



Briefing Note

REDUCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ...WHAT WORKS? POLICING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Crime Reduction Research Series
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Introduction

In 1990, the Home Office called on police forces to develop proactive policies and operational interventions in domestic violence. These were to cover arrest, thorough investigation and recording. It recommended that officers developed an improved understanding of, and response to, domestic violence survivors. The Home Office Inter-agency circular of 1995 (currently under revision) encouraged statutory and voluntary agencies, including the police, to work together to respond effectively to domestic violence.

Policing domestic violence

The results of much of this innovation have not been measured, however through Home Office funding the following projects have been evaluated in order to measure their effectiveness.

1. The Merseyside Domestic Violence Prevention Project

This project issued quick response pendant alarms to vulnerable women identified by the crime prevention officer and the domestic violence prevention worker. It set up a domestic violence database on police attendance and aimed to improve the transfer of injunction details from courts to the police. In addition, it offered support and information to domestic violence survivors, and aimed to heighten domestic violence awareness amongst officers.

2. Killingbeck, West Yorkshire

This project aimed to reduce repeat victimisation through a three-tiered programme of incremental interventions of increasing intensity based on repeat attendance. It required an equal focus on the victimised woman and the offending man in order to set up an

interactive crime prevention approach that both protected the victim and de-motivated the offender. All officers were required to implement the force policy on domestic violence. This overcame the shortcomings usually associated with restricting the responsibility for domestic violence to one or two officers within a specialist unit. The project also necessitated closer inter-agency involvement with organisations supporting victims and/or responding to offenders.

3. Domestic Violence Matters (DVM), London

This project was a replication of a Canadian model of responding to domestic violence in London, Ontario. Police referred those experiencing domestic violence to civilians for follow-up action. The project aimed to make contact within 24 hours of police call-outs and offer short-term support, advocacy and, in some instances, long-term contact with the victim. It aimed to increase the likelihood of prosecutions being followed through and of referrals to other agencies being taken up. It also sought to improve inter-agency co-ordination, promote consistent practice within the borough, and highlight gaps in service provision.

Key findings

1. Merseyside

- Pendant alarms were positively received and they increased the physical and psychological safety of women and children.
- The design of the study prevented evaluation of the effectiveness in terms of an increase or reduction in repeat victimisation.
- The study established the time intervals between repeat attendances; the time interval between repeat attendance was five weeks for 35% of

households and 45% of households required a third attendance after the second visit.

- The total capital outlay of the project was £136,000 over two years, with recurrent costs of £450 per month. These were police costs only and excluded the costs of local authority housing assistance (who arranged re-housing for some women). Alarms were returned after use and so could have multiple beneficiaries over time.
- The pendant alarm worked by:
 - preventing imminent assaults by activation;
 - alerting the police to remove the perpetrator; and
 - having a deterrent effect on the perpetrator.The alarm may also have had indirect effects through publicity and ensuring that the police worked with other agencies to ensure an effective response.

2. Killingbeck

- The three-tiered programme increased first time attendance from 60% to 85%, reduced repeat attendance and increased the time intervals between attendance.
- Within five weeks, 9% of those requiring Level 1, 15% of those requiring Level 2, and 26% of those requiring Level 3, were attended again.
- It was predicted that 61% of those attended for a first time, 42% of those attended for a second time, and 36% of those attended for a third time, would not be attended again.
- Improvements were made in the standard and consistency of police responses, although the project found that there were problems with law enforcement.
- Women and their supporters were encouraged to ask for police support and the numbers doing so increased over the project duration.
- Chronic repeat offenders were identified, individually assessed and over the year their numbers were reduced.
- Closer working relationships were established with other criminal justice agencies and with some social and welfare agencies.
- The project aimed to minimise costs by acquiring resources by the reallocation of existing staff and their duties to reflect a change in priorities, and by meeting priorities more effectively. However, the specific costs were not calculated.

3. DVM

- Following up calls for police assistance within 24 hours was effective with service users at the time. Women valued: the practical support; the emotional support; the legal advice; the assurance that the violence was not the women's fault; the emphasis on women's right to something better; the naming of the men's behaviour as violence; and the referrals to other agencies.
- The project interventions increased confidence in

the police amongst service users.

- The continuation of the project was difficult because of disputes over the role of civilians in policing domestic violence. This led to difficulties in the relationship between civilians and the police. Although some progress was made with domestic violence officers, the problems with patrol officers and senior management intensified and remained unresolved. These difficulties led to a substantial decrease in the number of referrals from police officers towards the end of the project.
- Data was not logged for cost-benefit analysis but some relevant data regarding costs were collected.

International policing

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, US is an inter-agency model of response to both those experiencing domestic violence and perpetrators. It involves all agencies responding to domestic violence including the police. The aim is to integrate and co-ordinate community responses to domestic violence. These involve practical, policy procedural and service measures in order to improve safety for those who are victimised, increase the offender's accountability for their actions, enhance evidence gathering, deliver more effective prosecution and sentencing of abusers, and strengthen the message that domestic violence is not tolerated. Although there cannot be true replications in the UK because local government responsibilities vary considerably, it is worthwhile to explore adaptations of the Duluth model as a way of delivering inter-agency services. There are several current loose replications in progress or in planning, e.g. Fulham and Hammersmith, and Gloucester.

Conclusions

Good policing practice includes:

- standardised definitions of domestic violence and repeat victimisation between forces and other agencies;
- consistent interventions;
- organisation and management based on unequivocal leadership, robust accountability and good management support;
- training of all police staff on domestic violence awareness, policy, good practice and new initiatives; and
- performance monitoring of officers, divisions and forces, police attendance and the use of resources.

The repeat victimisation approach, with its cost-effective resource implications, has been shown to increase effectiveness in policing domestic violence. This is because taking a repeat victimisation approach is able to:

- concentrate resources on a high volume crime;
- focus on those at greatest risk of repeat victimisation;

- fuse the historically separate roles of victim support and crime prevention;
- target offenders;
- identify chronic offenders;
- improve information gathering for investigative purposes;
- promote consistency in service delivery; and
- encourage the development of early intervention strategies.

Partnership models can also be cost-effective, and offer many of the same benefits. In addition they can:

- identify agencies needed by those experiencing domestic violence;
- increase knowledge of the work of other agencies;
- reduce the number of agencies approached in the search for appropriate assistance;
- improve information gathering and sharing; and
- encourage a co-ordinated and systematic response.

However, partnerships do not automatically prevent crime as effectiveness can be undermined by a lack of co-ordination and direction. The Islington project showed that police officers need to actively support initiatives and that management needs to challenge any lack of support further down the ranks.

There are two unresolved issues in the current debate on policing domestic violence. Firstly, there is the tension between empowering women victimised by violence from their partners and criminal justice interventions. How much influence should women have over initial charges and court outcomes? Secondly, there is disagreement over the use of arrest as an appropriate response to domestic violence. US studies suggested that arrest could cause further violence. Some argued that this was only likely when suspects were unemployed and/or not married. Similarly, the Killingbeck project showed arrest with criminal charges was more likely to occur when women and men lived separately rather than together. Arrest on its own did not significantly reduce repeat victimisation in the Killingbeck project. However, arrest was useful in identifying the more violent men and assessing the likelihood of future attendance.

Recommendations

Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness need to be considered in relation to achieving gains in prevention, protection and provision. New projects should address current policing issues by evaluating the organisation and management of the policing of domestic violence as well as the outcomes for those experiencing and committing domestic violence along with other agency responses where relevant.

The three evaluated projects reviewed have the potential for secondary analysis to investigate their financial effectiveness for all agencies. They could be

used to establish benchmarks against which to develop and measure future programmes.

The repeat victimisation approach has been shown to increase effectiveness in policing domestic violence. The three-tiered intervention model could also be extended to other statutory agencies and multi-agency partnerships.

There are many policing projects and partnership initiatives that have not undergone evaluation or cost-benefit analysis. These include:

- replications of Duluth;
- partnerships focusing on particular groups of women;
- the establishment of joint protocols with other agencies;
- training for health professionals;
- restorative justice projects;
- evidence diaries kept by women;
- safety plans for women; and
- improved investigative techniques and evidence gathering techniques e.g. instant photography kits.

The Killingbeck project used multiple initiatives that have not been subject to individual evaluation (hence it is not known which interventions are most or least effective). All the multiple initiatives of Killingbeck are potential candidates for evaluation.

Suggested policing initiatives include:

- following up and charging men that are absent from the house when the police arrive; and
- recognising the linkage between domestic violence and child protection issues and developing appropriate and sensitive strategies with social services and other organisations in relation to this.

Future research could examine:

- the impact of policing practices on cohabitation or separation;
- offender profiles and risk assessment;
- specific policing strategies for chronic offenders;
- the cost-effectiveness of arrest and arrest outcomes;
- victim satisfaction indicators;
- policing practices which effect the extent of under-reporting; and
- police structures and management features that best enable the implementation of effective strategic policing in domestic violence.

Further reading

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