

Evaluating the impact of the domestic abuse suicide safeguarding toolkit

Piloting new safeguarding practices within West Midlands Police to protect domestic abuse survivors from suicide, informed by survivor interviews, officer focus groups and expert consensus.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Birmingham
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Police region	West Midlands
Collaboration and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2024
Date due for completion	September 2028

Research context

Suicide has become the leading cause of death in domestic abuse-related fatalities in the UK, surpassing deaths caused directly by intimate partner violence (Hoeger and others, 2025). Women who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are three times more likely to experience suicidality, rising to seven times in cases involving sexual IPV (Agenda Alliance, 2023). Between 2020 and 2024, domestic abuse was linked to 1,012 reported deaths, 35% of which were deaths by suicide. Of those who died by suicide, nearly nine in 10 were known to partner agencies, underscoring the critical importance of multi-agency working thorough risk assessment and safeguarding practices (Hoeger and others, 2025).

The link between domestic abuse and suicide has only recently gained formal recognition. The [Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme \(VKPP\)](#) began reporting suspected suicides in domestic abuse cases in 2020. By 2023, suicide had become the most common cause of death among victims, a trend that continued into 2024. In these cases, 73% of victims were female, with male suspects.

While manslaughter charges can be brought following a victim's suicide, such cases remain rare due to evidentiary challenges. As awareness of this intersection grows, there is increasing pressure to address it through improved safeguarding, legal reform and targeted suicide prevention strategies.

Research methodology

This project aims to build a robust evidence base to inform new safeguarding practices designed to help survivors of domestic abuse stay safe from suicide. These practices will be piloted by the West Midlands Police (WMP) domestic abuse desks.

To develop the evidence base, qualitative research will be conducted, including interviews with survivors and focus groups with WMP domestic abuse desk officers. Insights from these activities will inform a Delphi study, through which field experts will reach consensus on the safeguarding practices to be implemented.

The implementation will then be evaluated using mixed methods. This will include quantitative analysis of WMP data, such as the number of specialist referrals made, and qualitative exploration of survivor and officer perceptions of the new practices.

References

Agenda Alliance. 2023. ['Underexamined and underreported: Suicidality and intimate partner violence – Connecting two major public health domains'](#).

Hoeger K and others. 2025. ['Knowledge and Practice Programme \(VKPP\): Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides 2020–2024 – Year 4 Report'](#).