

Evaluation of a forensic marking intervention for domestic abuse

The summary report of the evaluation completed on the forensic marking intervention.

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Domestic abuse has significant, often long-term, impacts on its victims and makes up a high proportion of calls to the police. However, only a minority of offenders are brought to justice. Despite evidence supporting the effectiveness of situational crime prevention (SCP) methods for various crime types, their use in tackling domestic abuse remains under-developed. Forensic marking is an SCP method that uses a unique, chemically marked solution that is visible only under ultraviolet light. Domestic abuse victims apply this solution to their property or use handheld sprays of the solution to tag offenders attempting to make contact with them.

Research method

The College of Policing secured funding from the Cabinet Office to evaluate a series of interventions designed to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG). The aim of this evaluation was to explore the impact of forensic marking on:

- domestic abuse incidents
- victims' feelings of safety
- trust and confidence in the police
- repeat perpetrators

The evaluation involved:

- comparison of the number of incidents reported to the police by a group of domestic abuse victims who had been given forensic marking products and a matched comparison group who had not
- a cost–benefit analysis
- a longitudinal survey of victims
- interviews with victims, perpetrators and police officers
- case studies of forensic marking activations

Findings

Fewer repeat domestic abuse incidents

Forensic marking was associated with a reduction in repeat domestic abuse incidents over the six-month follow-up period. This reduction was large even if it was not statistically significant, with a 22% reduction in the number of crimes.

£39 to £83 saved for every pound spent

The cost of delivering the intervention was estimated to have been around £131 per person. Depending on the method used, the economic benefit of forensic marking was estimated to have been between £39 and £83 for every pound spent.

Feelings of safety increased and remained high

Survey and interview data showed a consistent increase in feelings of safety and freedom among victims. This increase was maintained over time. Most victims said this increase was, to some extent or to a great extent, due to them having forensic marking products. Many victims felt confident enough to resume activities they had previously stopped doing outside of their homes, as they could take the forensic marking spray with them.

Perceptions of the police initially improved, but then fell

The survey and interviews showed an initial increase in victims trusting the police to respond appropriately. Satisfaction with the police response and confidence to report future incidents also initially increased. These improvements were not sustained and may have reflected a positive reaction among victims to being given forensic marking products, which then fell away as their investigations continued.

Too early to know impact on repeat perpetrators

There were only five forensic marking activations during the six-month follow-up period. Forensic marking evidence was not used in the prosecutions for these incidents. However, it did inform the investigative process, and was thought to have both strengthened the cases and reduced investigation time.

A key part of the intervention was supposed to have been the warnings given to perpetrators about victims having been provided with forensic marking products. However, warnings were recorded as

having been given to 60% of perpetrators, and in only one of the five activation cases.

Conclusions and implications

This research suggested that forensic marking may have had a positive impact and saved money. Forensic marking was well received by most victims and was largely supported by the police officers in the study. Police considered forensic marking to be one of few preventive measures available for domestic abuse victims. However, the deterrence effect may have been reduced by the inconsistent delivery of warnings to offenders about domestic abuse victims having been provided with forensic marking products.

- [Go to the full evaluation of a forensic marking intervention for domestic abuse](#)

Tags

Violence against women and girls Domestic abuse Domestic violence