

Introduction to authorised professional practice on domestic abuse

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This authorised professional practice (APP) on domestic abuse has been developed by consolidating and updating ACPO (now NPCC) (2008) Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse. It responds to a number of developments in the field of domestic abuse, in particular a new Home Office definition of domestic violence and abuse, and the statutory definition set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. These recognise the significance of controlling or coercive behaviour in better understanding domestic abuse.

During the development of this APP, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) also released its findings from a major inspection of how all police forces in England and Wales handle allegations of domestic abuse. These findings have been taken into account when developing the new APP.

The HMIC inspection

HMIC identified that there have been changes in how domestic abuse is handled. Risk assessment is increasingly becoming a core element of response (everyone's business) rather than being reserved to specialists, and the role of the domestic violence specialist officer is becoming more investigative in nature. This overlap in functions requires clarity as to who is responsible for maintaining victim contact and safety planning.

HMIC also emphasised the importance of getting the basics right – an effective investigation to build a strong case which can progress even without victim support, and the safeguarding of victims and children. It further indicated that there needs to be better management of risk, by targeting and managing perpetrators, and developing improved safety planning with victims.

HMIC Recommendation 5

The authorised professional practice update should reiterate and clearly set out principles and minimum standards in the following areas:

- approaches to identifying repeat and vulnerable victims
- information that responding officers must have available to them on or before arrival
- victim care and safety planning
- evidence-gathering to support domestic abuse investigations (in the context of professional police investigation) and evidence-led prosecutions
- positive action and arrest in cases of domestic abuse
- risk assessment
- standards of supervision
- effective targeting of domestic abuse perpetrators, including the use of covert tactics and the definition of serial and/or persistent perpetrators
- use of different criminal justice disposals, in particular simple cautions and restorative justice
- the principal components of multi-agency arrangements (such as the [MARAC](#) and [MASH](#)) to tackle domestic abuse

(Excerpt from HMIC (2014) [Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse](#))

HMIC found that there was a lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse, and that this had an impact on the effectiveness of the police response when dealing with victims.

Revised APP on domestic abuse seeks to address this weakness by including more contextual information to improve understanding. Officers should be encouraged to become familiar with this information and it should provide a basis for training them to recognise domestic abuse, particularly controlling or coercive behaviour, in a range of contexts.

APP on domestic abuse emphasises the importance of evidence-led investigation and prosecution, building a strong case which does not rely exclusively on the victim's support. It also underlines the critical nature of risk assessment and safety planning at an early stage.

The statistics provided to HMIC by forces clearly show that domestic abuse represents a significant proportion of overall crime: 8% of all recorded crime, one third of recorded assaults with injury, 49% of recorded harassment crimes. It is estimated that the police receive a related emergency call every 30 seconds. This strongly suggests that domestic abuse makes up a significant proportion of

police work, sometimes resulting in the most serious offences, which should shape the way in which domestic abuse is handled by forces at all levels. This is reflected in the structure of the revised APP, which places much greater emphasis on the role of the response officer in dealing with domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is not only high volume but also high risk. Getting the police response wrong can have severe consequences and result in a failure to protect victims from assault or even death.

[Office for National Statistics figures for 2016](#) indicate that 44% of female homicide victims were killed by a partner or ex-partner, as were 7% of male homicide victims.

For more information on domestic abuse figures see [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview 2023](#).

Real and sustained improvement cannot be achieved without leadership at the highest level. Forces must equip officers and staff by providing adequate training as a priority. They should include domestic abuse in their performance management frameworks and measure individual performance against domestic abuse objectives. Good performance by individuals and teams should be recognised and rewarded. Senior management must make it their business as much as, if not more than, anyone else as they have overall responsibility for ensuring that their force delivers a high quality service to victims of domestic abuse. The overarching principle which must guide forces at all levels is that every domestic abuse victim must be safer after police contact.

The advice contained in this authorised professional practice is based largely on the professional expertise of police and voluntary sector practitioners. The section on risk assessment and risk factors draws on findings from systematic reviews of research evidence.

Terminological note

The term victim is used throughout the APP to reflect the terminology of [Ministry of Justice \(2020\) Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#). It is accepted that other terms are also used and preferred in certain sectors.

The term perpetrator is used throughout to refer to a person who commits domestic abuse. Suspect, defendant and offender are used where appropriate to reflect the different stages of the criminal justice process. The term abuser is used in places for ease of readability when referring to a person who abuses an individual victim.

Tags

Domestic abuse