

Project Bright Light: Transforming the police response to domestic abuse

Project Bright Light aimed to lay the foundation for radically improving the police response to domestic abuse by applying Operation Soteria's 'six Pillar' methodological approach.

Key details

Lead institution	Cardiff University
Police region	Wales
Collaboration and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Amanda Robinson, Cardiff University (corresponding researcher) Contact the researcher • Prof Emma Williams, Anglia Ruskin University • Prof Nicole Westmarland, Durham University • Dr Kelly Johnson, University of Glasgow • Jo Lovett, London Metropolitan University • Fiona Vera-Gray, London Metropolitan University • Tiggey May, Birkbeck, University of London • Prof Katrin Hohl, City St George's, University of London • Avon and Somerset Police
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	January 2025

Research context

In recent years, multiple reports have highlighted significant failures in the policing response to domestic abuse, suggesting it is beset with a range of issues similar to the systemic problems that prompted Project Bluestone and Operation Soteria. Shared organisational issues have also been found in numerous local and national reviews of policing:

- a deficit in specialist knowledge, professionalism and competence
- under-resourced and inexperienced officers
- poor data quality and data analytics to inform operational and strategic decision-making
- ineffective and patchy learning and development approaches
- the poor use of digital forensic evidence in case building

Aims

Project Bright Light involved close police-academic co-production to collect, analyse and interpret a range of data sources to examine the following six topics:

- investigation and safeguarding
- disruption and deterrence
- victim-centred response
- learning, development and officer wellbeing
- data and performance
- digital evidence

The overall aim of the research was to map the force's current approach to domestic abuse to suggest evidence-informed, practical ideas to help transform how police operate in each of the six pillar areas. Specific findings from each of the pillars are described in sections of this report.

These findings coalesce into an overarching theme: the statutory definition of domestic abuse is too broad for effective operational policing. Conflating various victim-suspect relationships into a single domestic abuse category challenges police operations and compromises the delivery of victim-centred, suspect-focused and context-led policing. These findings reflect significant and systemic issues affecting all police forces across England and Wales, leading us to propose national policy implications. In addition, they point to the need for a transformational change programme based on these findings to enable police to consistently deliver victim-centred, suspect-focused and context-led responses to domestic abuse.

Research objectives

Map the force's current approach to domestic abuse and identify its strengths, weaknesses and blind spots. Develop evidence-informed, practical ideas to improve:

- the quality of the frontline response (including by safer neighbourhood teams), investigations and safeguarding
- disruption and deterrence of known perpetrators from causing further harm
- officer engagement with and support of victims, both operationally (including by frontline patrol officers and safer neighbourhoods officers) and strategically through multi-agency arrangements
- the learning and development offer as well as well-being support for officers
- the collection and use of data to support operational and strategic domestic abuse policing
- the use of digital technologies within investigation, safeguarding and prevention

Research methodology

The research was conducted between January and May 2025 and was grounded in the methodological approach established by Operation Soteria. This involved close police-academic co-production and the application of a framework of six interconnected pillars to guide the fieldwork:

- investigation and safeguarding
- disruption and deterrence
- victim-centred response
- learning, development and officer wellbeing
- data and performance
- digital evidence

pillars one, two and three are directly concerned with operational policing of domestic abuse and pillars four, five and six are enabling pillars, providing crucial structural and strategic support for these activities.

Each pillar employed a mixed-methods approach, suited to its specific focus, which is described in the individual pillar sections of the report. Our data sources included:

- three-year dataset of all domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the force during 2022 to 2024
- analysis of a subset of case files and digital processing notices
- approximately 30 focus groups and 60 interviews with police
- online survey of partner agency perspectives
- multiple in-person site visits and online observations of meetings

- review of body-worn video, force policies, guidance and templates along with other relevant information

Summary of findings

This project was completed in May 2025.

- Robinson AL and others. 2025. 'Project Bright Light transforming the police response to domestic abuse'. [Read report in National Police Library](#)
- Vera-Gray F and others. 2025. 'Project Bright Light: National Policy Briefing'. Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit. [Read report in National Police Library](#)
- Robinson AL and McPhee D. 2026. [An ecological approach to understanding police domestic abuse investigations](#). Policing: An International Journal.