Policing, vulnerabilities and domestic abuse – victims, perpetrators, interventions

Exploring emerging approaches to policing perpetrators of domestic abuse and delivering safer outcomes for victim-survivors.

Key details

Lead institution	Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre
Principal researcher(s)	Professor Sandra Walklate and Professor Nicole Westmarland s.l.walklate@liverpool.ac.uk
Police region	North West
Collaboration and partnership	• Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) • Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse, Durham University
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	May 2023
Date due for completion	October 2025

Research context

Domestic violence and abuse is a significant social problem worldwide. In England and Wales, domestic abuse accounted for 17% of all crime recorded in the year ending March 2022. In 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) issued its first National Strategic Threat Risk Assessment of violence against women and girls, placing such offences on the same footing as terrorism and serious organised crime.

In social policy, domestic abuse is often conceptualised in terms of 'risk of harm' and 'victim vulnerabilities'. However, how these interact, how they intersect with inequalities and how interventions can adapt to changes in vulnerabilities is under-developed. There is also limited research examining the vulnerabilities affecting perpetrators and what might be needed to deliver effective interventions.

The project team will focus on Greater Manchester, UK, which is committed to a 10-year strategy to tackling gender-based violence informed by similar efforts in the State of Victoria, Australia.

The project will explore what is working well with these new approaches, what could be improved and what can be learnt from different stakeholders involved in this response.

Research questions and aims

This project will explore:

- whether it's possible to create a multi-agency response that encompasses more complex, nuanced understandings of vulnerability within existing UK legal frameworks
- how tackling domestic abuse might change if everyone involved, including police, social workers and community organisations had shared understandings and approaches to vulnerability

The project aims to identify ways to balance current legislation and best practices with the aspiration to further develop multi-agency responses to domestic abuse. By taking a deeper, more nuanced look at how vulnerabilities are understood and responded to, the project seeks to inform police responses to domestic abuse and improve multi-agency responses.

Research methodology

The project fieldwork will be delivered in three successive parts, each lasting around six months.

1. Semi-structured interviews

The first part will involve semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and frontline professionals from police, mental health, local authority, substance misuse, third sector and other relevant organisations working with perpetrators and victim-survivors.

The team will also conduct semi-structured interviews with police in Victoria, Australia to examine what can be learnt from changes implemented as part of the Royal Commission into Family Violence reform agenda, including examining the barriers to effective service provision.

2. Analysis of secondary data

Following the interviews, the researchers will analyse secondary data (including police case files) to establish:

- how the reforms taking place in Greater Manchester are affecting the profile of known perpetrators
- the response of the criminal justice system to people alleged to have used domestic abuse

3. Case study analysis

Finally, the team will conduct a case study analysis. This will investigate at a deeper level the changes that the reforms are having at one or two specific locations within Greater Manchester identified as exemplifying best practice.

References

National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). 2023. 'Violence against women and girls: Strategic threat risk assessment'.

Tags

- Violence against women and girls