

Victims of Domestic Violence (DV)

How can we ensure policies and procedures empower victims?

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Polices and procedures that meet the objective of empowering victims of DV

- Society once considered that violence within a home was entirely a private matter, of little concern to the courts (criminal or civil). The expression "rule of thumb" was derived from the practice of a man being allowed to beat his wife with a stick provided it was no thicker than his thumb (Tilbury, 2001).
- The CPS, police and other concerned agencies or organizations have been working to develop and implement policies that ensure victims of DV are empowered, for example, Clare's Law, known formally as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, has been a PR success for the police in England and Wales (Grace, 2015). This allows the police to disclose information to the potential victims about their partner's previous violent offending history, thus, empowering victims to make an informed decision about the future of a relationship.
- The domestic violence protection order which rolled-out nationally from March 2014, prevents perpetrators of violence from returning to their home for up to 28 days, giving the victim time to consider their options (Grace, 2015).
- Further calls were made to change the law on the disclosure of addresses in court, following the experiences of Eve Thomas, a victim of domestic abuse in the Bolton County Court in August 2013. The hearing was unconnected to the abuse but when asked to disclose her address to the court she refused because of her abusive partner. The original Domestic Violence (Legal Framework) Bill has now been redrafted and includes new Clauses to protect addresses. The name "Eve's Law" has been coined (Groves 2014)
- National network of CPS domestic violence co-ordinators has been set up. The co-ordinators will also now be able to share information, address problems, encourage consistency and share good practice across all 42 CPS Areas (Groves 2014)

Summary of Main Findings



- The crime survey for England and Wales picked up more crime than the police official figures, thus more needs to be done to ensure victims come forward (Woodhouse, 2016).
- The Crown Prosecution Service issued a report and guidance indicating special measures for supporting vulnerable and intimidated witnesses (Charles, 2012)
- Providing support to victims of DV, e.g. therapeutic or general support ranging from counselling to providing of information and advice, would ensure that the rights of witnesses are strengthened (Ministry of Justice, 2011).
- Making available valuable support would potentially reduce the number of cases discontinued, withdrawn or discharged, as the witness would be more confident about going to trial and testifying.
- Report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) commissioned by the Home Secretary in 09/2013, concluded that there was a lack of visible leadership, frontline officers without the knowledge or experience to spot dangerous patterns of behavior and failure by some forces to collect evidence properly.
- However, the Home Office would improve data standards, reviewing the Domestic Homicide Review Process and sharing best practice on tackling perpetrators in line with HMIC's recommendations.
- The Home secretary unveiled new measures to tackle violence and abuse targeted a women and girls. A new criminal offence of coercive or controlling behaviour against an intimate partner or family member came into force on 29 December 2015. The offence was created, following consultation, through section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 (Woodhouse, 2016)

Gaps in Knowledge

- It is not known if all affected victims are coming forward or if current figures are correct (Woodhouse, 2016)
- There is a need for a mass public campaign to reassure victims that specialist support will be provided if they come forward.
- Frontline officers need training to enable them to take appropriate steps when dealing with incidences of DV, this will allow effective recording of data. Currently it is not known how many cases of DV are unrecorded (Hester, 2005).
- Domestic violence has been rising year on year from 2008/09 to 2014/15, it is not known if the implementation of new strategies would see a decline in the number of offences recorded (Woodhouse, 2016; Office of National Statistics (2016)).

Research Methods

- Research methods used include both qualitative and quantitative research.
- It is not known if the Crime Survey for England and Wales provides data that reflects a true account of crimes committed. However, it identifies more crime than does the official police figures (Woodhouse, 2016).
- Some non-relevant crimes are being included as DV, for example domestic burglary and other selected offence groups, it is unknown if the data reflects the true nature of the actual numbers (Office of National Statistics 2016).

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