Domestic Abuse (DA) Threat Assessment Unit (TAU)

Introduction of a Domestic Abuse (DA) Threat Assessment Unit (TAU) to combine police data with academic research to identify high threat relationships.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Domestic abuse Intelligence Investigation
Organisation	[Leicestershire Police](#)
HMICFRS report	**[PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Leicestershire Police](#)**
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Region	East Midlands
Partners	Police

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Families Victims Workforce

Aim

The aim of the DA TAU is to:

- combine data from within Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour (DASH), Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA), previous offending and academic work to highlight clusters of risk
- create bespoke problem-solving plans to support victims and deter offending
- encourage collaboration between TAU and neighbourhood policing teams to ensure problem-solving plans are effective and well managed

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of DA TAU are to:

- reduce the risk of serious harm within identified relationships that involve domestic abuse
- reduce the number of domestic abuse incidents, therefore safeguarding victims and reducing police demand
- reduce the severity of offences
- improve support to victims to make informed decisions about the relationship and their support needs

Description

In 2020/21, Leicestershire Police conducted a force-wide review of medium/high-risk DA incidents, with the aim of improving performance. The review focused on four areas:

- increasing intelligence
- driving attendance at incidents
- improving investigations
- efficiently using data

The main finding of this review was that officers and staff had no consistent, objective or efficient way to identify medium/high-risk DA due to the vast amounts of data held on police systems. Furthermore, the force found they were reactive and had limited preventative focuses. Due to these issues, Leicestershire Police developed the DA Threat Risk Assessment to be more proactive and effective in assisting those at the greatest risk.

Development of DA threat risk assessment

The force identified that most of this data was from DASH. DASH is filled out at every domestic abuse report and gives a holistic overview of the risks involved with different relationships, however there was no way to utilise it effectively. Due to this, the force wanted to move away from volume of information alone and take a more considered and academic approach to threat and risk.

Leicestershire Police conducted academic literature searches, identifying various pieces of research highlighting how "clusters of risk" can be applied to domestic abuse. "Clusters of risk" make use of existing data from DASH or DARA that are already held on police systems. These "clusters" come from answers from the risk assessments that make victims more vulnerable, perpetrators more dangerous, and when the two come together, the whole situation more volatile.

An example of this is Starks Cluster, where if a perpetrator exhibits controlling and coercive behaviour, is violent to any extent and there is a trigger event (such as separation), the risk of homicide to the victim increases by 900%. When this research was paired with the Domestic Abuse Homicide Timeline, a lot of the clusters could be found in DASH or DARA i.e. Strangulation = Q18 and Separation = Q6.

However, an issue was found within the data regarding question wording, where "has the abuser EVER..." was sometimes answered yes but then subsequently answered no. This created a problem as if an officer only looked at the latest DASH and the answer to "has the abuser every strangled you?" was "no" but 2 DASH's ago it was "yes", they would assume no strangulation had ever been present.

To combat this, a Power BI app was developed to create "sticky clusters", which highlight where the "EVER" questions have previously been answered "yes". These were then added to a scoring system (supported by the cluster of risk research) and paired with other tools to identify the recency and frequency (such as Cambridge Crime Harm Index). Each victim/perpetrator on the DA threat risk assessment app score over each section is then totalled, with higher scores (highlighted in red) indicate the highest risk relationships. This allows the force to easily identify which relationships need intervention quickly to reduce the risk of harm.

There were no costs involved in the development of the DA TAU.

How the DA TAU is used

The DA Threat Risk Assessment app is monitored by threat assessors, who sit centrally within the force and received enhanced internal training. These assessors pick out the highest risk relationships and develop bespoke problem-management plans (PMPs) dependant on a variety of factors and tailored to the victim's needs. Each relationship is plotted against the eight stages of the homicide timeline, which allow the force to monitor where changes within the relationship have occurred.

The plan then follows the Scanning and Analysis, Response and Assessment (SARA) model. The TAU complete the scanning and analysis to identify a bespoke response. Actions are raised for the TAU as well as for local Neighbourhood Teams, with the intention of supporting community engagement and confidence in policing to safeguard and reduce harm. Tasks are developed for Neighbourhood Officers to complete face to face with victims and perpetrators, allowing them to have a single point of contact for the police within their area, whom they can develop better engagement with. This then allows the TAU to re-assess needs and response strategies to reduce risk and demand.

Overall impact

Outputs are measured by the percentage of occurrences reported in the last 90 days and the domestic abuse threat score. There may also be individual outputs such as "right to know" disclosures, civil intervention or an increase in detention rates for offending.

For example, the TAU took a dip sample of 19 PMP's over a 12-month period (Jan – Dec 2024):

Before intervention:

- 19 PMP's totalled 141 reported DA incidents prior to intervention
- based on the data, should trends have continued in the same way without the intervention, data suggests a further 197 incidents (40% increase) anticipated, without any intervention

After intervention:

- three months following the PMP's being finalised, the reported incidents across all 19 PMP's totalled 23 instead of 197 that were expected
- all 19 PMP's showed a clear reduction following interventions
- six showed 100% reduction
- four had 40-90% reduction
- this saved over 2,000 hours of police time

Internally, there had been an increase in confidence in the forces ability to see hidden, high threat relationships. Furthermore, front line officers have greater access to relevant data within domestic abuse, which allows attendance of investigation to be more efficient and effective.

Learning

Embedded team

It is essential for analysts and developers to be embedded within the TAU team to help produce the data which is useful for the operational front line. This drove performance and ensured that high-risk relationships were being responded to in a way that was understood by officers and could be utilised effectively.

Culture change

The culture change was and remains a key element. The force found that the new process has the ability to see hidden threat and risk within standard or medium DASH, whilst teams have developed strong mindsets to engage with high-risk DASH, asking teams to deal with a Standard or medium DASH as a high Threat has been challenging. This was overcome through use of language, being explicitly clear regarding what the threat is and where it comes from, building in the technical ability to find the source of the threat / cluster within our IT systems and developing root and branch training.

Assessment

It was important to remember that the assessment of each PMP could be influenced by the enhanced supported offered by police and partners during the intervention, and it was important to understand that many DA victims are unable to report to the police. The more engaged victims are with relevant professionals, the more likely they or the professionals are to identify and report incidents, therefore the assessment cannot purely be made on a reduction in police reports alone.

Individual vulnerabilities

The subjects of the TAU PMPs have various vulnerabilities, and the interventions targeted are designed to support needs based on their current issues, and previous involvement. Such interventions at times require the consent of the subject as certain support organisations will only accept referrals if the subject consents to them.

The other issue is the willingness of the subjects to engage or be able to engage with the support offered and referrals made. When asked what support they require, the subjects are encouraged to disclose their current support needs and without the willingness to do so the necessary and specific support they require is not recognised or targeted. The victim and/or the perpetrators not recognising the concerns raised by police and professionals as to the toxicity and volatility of their relationship, will lead to interventions failing and the risk/threat from their relationship remaining.

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