

# Effectiveness: how can we determine and measure the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic abuse?

Author: Esme Hookway,  
Forensic and Crime Science,  
Staffordshire University.

Main contact: Dr Claire Gwinnett,  
[C.Gwinnett@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:C.Gwinnett@staffs.ac.uk)

# Effectiveness: Brief Outline



- There are many different areas which need to be considered when discussing the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic abuse, from encouraging victims to report abuse, assessing risk, engaging with victims and perpetrators and working with partner agencies to address risk and reduce repeat incidents.
- Effectiveness relates to success which is variably defined as preventing or reducing domestic abuse incidents. However as domestic abuse is often a 'hidden crime' and is known to be under-reported, establishing accurate figures to assess success and effectiveness of policies and practice can be problematic.
- To promote effectiveness within multi-agency working practices, knowledge management and knowledge sharing needs to be timely and appropriate.
- The creation of multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs) and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) is improving the effectiveness of police and partnership working (The Police Foundation, 2014).
- The Home Office (2005) suggest that an effective police domestic abuse programme would see an increase in recorded domestic abuse incidents in the short – medium term as victims were better supported to report abuse, and a decrease in the medium – long term as repeat incidents decreased.

# Summary of Main Findings

- In pilot studies to support victims and tackle domestic abuse, the Home Office (2005) found effective actions to be:
  - Primary prevention: raising awareness of domestic abuse with young people.
  - Supporting victims to report offences.
  - Supporting victims through the court process.
  - Advocacy and support tailored to the needs of victims by multi-agencies to reduce repeat victimisation.
- HMIC (2013) found that most police forces were not doing enough in practice to effectively tackle domestic abuse. This was due to multiple factors including:
  - A lack of visible leadership and management which prioritised domestic abuse and promoted positive attitudes and behaviours.
  - A lack of skills and knowledge for police officers to effectively engage with victims and collect appropriate evidence.
  - A lack of systematic feedback from victims about their experiences with the police.
- Similar findings to those in the HMIC report also emerged from studies in the USA (Horwitz *et al.* 2011; Jewkes, 2014).
- The introduction of independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVAs) and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) is improving the effectiveness of interventions for victims (The Police Foundation, 2014).
- Westmarland and Kelly (2012) question the success and effectiveness of domestic abuse programmes which do not address the behaviours of, and provide support for the perpetrator.
- Guy (2014) further argues, that to be effective, domestic abuse perpetrator programmes need to be holistic and address any related issues such as drug or alcohol misuse or mental health problems.

# Gaps in Knowledge

- More research is needed to track the outcomes for victims and perpetrators in cases which are taken through the court system.
- More nuanced research is required to evaluate the outcomes of interventions for repeat victims.
- More research is required to understand how arrest policies and practices can be used effectively to reduce risk and empower victims (Hoyle and Sanders, 2000).
- Police management systems need to assess the effectiveness of the police response to domestic abuse victims (HMIC, 2013).
- Definitions of key terms need to be clarified and be consistent across all police forces.
- Data collected on domestic abuse needs to be consistent, comparable and accessible so progress can be monitored and the effectiveness of policies and procedures can be assessed.

# Gaps in Knowledge

- Parmer and Sampson (2007) discuss problems with ‘rolling out best practice’ identified from research and argue that whilst mechanisms can be transferred, local situations and contexts need to be considered to deliver effective domestic abuse prevention/reduction programmes across the UK.
- Greater knowledge is needed of ‘what works best’ in the reduction of offending and re-offending behaviour in the area of domestic abuse.

# Research Methods

- Across the research a range of similar qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used to measure the effectiveness of domestic abuse programmes.
  - Interviews with police and partner agency staff
  - Interviews with victims
  - Focus groups
  - Questionnaires
  - Literature reviews
  - Collection of quantitative data from police systems

# Reference List

- Guy, J. (2014) *Early Intervention in Domestic Violence and Abuse*, Early Intervention Foundation.
- Hester, M and Westmarland, N. (2005) *Tackling Domestic Violence: effective interventions and approaches*, Home Office Research Study 290.
- HMIC (2014) *Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*.
- Horwitz, S., Mitchell, D., LaRussa-Trott, M., Santiago, L., Pearson, J., Skiff, D. and Cerulli, C. (2011) 'An Inside View of Police Officer's Experience with Domestic Violence', *Journal of Family Violence* 26, 617-625.
- Hoyle, C. and Sanders, A. (2000) 'Police Response to Domestic Violence', *The British Journal of Criminology* 40:1, 14-36.
- Jewkes, R. (2014) What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls? Evidence review of the effectiveness of response mechanisms in preventing violence against women and girls. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-works-in-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls-review-of-the-evidence-from-the-programme](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-works-in-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls-review-of-the-evidence-from-the-programme) (accessed 23 Mar 2016).
- Parmer, A. and Sampson, A. (2007) 'Evaluating Domestic Violence Initiatives', *The British Journal of Criminology* 47:4, 671-691.
- The Police Foundation (2014) Policing Domestic Abuse. [www.police-foundation.org.uk/publications/briefings/policing-domestic-abuse](http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/publications/briefings/policing-domestic-abuse) (accessed 22 Mar 2016).
- Westmarland, N. and Kelly, L. (2012) 'Why Extending Measurements of 'Success' in Domestic Violence perpetrator Programmes matters for Social Work', *British Journal of Social Work*, 1-19.