






Second responder programmes to prevent domestic abuse

A second visit to the home of domestic abuse victims after the initial police response.

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Effect scale	Quality of evidence				
	Effect Impact on crime	Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
 Some reduction	 Strong	 Low	 Low	 Low	No information

Focus of the intervention

Second responder programmes typically involve a second response visit to victims of domestic abuse at home. These visits take place sometime between 24 hours and 14 days after the initial police response.

A team – typically comprised of a police officer and a victim advocate – attend with the aim of providing assistance to the victim and sometimes the offender, preventing further violence and finding long-term solutions to the problem.

Second responder programmes assume victims of abuse will be more receptive to interventions in the period immediately after the incident has occurred and will subsequently be more willing to consider behavioural and lifestyle changes.

This narrative summarises the findings of a systematic review based on 10 studies.

Effect – how effective is it?

There is some evidence that second responder programmes have reduced self-reported victimisation, but overall they have not had a statistically significant impact on crime.

While one study found a statistically significant reduction in abuse based on victimisation surveys, the analysis of all studies combined showed that second responder programmes had no overall effect.

The review also looked at new incidents of abuse reported to the police. Overall, studies with experimental designs found that second responder programmes resulted in a slight increase in reports of abuse to the police.

The authors conclude therefore that second responder programmes led to slightly higher reporting of abuse than standard approaches, but they do not impact on the likelihood of repeat violence.

Further research is needed to study the exact reason for increased reports as a result of second responder programmes.

How strong is the evidence?

The review was sufficiently systematic that many forms of bias that could influence the review conclusions can be ruled out.

The review conducted meta-analyses of study outcomes by study design to ensure that only comparable results were included in the different effect sizes. The review has a well-designed search strategy and includes unpublished literature. Many threats to validity can be ruled out and risks of bias by the reviewers have been minimised.

However, some biases may remain within some of the primary studies, including variable dropout rates among participants in some studies and selection of participants and control groups.

Mechanism – how does it work?

A number of mechanisms are suggested through which the programme might work. However, the review does not empirically test these mechanisms.

Second responders work with victims to help them to understand the cyclical nature of family violence, with the hope that increasing their knowledge may reduce the likelihood of new offences.

They also work to establish greater independence for victims through initiatives like counselling, job training, public assistance or social service referrals, which can provide accommodation relocation.

The review discusses other mechanisms directly affecting abusers, including second responders talking to them to make them understand that assault is a criminal act, and that further abuse will result in additional sanctions.

It is suggested that increased knowledge and fear of sanctions should help to reduce repeated incidents of violence.

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

The review suggested that those victims who reside in public housing settings were less willing to move away from their home, so were more likely to suffer repeat abuse. However, this was not tested within the review.

The review did not analyse the effect of the programmes on different types of population or different types of abuse (for example, elder abuse, child abuse).

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

The review noted that second responder programmes were carried out by victim advocates and specially trained police officers.

The victims were visited at their homes between 24 hours and 14 days after the initial report of abuse was made.

Within the review, these contacts were all face-to-face. None were reported to be by phone or post.

The victims, and sometimes offenders, were offered a range of services and support, including information on legal options for victims and warnings to perpetrators about the potential legal

consequences of their actions.

Victims may be given information about obtaining a restraining order, sheltered accommodation or relocation assistance. They may also be offered counselling, job training or referrals to social services.

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

There is no mention of costs in the review, and no cost-benefit analysis is conducted.

General considerations

- All of the second responder studies were conducted in the USA, so care must be taken when transferring these findings to the British context.
- It is unclear whether higher levels of reported abuse to police means that the programmes are working and victims have more confidence to report abuse where they previously would have stayed silent, or whether more abuse is actually occurring.
- Second responder programmes differ in how they are implemented. More research is needed to determine the effectiveness of different approaches.

Summary

There is some evidence that second responder programmes have reduced crime, but overall they have not had a statistically significant effect on crime.

While second responder programmes lead to slightly higher reporting of abuse to the police, they have no statistically significant effect on repeat victimisation.

Therefore we can conclude that second responder programmes lead to slightly higher reporting of abuse than standard approaches, but they do not have an impact on the likelihood of repeat domestic violence.

Reviews

Review one

Reference

- Davis, R., Weisburd, D. and Taylor, B. (2008) 'Effects Of Second Responder Programs On Repeat Incidents Of Family Abuse', Campbell Systematic Reviews, 2008:15, DOI: 10.4073/csr.2008.15

Summary prepared by

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