

Service Provision for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence

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Why do research on domestic violence perpetrators?

- Very little research has been done on service provision for domestic violence perpetrators.
- This research builds on research with victims in the same region (Northumbria) that found that very few perpetrators who were reported to the police were convicted¹.
- Researching what men might need to stop being violent towards their partners is a controversial topic, mostly because it is already difficult to find money to provide research and services for victims of domestic violence. This is the first time a study of this nature has been funded in the UK.
- Service provision for victims of domestic violence is very important. However, if adequate services are not provided for men who perpetrate domestic violence, they may move on to offend against other women in the future.

What did this research consist of?

- Semi-structured interviews with 17 domestic violence perpetrators from the Northumbria police force area, regarding their contact with the criminal justice system and experiences of help-seeking².
- Development of 692 perpetrator profiles using data collected from Northumbria police. Northumbria police have a national reputation for having good IT systems in relation to domestic violence³.
- Analysis of 1,889 incidents relating to the 692 perpetrator profiles.
- 3 year follow up of 356 offenders (2001/2 – 2004/5).
- Interviews with 72 agencies in the area.
- Our research was focused on intimate partner violence (partner/ex-partner) not familial violence (other family member).

Who were the domestic violence perpetrators?

- All of the perpetrators in our database had been reported to the police for domestic violence.
- The perpetrators were aged between 17 and 80 years old, with an average (mean) age of 34.

¹ Hester, M. (2006) Making It Through the Criminal Justice System: Attrition and Domestic Violence', *Social Policy and Society*, 5 (1): 79-90; Hester, M., Hanmer, J., Coulson, S., Morahan, M. and Razak, A. (2003) *Domestic violence: making it through the criminal justice system*, Sunderland: University of Sunderland.

² Similar interviews with a further 45 male perpetrators in four other sites throughout England and Wales were carried out by a Home Office research team and the findings shared.

³ HMIC and HMCPSI (2004) *Violence at Home: A Joint Inspection of the Investigation and Prosecution of Cases Involving Domestic Violence*, London: HMIC

- Nine out of ten perpetrators were male.
- Very little same-sex domestic violence was reported (7 male same sex cases and 2 female).
- Perpetrators were generally the same age or older than the victims (71% of cases).
- Nearly all perpetrators and victims were white (94% and 95% respectively).
- Police intelligence showed that one in five (21%) perpetrators were suspected of use of or dealing drugs.
- Police intelligence showed that one in six (17%) perpetrators were suspected of possession or use of weapons. Most often these were knives, but baseball bats, hammers, machetes, ammonia and samurai swords were recorded as weapons for three or more perpetrators.
- Male perpetrators were significantly more likely than female perpetrators to possess or use weapons.
- The perpetrators interviewed had a wide range of experiences of perpetrator programmes and were at different stages (prison, probation, voluntary/community and none).

What happened to perpetrators who were reported to the police for domestic violence?

- There is no criminal offence of ‘domestic violence’. However, a range of criminal offences such as common assault, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm may be committed at a domestic violence incident. Perpetrators may also be arrested as a preventative measure where it is likely a criminal offence would otherwise take place.
- There were a high number of incidents where the police did not appear to have any power to intervene (i.e. no criminal offence was deemed to have been committed or likely to take place). This was fairly consistent over time, accounting for around two-thirds of incidents.
- Arrests were made in 91% of cases where it was possible for an arrest to be made (incidents coded as having ‘power of arrest’). This appeared to rise over time (from 76% in 2001/2 to 97% in 2004/5). This is far higher than any other studies have found and suggests strict adherence to the revised Home Office Circular on Domestic Violence (19/2000) which introduced the presumption of arrest (where arrest is possible). We suggest that adherence is not actually this high, and the data instead reflect inaccurate interpretation/recording of cases where arrest could be made.
- Perpetrators were most frequently arrested for breach of the peace.
- The criminal acts perpetrators were most frequently arrested for were violence against the person (most often ABH), criminal damage, and public order (most often drunk and disorderly).
- There was no correlation between the number of domestic violence incidents a perpetrator had been involved in and an increased likelihood of arrest. Moreover, incidents coded as ‘high risk’ were not significantly more likely to result in arrest than those rated at a lower risk. This questions the effectiveness and usefulness of risk assessing incidents where the focus is on discreet incidents and not the overall pattern of behaviour.
- In interviews some perpetrators described how they would avoid arrest by absenting themselves from the house. Some also talked of how they would put pressure on their partners to withdraw statements or complaints, often resulting in no further action from the criminal justice system.
- Some men felt that being put in a police cell overnight to ‘cool off’, without charges being pursued, had little effect. It led them to think that the police did not take their violent behaviour seriously, and re-enforced the men’s minimisation of the incident

What happened to perpetrators who were arrested and charged for domestic violence related crimes?

- Out of a total of 2,402 domestic violence incidents, perpetrators were arrested, charged and convicted in only 120 incidents (5%). This replicates previous findings in Northumbria and elsewhere.
- Perpetrators who were arrested for public order or criminal damage offences were more likely to be convicted than those arrested for violence against the person (46% of public order and 36% of criminal damage compared with 17% violence against the person).
- The most frequent sentence for those convicted involved a monetary penalty, most often a fine but sometimes compensation. This was a consistent finding over time (2001 – 2005).

Did they keep on offending?

- Exactly half of the perpetrators were involved in at least one more domestic violence incident within the three year follow-up period (50%).
- Nearly one in five (18%) perpetrators who re-offended did so against a different partner to the one they were originally reported for.
- The highest number of domestic violence incidents involving one perpetrator over the 3 year follow up period was 44. Twenty-nine perpetrators were involved in ten or more incidents.
- Previous domestic violence offending was the strongest predictor of further domestic violence offending.
- Over the three years (2002-2004), on average, the domestic violence perpetrators were arrested for more non domestic violence offences than they were for domestic violence offences (mean number of domestic violence arrests = 0.83 compared with mean number of non-domestic violence arrests = 2.24).
- Domestic violence offenders who were convicted were subsequently involved in fewer incidents over time, yet were more likely to be convicted again.

What do domestic violence perpetrators do if they want to stop being violent?

- Some perpetrators had not tried to find help to stop being violent because they did not accept that their behaviour was a problem.
- Others only began to accept that their behaviour was a problem once they had been convicted and sent on a probation-led programme.
- When perpetrators were prepared to find help they would most frequently access GPs. They were also likely to be in contact with Relate, social services, Samaritans, alcohol or drugs services, hospitals, solicitors, and welfare services at work. Some used websites associated with TV programmes to access help.
- Partners sometimes arranged for perpetrators to see agencies about their behaviour, and might accompany them.
- Where perpetrators went to their GP, they attempted to position themselves as ‘sad’ (depressed) or ‘mad’ (in need of psychological or psychiatric care), with a resultant focus on ‘poor-me’ rather than their unacceptable behaviour.

- A focus on ‘poor-me’ tended to abnegate perpetrator’s responsibility for their behaviour, or need to change, and can be dangerous.
- Alcohol, drugs, depression and ‘jealousy’ rather than violence were often presented as the problems requiring ‘treatment’.
- For some men, domestic violence perpetrator programmes had clearly had a major impact on the way they managed all inter-personal relationships, not only those with their partners.
- Whichever programme the men were on/had completed, they were critical of the inclusion of elements relating to sex (‘I’m not a nonce’). Some were also critical of the children element (‘I’m a good father’). However, these were issues that clearly did need to be addressed by the men concerned.

What should be put in place for domestic violence perpetrators?

- The men were more likely to seek help at some kind of ‘crisis’ moment, usually when the partner gave them an ultimatum or actually left, or where there were child contact issues. However, this is also when the men are likely to be especially dangerous and homicidal, and safety for the women and children concerned therefore has to be a priority for any agency intervening with the men at this time.
- Perpetrators interviewed said that adverts in newspapers and on the radio for services would be useful to highlight domestic abuse behaviour and direct them to services.
- Some men suggested that a criminal justice sanction or threat or consequence of sanction, provided the incentive for help-seeking, and intervention might be effective at this point.
- Some men wanted the police to direct them to perpetrator programmes and/or provide information about help-seeking.
- Emergency accommodation should be made available for perpetrators so that women do not always have to be the ones to leave the home.
- Men who are violent towards women need to learn new, appropriate responses to feelings of jealousy and aggression. This requires an increase in the number of perpetrator programmes, including more self-referral programmes. Such programmes should adhere to the guidelines developed by Respect.
- Health service responses should not refer perpetrators to counselling or related approaches that may re-enforce the ‘poor me’ syndrome. Instead, GPs and other health service staff should direct perpetrators to services that are critical of, and aim to change, violent men’s behaviour.
- Agencies from criminal justice, health, social care, family proceedings and other sectors need to work together to develop coherent and co-ordinated approaches to perpetrators that focus on tackling men’s violent and abusive behaviour while also ensuring safety for the women and children concerned. This should apply to the whole ‘continuum’ of domestic violence perpetrators, from early intervention to chronic and severe offenders.
- Agencies that may come in to contact with perpetrators need to be able to ask about their violent and abusive behaviour.
- Specialist services are needed for some groups, such as young men, and for men for whom English is not their first language.
- Services should be sensitive to issues of racism and discrimination.

This research was funded by the Northern Rock Foundation.
Please reference this report as: Hester, M. and Westmarland, N. (2006) Service Provision for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence, Bristol: University of Bristol.