any specific information on the system linked to the address in question. This could include, for example, information relating to a victim previously identified as being vulnerable. In the calls we reviewed, these checks were always carried out, and relevant information about previous incidents or the vulnerability of the caller was consistently recorded in the incident log. Attending officers are nearly always passed this information when being sent to attend a domestic abuse incident.

Additional checks can also be carried out on a number of different force computer systems. A search tool, called Genie 2, is used to highlight where such information exists. Responsibility for carrying out these more extensive background checks is not clear. Sometimes they are undertaken by dispatchers within the force control room, and on other occasions by staff from the intelligence research centre (IRC), a team of intelligence staff based in the force control room. Where this does not happen, officers can carry out the checks themselves using mobile data terminals, but not all officers have access to this technology. The force's policy document for dealing with domestic abuse states that "*background intelligence checks should be carried out by call-takers, dispatchers, intelligence research centre or attending officer depending on dynamics or nature of incident*".⁹ This could lead to some confusion as to who is actually responsible for carrying out which checks, in what circumstances.

Control room staff undertake a programme of initial training when they are first appointed and domestic abuse is covered. There is, however, no regular training provision within the shift pattern worked by control room staff. Refresher training on domestic abuse has therefore been limited, although all control room staff are expected to have undertaken a computer-based training package on the domestic abuse, stalking, harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool, which includes so-called honour-based violence, and used by the force in assessing risk to domestic abuse victims. Some call takers have also received training involving role play and actors enacting scenes that were designed to illustrate some of the less obvious forms of domestic abuse, such as coercive controlling behaviour.

⁹ Leicestershire Police document 'Domestic Abuse Procedure' – September 2013.

The force defines a repeat victim as someone suffering more than one incident reported in a 12 month period. Staff are not always familiar with this definition, but they have a clear understanding that where a victim discloses that they have been abused previously (whether or not this was reported to the police), this will influence any risk assessment that is made. The force has recently introduced a process to highlight victims of domestic abuse who have contacted the force three times over the past year. This information is then passed to local policing commanders. At this local policing unit (LPU) level, processes were in place in some LPUs to scrutinise these cases, assess whether any escalation in threat is evident and consider what problem-solving interventions might be appropriate. However, this process is not yet fully embedded across the whole force.

Supervision of domestic abuse incidents within the force control room is patchy. It is reliant on the inspector or team leader scanning the incident list and identifying potentially high risk cases. At busy times it is possible that some high risk cases could get missed. Supervisors listen to calls taken by their team and formally review at least two calls per team member each month. Although not specifically focused on domestic abuse, this does allow the team leader to assess if the right questions are being asked to make an accurate initial assessment of risk, and identify any training needs within the team. Staff in the force control room inform operational supervisors about domestic abuse incidents that may need additional oversight based on individual judgement rather than on any specified criteria.

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

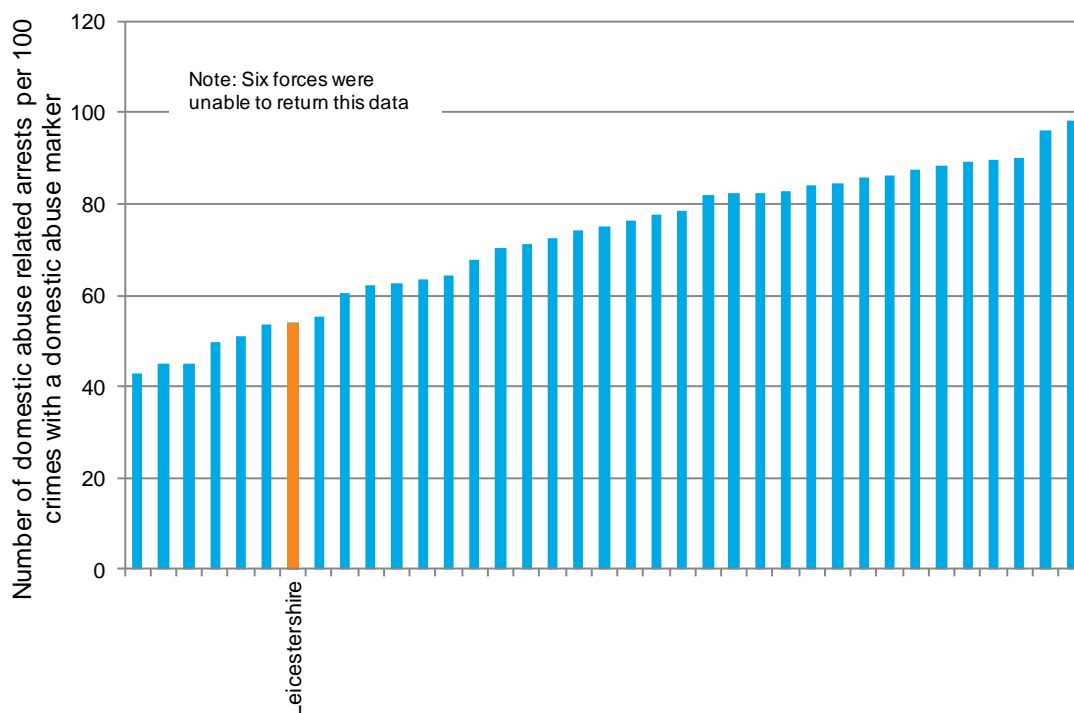
Domestic abuse is a priority for Leicestershire Police. The PCC has set a strategic priority within his police and crime plan, to increase reporting of domestic abuse, and ensure a positive outcome for victims and witnesses of domestic abuse. For a number of years, the force has provided training for staff in identifying and protecting vulnerable people. This has given staff a good awareness of these issues. However, specific training on domestic abuse has been limited, and non-specialist staff have variable levels of understanding of the risk assessment tool used by the force. There are weaknesses in the supervision of the risk assessment process, which means that the force cannot be confident that accurate assessments are made of all victims.

Staff attending reports of domestic abuse have a good appreciation of the actions they need to take to help protect the victim. Investigations are generally well managed. However, as cases are passed between teams and

departments, responsibility for contacting victims is not always clear, which is a concern.

For every 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker recorded, there were 54¹⁰ arrests in Leicestershire for the 12 months to 31 August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90. This low arrest rate, compared to other forces, indicates that this is an issue the force may want to review.

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



Source: HMIC data collection

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the force. It is one of the strategic priorities within the PCC's police and crime plan, with a focus on increasing the reporting of domestic abuse and improving outcomes for victims. Despite the current climate of austerity, additional resources have been identified to improve the force's problem-solving capacity in relation to repeat medium and standard risk domestic abuse cases. This is good practice.

The force has also produced a range of communications material, such as posters and leaflets, to raise awareness, both within the police force and the

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

public, to encourage victims to come forward and report abuse. Specific campaigns have been aimed at groups who have traditionally been less confident in reporting domestic abuse to the police, such as male victims and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. Material has also been produced in a range of languages, reflecting the diverse nature of communities, especially in Leicester. Staff across the force have a clear and consistent understanding of the importance of dealing effectively with domestic abuse.

For a number of years, Leicestershire Police has delivered a regular and effective programme of training for staff, in relation to identifying where victims may be particularly vulnerable, and in understanding their responsibilities to protect vulnerable people. This has given staff a good understanding of these issues. However, there has been little specific training on domestic abuse other than a programme of computer-based self-learning, which most staff we spoke to did not feel was effective. HMIC is recommending that in the future, domestic abuse training should be face-to-face, rather than online. Despite this, staff are generally able to demonstrate a good awareness of what constituted domestic abuse, including issues such as coercive control and so-called honour-based violence.

Apart from specialist domestic abuse officers, understanding of the DASH risk assessment tool is variable among staff. There is some lack of clarity as to why each of the questions in the assessment are important, and how the tool should be used alongside professional judgement, to identify and then manage risk. Examples were provided of a number of cases where officers did not ask the victim all of the DASH questions at the time, but sought to answer the questions as best they could when back at the police station, based on their own evaluation and perception. The initial risk assessment by the officer is important to ensure that there is a full understanding of the risk posed to the victim, so that appropriate immediate safeguarding and follow-up measures can be taken. There is a risk that some officers may not be making an accurate assessment if they do not complete the DASH tool in full, and use appropriate professional judgement for each victim.

The strong focus placed by the force on identifying and protecting vulnerable people means that officers and staff are very aware of their responsibilities in relation to children who may be present at incidents of domestic abuse. Referrals to children's services are made in such cases. The force is also involved in a pilot initiative with a number of schools in Leicester, whereby the force notifies the school if there has been a domestic abuse incident, which the child has witnessed. This, in turn, helps the school to respond appropriately to any changes in the behaviour of the pupil in question.

The force has a policy of taking positive action to protect domestic abuse victims when they attend an incident. Where a power of arrest exists, this positive action will normally involve arresting the suspect. Officers responding to incidents of domestic abuse are aware of this policy and, in addition to making an arrest, they have a good understanding of the immediate safeguarding action that they should be taking in order to protect victims. This could involve, for example, arranging for a friend to stay with the victim, ensuring she or he had access to a mobile phone, and that doors are kept locked. It could also involve providing advice on other organisations that might be able to provide help in areas, such as finance or housing.

There are weaknesses in the supervision of this initial risk assessment. The force's policy requires that supervisors should review and agree every DASH risk assessment. In practice this is at best a 'tick-box' exercise. If a supervisor disagrees with the risk assessment, they are not able to amend the grading on the DASH form.

Some staff who respond to reports of domestic abuse have access to body-worn video cameras in order to capture evidence of, for example, the scene and the victim's demeanour. In some cases, staff also have access to digital cameras so that they can take photographs of injuries or of the scene. However, the availability of digital cameras is patchy and a number of staff resort to using their personal mobile phones.

Sergeants check the progress of investigations at regular intervals to ensure that appropriate lines of enquiry have been identified and are being progressed in a timely fashion. Staff are aware of the victims' charter and victims are generally kept up to date with the progress of the investigation. However, in those cases where a suspect is not quickly located, and the case handed over from the attending officer to a colleague, responsibility for updating the victim is not always clear. In some cases, after a suspect is charged, they are kept in custody and an application made to the court to have them remanded in custody. When this happens, staff are not clear how the outcome of the court appearance is monitored, and the victim notified should the suspect be released on bail by the court. This poses a risk to the victim's safety.

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

All cases assessed as high risk as well as those medium risk cases where serious crimes are involved, are reviewed and investigated by specialist officers in the domestic abuse investigation unit (DAIU). However, some staff are concerned that the downgrading of some initial risk assessments by the DAIU may be influenced by their capacity.

Specialists in the DAIU are either accredited detectives, or are working towards this, and in addition to their investigative training, they have received an enhanced level of training in the domestic abuse, stalking, and harassment risk assessment (DASH).

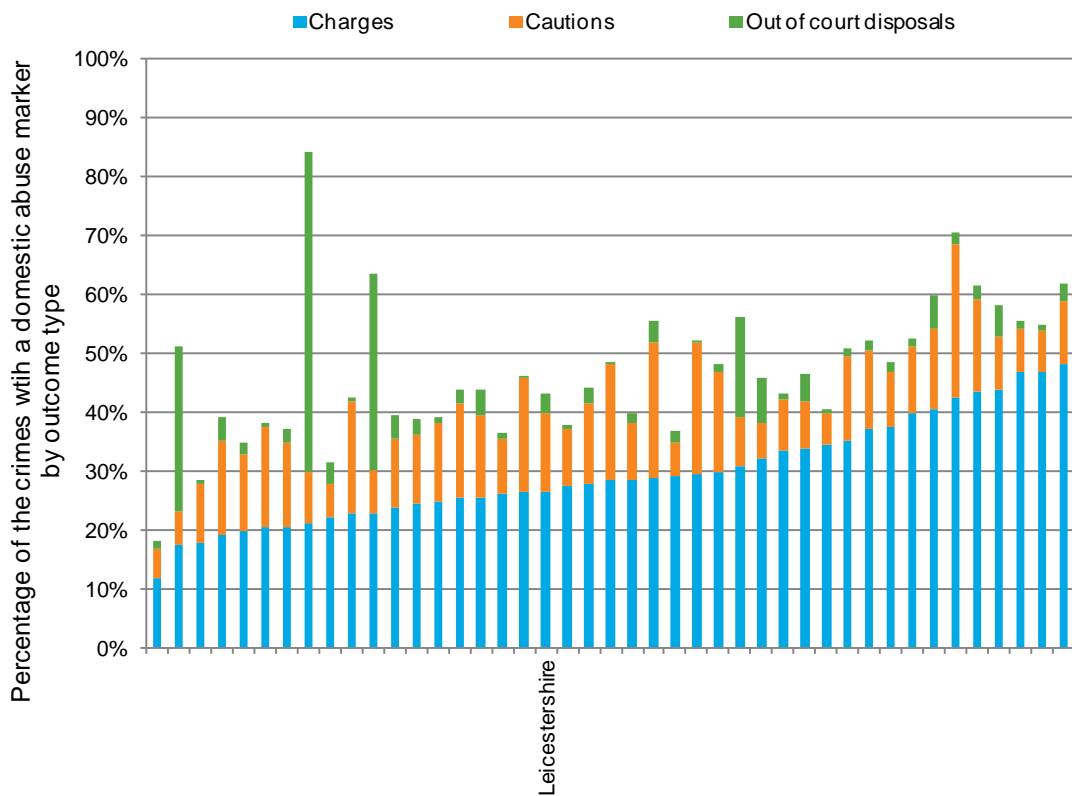
There are good examples of the police working effectively with partners, although the shortage of dedicated domestic abuse support services in some parts of the force area presents a challenge in sharing information and responding to the needs of victims. Multi-agency risk assessment conference arrangements are said to be effective.

The force is in the process of establishing a new specialist team which will review repeat domestic abuse cases and act as a link into a range of other agencies. However, the threshold for consideration by this team has been set high, at seven incidents of domestic abuse in a 12 month period. This is too high. It excludes victims who are still being subjected to frequent and escalating abuse.

Leicestershire recorded 5,429 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013.¹¹ Of these crimes, 27 percent resulted in a charge, 13 percent a caution and 3 percent had an out-of-court disposal.

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

Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013¹²

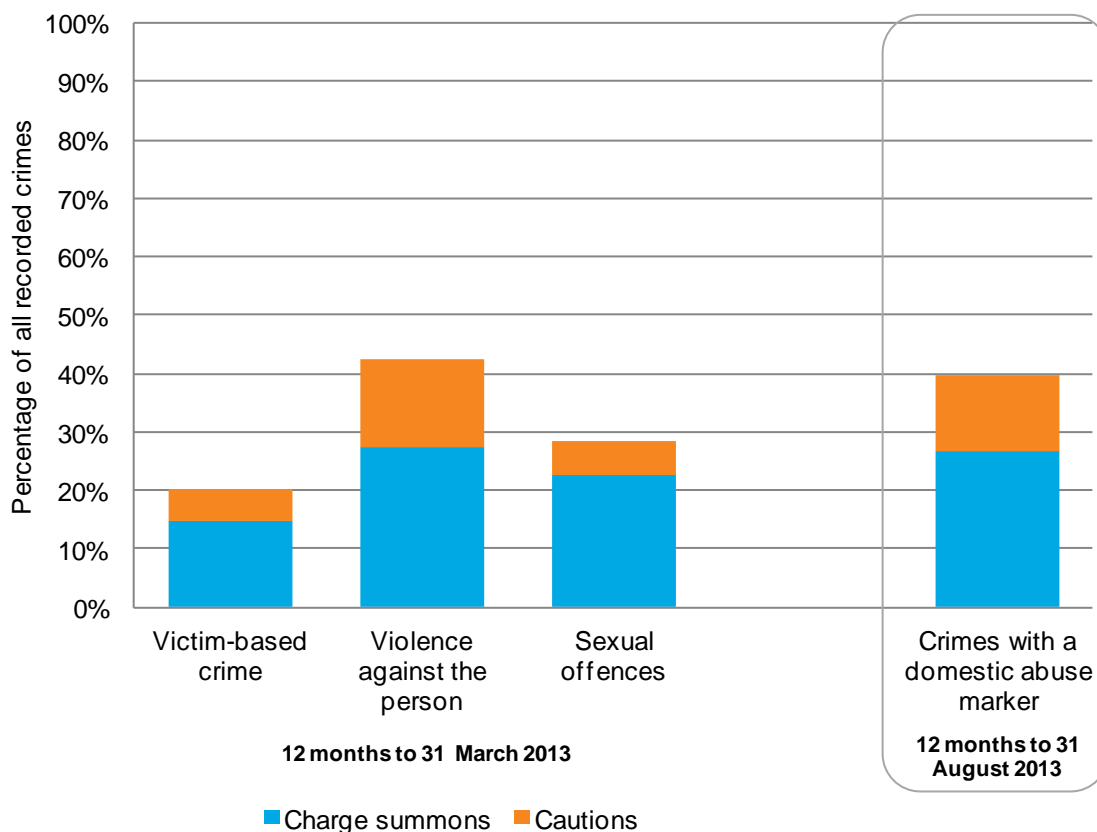


Source: HMIC data collection

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

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

Figure 3: Percentage of charge summons and cautions used for victim-based crime, violence against the person, sexual offences and all crimes with a domestic abuse marker¹³



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

The domestic abuse investigation unit (DAIU) investigates all high-risk cases of domestic abuse. It also deals with medium risk cases where a serious offence is involved, as well as any case involving so-called honour-based violence or forced marriage. In addition to investigating the offences, they are also responsible for safeguarding the victims. Before assuming responsibility for the investigation, the DAIU review the risk assessment in these cases. Operational staff are sceptical about the impact of applying professional judgement to the risk assessment process. Staff across the force quoted examples of cases where they had applied professional judgement in assessing the risk as high, only to have the case downgraded to medium risk by the DAIU. Several officers had challenged the DAIU on this point, but none had done so successfully.

¹³ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

They were particularly concerned in cases where this downgrading of risk had been carried out in the absence of any further direct contact with the victim (that is, it had been solely based on the information on the DASH form). There is a widely held perception that an element of the reassessment of risk by the DAIU is driven by their capacity to take on extra cases. Partners have also identified this as an issue, and expressed the view that the capacity of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) is a factor in determining the number of cases assessed as high risk. The force should review this as a matter of urgency.

The force has developed a professional approach to dealing with domestic abuse cases, with officers on the DAIU all being either accredited detectives or working towards this. The role is a sought-after one, and is linked into the force's detective career pathways, which is good practice. DAIU staff are enthusiastic and well-motivated. The unit provides an effective service to high risk domestic abuse victims and has strong links to relevant partners. In addition to their investigative training, DAIU staff have received specific training in domestic abuse, including enhanced training on the DASH risk assessment model.

There are some good examples of the police working effectively with partners, such as the probation service, housing providers and voluntary and community organisations. This is the case both at a strategic level (through joint strategic boards to oversee the response to domestic abuse) and at a neighbourhood level. The domestic violence support service, SAFE, provides the independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) service in Leicester, and an IDVA spends one day each week working from the police station in Spinney Hill. This has helped the safer neighbourhood team (SNT) at Spinney Hill to develop effective links with SAFE. The force was involved in a scheme to promote the SAFE helpline across Leicester. This has led to a significant increase in the number of calls made to the helpline, with a corresponding reduction in the number of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police over the same period. However, the force has not yet carried out any work to assess the implications of this reduction in reported incidents in relation to lost intelligence and opportunities to protect victims. Elsewhere in the force area, joint action groups are typically in place and provide an effective way for the police and local partners to work together to help tackle domestic abuse. However, throughout the rest of the force area, outside Leicester City, the provision of dedicated domestic abuse support services is patchier, which creates a challenge for the force.

In a number of other police forces, a multi-agency support hub (MASH) has been established, where police and a range of partner agencies work from the same location. The agencies share information about children at risk and vulnerable adults, including domestic abuse victims and develop plans to

prevent further harm. To date, a MASH has not been established within Leicestershire and staff we spoke with had a range of views as to the relative merits or otherwise of this approach. The arrangements currently in place for information sharing and joint problem solving with partners do not provide as good a response as could be achieved through an effective MASH. However, the force is in the process of establishing a domestic abuse support unit (DASU) comprising a detective sergeant, four detective constables and the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) co-ordinators. The concept behind this arrangement is for the team to act as a central hub to link with partners, share relevant information and develop a problem-solving approach to repeat domestic abuse cases. This as a positive step, although the force is proposing a very high threshold for repeat domestic abuse cases, of seven incidents in twelve months, that will have taken place before the DASU takes on responsibility for the case. There is no plan for dealing with cases that fall below this threshold.

Staff across the force are generally clear about their responsibilities for safeguarding in domestic abuse cases. The DAIU has safeguarding responsibility for high risk cases and safer neighbourhood team (SNT) staff are responsible where the risk is assessed as standard or medium. We found some instances where there is a lack of clarity between response officers (who typically attend domestic abuse incidents in the first instance) and SNT officers (who typically investigate standard and medium risk cases) over safeguarding responsibilities. This tends to happen where there is a delay between the initial attendance and the case being handed over to the SNT. Both within the DAIU and the SNTs, supervisors regularly review safety plans alongside their supervision of the investigation.

MARAC meetings are held every two weeks. At these meetings, high risk domestic abuse cases are reviewed, information shared and actions identified to reduce and manage the risk. MARACs are generally well attended by partners, there is good sharing of information, and actions are followed up at subsequent meetings. Approximately half of the referrals to MARAC come from organisations other than the police, which indicates that partners are well engaged in the process.

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

There is a good level of understanding about domestic abuse across the force, and there are appropriate systems in place to review risk and safeguard victims, although there is room for improvement. The force does not currently have a structured process to identify and manage serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.

There is a good process in place to review any learning from domestic homicide reviews, and the force is considering how these issues could be better communicated across the force as a whole.

The performance framework in relation to domestic abuse is based on a combination of encouraging more reporting, improving the outcome rate and increasing victim satisfaction. It is supported by a comprehensive performance report which the force is hoping to develop further, for example, by including partner data. Leicestershire is one of very few forces who specifically survey victims of domestic abuse to provide an insight into the victim's perspective of services, and to identify areas for further improvement, which is good practice.

Where domestic abuse perpetrators have been imprisoned, contact takes place between the force, the prison service and probation to ensure that the risk assessment is reviewed ahead of the perpetrator's release; the victim is notified; and appropriate safety plans are put into place.

The force does not currently have a structured process to identify and manage serial perpetrators. While there are established arrangements to deal with the most dangerous offenders, neighbourhood officers are not routinely made aware of the repeat perpetrators in their area, and there are no structured arrangements for dealing with these individuals.

The force's performance framework in relation to domestic abuse is based on a combination of encouraging more reporting by victims, improving the proportion of successful prosecutions for domestic assaults involving injury, and improving victim satisfaction. This reflects a balanced approach to managing domestic abuse, which features regularly within the performance management arrangements across the force.

There are good examples of the force engaging with emerging communities to encourage greater reporting of domestic abuse. The force has developed a detailed performance report in relation to domestic abuse, which is discussed in a number of strategic forums and which helps to identify and drive improvement activity. The force recognises that it can build further on this already

comprehensive product, for example, by incorporating partner data, and develop a more detailed understanding of what the information contained in the report means and how it can be used to further improve the service.

The force undertakes dedicated surveys of domestic abuse victims to help establish levels of satisfaction and identify how the service to domestic abuse victims could be improved. It is one of 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. The force could make better use of the wealth of data obtained through this work in order to further improve the service it provides. There is only brief coverage, and no analysis, of the survey findings within the domestic abuse performance pack. Although improvements could be made, the force's approach to seeking the views of victims is commended.

The force has developed a good process to identify, co-ordinate and address issues identified through domestic homicide reviews and other serious case reviews. These are managed through a dedicated bi-monthly meeting chaired by the head of delivering justice and overseen at a strategic level by a group chaired by the deputy chief constable. The force is currently considering how these lessons can be better communicated across the organisation.

Recommendations

As a result of this inspection, HMIC has developed recommendations which are designed to tackle any risks identified in the service to victims of domestic abuse. These force-specific recommendations should be considered in conjunction with recommendations to all forces set out in HMIC's national report on domestic violence.

1. The force should consider providing specific guidance on domestic abuse which should be readily available to call takers.
2. The force should consider reviewing its policy for undertaking background intelligence checks to make clear who has responsibility for this.
3. The force should review how information about repeat victims is being managed locally, to ensure a consistent approach across the force.
4. The force should review the training currently provided to non-specialist staff, to ensure they understand the DASH risk assessment tool.
5. The force should review the process for supervision of DASH risk assessments, and either ensure that any supervision is meaningful, or remove the requirement for a supervisor to sign off the form.
6. The force should review the availability of digital cameras to allow officers attending reports of domestic abuse to capture evidence.
7. The force should take steps to ensure that staff are clear on their responsibilities when cases are handed over, or where suspect is kept in custody for a remand application.
8. The force should review whether it is the case that the reassessment of risk is influenced by the capacity of the DAU and, if so, take steps to address this.
9. The force should review the approach to those cases falling below the threshold for the new DASU to ensure that there is clarity about how risk in such cases will be managed. This should include the threshold for the referral of repeat incidents.
10. The force should seek to establish arrangements for the identification and management of serial domestic abuse perpetrators.
11. The force should review how the information obtained from the survey of domestic abuse victims is used to improve the service provided by the force.

12. The force should seek to establish a more effective way for lessons learnt from domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews to be communicated across the force.

Glossary

Bail conditions

A court can remand a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached. Before the first court hearing, the police can also retain a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached, but their powers to do so are more limited than the court's. Conditions can only be imposed to ensure that the defendant attends the next court hearing, commits no new offences in the meantime, and does not interfere with any witnesses or obstruct the course of justice.

Body worn camera

A video camera, worn on the helmet or upper body of an officer, which records visual and audio footage of an incident.

CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse)

CAADA is a national charity supporting a strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse. Its work focuses on saving lives and public money.

CAADA provides practical help to support professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims. The aim is to protect the highest risk victims and their children – those at risk of murder or serious harm.

CCTV

Evidence from Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) can be used to support police investigations. It is primarily used for corroborating what is already known in investigating incidents and to trigger further opportunities to carry out investigation, such as the identification of witnesses and suspects.

Clare's Law

Clare's Law – the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – is designed to provide victims with information that may protect them from an abusive situation before it ends in tragedy. The scheme allows the police to disclose information about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts. The

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is named after Clare Wood who was brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (the Victims' Code) places a statutory obligation on criminal justice agencies to provide a standard of service to victims of crime or, where the victim died as a result of the criminal conduct, their relatives. The obligations the Victims' Code places on the agencies concerned include that:

- They provide victims, or their relatives, with information about the crime, including about arrests, prosecutions and court decisions;
- They provide information about eligibility for compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme;
- Victims be told about Victim Support and either be referred on to them or offered their service;
- Bereaved relatives be assigned a family liaison police officer; and
- Victims of an offender who receives a sentence of 12 months or more after being convicted of a sexual or violent offence have the opportunity to make representations about what licence conditions or supervision requirements the offender should be subject to on release from prison.

There are enhanced entitlements for victims of the most serious crime which includes domestic violence.

Coercive control

This is term and concept developed by Evan Stark which seeks to explain the range of tactics used by perpetrators and the impact of those on victims. It highlights the on-going nature of the behaviour and the extent to which the actions of the perpetrator control the victim through isolation, intimidation, degradation and micro-regulation of everyday life. Crucially it sets out such abuse can be psychological as well as physical. Coercive control is explicitly covered by the definition of domestic abuse.

Control room

A police control or communications room manages emergency (999) and non-emergency (101) calls, and sending police officers to these calls.

Counter-allegation

Where someone initially identified as the perpetrator makes an allegation against the victim. If counter-allegations are not identified and resolved agencies may be providing services to the perpetrator and inadvertently helping them isolate and control the victim. The victim may not get access to the services they need because they are labelled 'the perpetrator'.

Crime Scene Investigator

Police staff who work alongside uniformed and plain clothed police officers during the investigation of a crime to locate, record and recover evidence from crime scenes.

DASH – domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH 2009)

DASH is a risk identification, assessment and management model adopted by UK police forces and partner agencies in 2009. The aim of the DASH assessment is to help front-line practitioners identify high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and so-called honour-based violence.

Domestic Homicide Review

Local areas are expected to undertake a multi-agency review following a domestic homicide. The process aims to assist all those involved, to identify the lessons that can be learned from homicides where a person is killed as a result of domestic violence, with a view to preventing future homicides and violence.

Domestic Violence Prevention Notices (DVPN)

A DVPN is the initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence.

This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively bar the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim.

A DVPN may be issued to a person aged 18 years and over if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that:

- the individual has been violent towards, or
- has threatened violence towards an associated person, and
- the DVPN is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the intended recipient of the DVPN

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (sometimes referred to as female circumcision) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is illegal in the UK.

Frontline

These are police officers or police staff who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law. The HMIC publication, *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge* (2013) sets this out in more detail.

Golden hour

Commonly used to refer to the time after a crime has been committed during which there is maximum potential for recovery of forensic evidence

Harassment

The term harassment is used to cover the 'causing alarm or distress' offences under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 as amended (PHA), and 'putting people in fear of violence' offences under section 4 of the PHA.

House-to- house

House-to-house enquiries are likely to feature in many investigations to: identify suspects and canvas for witnesses in areas connected to an incident, establish who lives or works in a particular location, and obtain an account of their movements during relevant times.

High risk

Term used when, following a DASH risk assessment, there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious. Risk of serious harm (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006): 'A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible'.

IDVA – independent domestic violence adviser

Independent domestic violence advisers or advocates (IDVAs) are trained specialists who provide a service to victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, with the aim of securing their safety and the safety of their children. Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, IDVAs normally work with their clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans.

Incident

When a member of the public calls for police assistance, or a police officer observes or discovers a crime the police usually create an incident record. This is the first step, the police will then decide whether a crime has been committed and, if it is appropriate, create a crime record.

Intimate Partner Violence

This describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy.

MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

MARACs are regular local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies. By bringing all agencies together at a MARAC, and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the victim is represented by the IDVA, a risk focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the victim. There are currently over 270 MARACs operating across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland managing more than 64,000 cases a year.

MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

A Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) brings together staff from police and partner agencies who work from the same location, sharing information and ensuring a timely and joined-up response to protect children and vulnerable adults.

Medium risk

Term used when following a DASH risk assessment there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender has the potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances, for example, failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse.

National Domestic Abuse helpline

A Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge, is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

The Helpline can give support, help and information over the telephone, wherever the caller might be in the country. The Helpline is staffed 24 hours a day by fully trained female helpline support workers and volunteers. All calls are completely confidential. Translation facilities for callers whose first language is not English, and a service for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing are available.

Partnership

A term used where collaborative working is established between the police and other public, private or voluntary organisations.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the PACE codes of practice provide the core framework of police powers and safeguards around stop and search, arrest, detention, investigation, identification and interviewing detainees.

www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions

Positive action

The term refers to the steps and action taken at all stages of the police response to ensure effective protection of victims and children, while allowing the criminal justice system to hold the offender to account. It is often used in the context of arrest policy, police guidance states that “arrest will normally be ‘necessary’ under the terms of PACE to protect a child or vulnerable person, prevent the suspect causing injury and/or to allow for the prompt and effective investigation of the offence”.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving is a term used in policing where forces systematically identify and analyse crime and disorder problems, develop specific responses to individual problems and subsequently assess whether the response has been successful.

Refuge

A refuge is a safe house where women and children who are experiencing domestic violence can stay free from abuse. Refuge addresses (and sometimes telephone numbers) are confidential. According to Women’s Aid on a typical day, **over 7000 women and children** are resident in refuge accommodation in England

Risk assessment

A risk assessment is based on structured professional judgment. It provides structure and informs decisions that are already being made. It is only a guide/checklist and should not be seen as a scientific predictive solution. Its completion is intended to assist officers in the decision-making process on appropriate levels of intervention for victims of domestic violence.

Safeguarding

The term safeguarding is applied when protecting children and other vulnerable people. The UK Government has defined the term 'safeguarding children' as: *"The process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care that enables children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully."*

Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)

SARCs are specialist medical and forensic services for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted.

They aim to be a one-stop service, providing the following under one roof: medical care and forensic examination following assault/rape and, in some locations, sexual health services.

Standard Risk

Term used following a DASH risk assessment where current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.

Victim Personal Statement

The Victim Personal Statement (VPS) gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support.

Provisions relating to the making of a VPS and its use in criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), which was published on 29 October 2013 and came into force on 10 December 2013.

Vulnerable

A term used to describe a person who is in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.

What Works Centre for Crime Reduction

The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction is hosted by the College of Policing. The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction will: review research on practices and interventions to reduce crime, label the evidence base in terms of quality, cost and impact, and provide police and crime commissioners and other crime reduction partners with the knowledge, tools and guidance to help them target their resources more effectively.

It will be led by a core team from the College of Policing, and supported by a "commissioned partnership programme" which has been jointly funded by the College and the Economic and Social Research Council.