

N8 Policing Research Partnership

Domestic Violence: Evidence Review

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Background

While domestic violence is high on the public policy agenda in the UK, successive reviews have highlighted policing problems. A recent HMIC report found domestic violence is not policed at the same level as other offences and identified a catalogue of policing failures that have a long history of recurrence. With domestic violence accounting for around a large proportion of violent crime incidents reported to the police, and the majority of all female homicides (Office for National Statistics, 2013), it is essential that what works in addressing perpetrators is fully reviewed. This review provides a rapid assessment of the current state of evidence on policing interventions with perpetrators of intimate partner domestic violence. Policing interventions such as risk assessments, referrals to IDVAs, and MARACs, and 'Clare's law' that are primarily focused on victims are excluded from this review. After the methodology is described, seven areas of work are briefly described, giving operational examples from England and Wales where possible.

Key findings

- Research on policing practices in relation to perpetrators of partner violence is extremely limited.
- There are mixed findings on the impact of arresting offenders, mostly derived from the US and Canada.
- Some optimism exists in relation to Protection Orders in the UK and Germany.
- Partnership working and intelligence-led policing are generally recognised as good practice, but their impact on reoffending is unknown.
- Conditional caution schemes are in their infancy in the UK and no literature was found on their use elsewhere.
- The use of body cameras is being extended and researched in the UK.
- Second responder programmes are being used in Canada and Australia and can increase referrals into other interventions.
- Graded response interventions show some benefits when measured through reduced police re-attendance.
- More research and innovation is needed in this area, particularly on existing innovative practices, to conquer an academic-practice gap that has developed.
- We recommend that 1) mappings of innovative practice be routinely undertaken, 2) greater consideration be given to academic involvement and research into innovative practices, and 3) approaches that have previously shown benefits (e.g. Killingbeck model) be re-examined in a contemporary context and built upon where possible.

1. Introduction

Research on intimate partner domestic violence perpetrators tends to focus on the debate over whether domestic violence perpetrator programmes ‘work’. A recent review commissioned by the Scottish Government Brooks et al (2014) concluded that *‘literature that specifically addresses the question of what works to deal with perpetrators and reduce reoffending is relatively limited’* ([Brooks et al. 2014, p.11](#)). This review finds the same lacuna.

2. Methodology

This review consisted of a search of three electronic academic databases (JSTOR, Web of Knowledge and Science Direct) and Google Scholar using the key words: ‘domestic violence’, ‘intimate partner violence’, ‘domestic assault’, ‘spousal abuse’, ‘domestic abuse’ combined with ‘perpetrator’, ‘offenders’, ‘batterer’ and with ‘intervention’, ‘treat*’ and ‘polic*’. A selection of key websites was also searched and a request for information was sent to academics and practitioners in the field with knowledge of relevant literature and materials. The review hence draws on both national and international literature, published academic journal articles and grey literature, all of which has been published in the English language. It is best described as a ‘rapid evidence assessment’ as the review was done in a short period of time with limited resources. It is intended as a broad brush of the field of policing perpetrators of intimate partner domestic violence rather than a detailed review of evidence. A workshop was also held where examples of innovative practice were collected.

3. Findings

3.1 *There are mixed findings on the impact of arresting offenders.*

The literature on arresting practices forms the largest body of evidence in relation to policing perpetrators of domestic violence – most of it from the US and Canada. The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, in which 314 cases were randomly assigned to one of three police responses (arresting and detaining the perpetrator overnight; separating the couple by having the perpetrator leave for 8 hours; and just providing advice and information) found that offenders who were arrested for misdemeanour domestic violence had lower recidivism rates than those given advice or ordered away from the scene ([Sherman & Berk 1984](#)). However, results from a series of similar studies collectively known as the Spousal Assault Replication Program (SARP) were inconsistent ([Cho & Wilke 2010](#)). More recently, a 23 year follow-up study on the MDVE, found that arrest had no long-term, discernible effect on repeat domestic violence ([Sherman & Harris 2013](#)). Mandatory arrest policies may reduce unequal arresting practices in relation to perpetrator age, race, or socio-economic status ([e.g. Hirschel and Buzawa, 2013](#)). As arrest of perpetrators has become a key police strategy, researchers have reported a rise in the number of dual arrests in domestic violence ([e.g. Hirschel & Buzawa 2012; Hester 2013](#)) and the negative impact this can have on victims ([Braaf & Sneddon 2007](#)). Furthermore, researchers have argued that focusing on the success of arrest for those suspects who remain at the scene, whom they argued were composed primarily of first-time offenders and those with far less of a criminal record, ‘presents a falsely positive image of the success of proactive arrest statutes and policies’ ([Hirschel and Buzawa, 2013, p.1096](#)).

3.2 *Some optimism exists in relation to Protection Orders*

A number of countries (including Germany, Austria, Poland and Switzerland) have introduced some form of Protection Orders and there exist a range of corresponding studies showing some positive effects. A review of empirical studies of outcomes associated with Protection Orders, [Benitez et al. \(2010\)](#) found that although protection orders are not a ‘panacea’, they can serve a useful role in ‘threat management’ (managing the threat of violence posed by the perpetrator). At the workshop we ran, Professor Kelly provided an overview of her recent evaluation into DVPOs ([Kelly et al., 2013](#)) and police attendees seemed optimistic about their potential. The evaluation found that very low numbers of breaches of DVPOs were recorded during the pilot. DVPOs were

associated with reduced rates of re-victimisation (measured by police call-outs) compared to similar cases dealt with by arrest followed by no further action and appeared to be most effective when used on more 'chronic' cases (defined as 3 or more previous police attendances for domestic violence). The study noted that no perpetrator had engaged in interventions designed to end their abusive behaviour during the pilot and that not all police force areas had a perpetrator programme so automatic referrals could not be made.

3.3 Partnership working and intelligence-led policing are generally recognised as good practice, but their impact on reoffending are not known.

Partnership working has now become a core part of policing perpetrators of partner violence. However, their specific impacts on reoffending are unknown. We were made aware of some pilots where intelligence sharing and third party reporting were being developed, but found no research on this.

3.4 Conditional caution schemes are in their infancy

Conditional cautioning was one of the proposals considered in the 2009 ACPO Review for the Home Secretary on Tackling Perpetrators of Violence Against Women and Girls. The proposal was considered because of a 'significant number' of comments during the consultation process for a 'near-Criminal Justice' disposal that has the potential for a sanction but also offers the possibility of rehabilitation and possibly the retaining of the relationship. It was concluded that it was premature to offer this as an intervention while there was uncertainty about the effectiveness of domestic violence perpetrator programmes and that this proposal be reconsidered once the findings of a national multi-site evaluation was concluded. Although the evaluation is still on-going (Project Mirabal - with results due end of 2014), one police force (West Hampshire Constabulary) was identified that had started a conditional cautioning scheme called Project CARA (Conditional Caution and Relationship Abuse). An evaluation is being undertaken by researchers at University of Cambridge.

3.5 The use of body cameras is being extended and researched

As technology becomes more affordable, widespread, and mobile, the use of cameras including body mounted photo and video cameras, is becoming more widespread. Research a decade ago in England and Wales found that photographic evidence was associated with higher arrest rates, victims more willing to give witness statements, and less likely to subsequently withdraw their statements ([Hester and Westmarland, 2005](#)). For this review, evidence of extending practice was found, including in the US and in England and Wales (we found examples in Essex, Cleveland, Humberside, Sussex, and Leicester constabularies but there may be more). An evaluation is on-going by College of Policing researchers.

3.6 'Second responder' programmes are being used in Canada and Australia

'Second responder' programmes involve follow up contact with domestic violence perpetrators within a specified period of time by an organisation other than the police, for example a social worker or a domestic violence perpetrator project. [Scott et al. \(2013\)](#) have evaluated an RNR (Risk, Needs, and Responsivity) focused second-responder program in Canada for men accused of assaulting their intimate partners and who were judged as being at moderate to high risk for re-offending. They compared police outcomes for 40 men attending a second-responder intervention program to 40 men with equivalent levels of risk for re-offense who did not attend intervention. Results showed that those in the treatment group had lower rates of recidivism; rates of subsequent domestic-violence-related changes were more than double for men in the comparison group as compared with the intervention group in both 1-year (65.9% vs. 29.3%) and 2-year (41.5% vs. 12.2%) follow-up. Similarly, in Victoria, Australia police are actively referring perpetrators to a telephone-based outreach service after attendance at a domestic violence incident as part of an Integrated Response to Family Violence ([Johns & Benjaminsen 2012](#)). The referral is handled by an intake worker who attempts to make telephone contact with the perpetrator in the period shortly after the incident. No evaluation has as yet been carried out.

3.7 *Graded response interventions show some benefits*

Graded response interventions ensure that different offenders get different, but certain, responses, appropriate to their behaviour and offending background. Interestingly, an emerging practice example from Merseyside police was found through interview to be built upon the Offender Focused Domestic Violence Initiative (OFDVI) in High Point, North Carolina, which in turn was found to have its roots in the Killingbeck model pioneered by West Yorkshire Police in the late 1990s.

The Killingbeck model aimed to reduce repeat victimisation through a three-tiered programme of operational interventions according to the number of times the police have attended the offender in the past year of West Yorkshire Police ([Hanmer et al. 1999](#)). Findings from the pilot year indicated that the graded response reduced repeat attendances, increased the time intervals between attendances and encouraged an increase in reporting of incidents to the police. For example, the proportion of attendances that were one-off increased from 66% to 85%. The study also found that early intervention achieved the greatest reduction in repeat attendances: the percentage of Level 1 entrants requiring two or more attendances was consistently less than those at Level 2 and Level 3. In the High Point, US, example, offenders are categorised into four tiers based on their offence history and are notified that their behaviour will no longer be tolerated and informed of the specific sanctions that they will face should they reoffend following the notification. In the first year of operation 673 individuals were notified and preliminary findings showed only 7% had reoffended (defined here as rearrests) ([Sechrist et al. 2013](#); [Sechrist & Weil 2014](#)). A full evaluation of the initiative is currently being carried out by UNC Greensboro.

4. **Conclusions and Recommendations**

There exists more innovative practice than research based interventions, especially in England and Wales. There exists an academic-practice gap, whereby a body of innovative practice exists that has not been subject to academic scrutiny and is therefore absent in the international literature. Most of the research based knowledge has been imported from the US and Canada. Of notable exception are graded response interventions, which originated in research and practice in England, were exported to the US, and are gaining favour again in England.

We recommend that 1) mappings of innovative practice be routinely undertaken, 2) greater consideration be given to academic involvement and research into innovative practices, and 3) approaches that have previously shown benefits (e.g. Killingbeck model) be re-examined in a contemporary context and built upon where possible.

Further Information

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