

Police officers responses to women who resist an intimate abuser with non-fatal force

Project examining police officers' decision making regarding if and whom to arrest in domestic abuse callouts where there are counter allegations.

Key details

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Police region	North West
Level of research	PhD
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Research context

This study seeks to understand police officers' assessments and subsequent decision making in domestic abuse callouts where there are counter allegations and/or where the woman is listed as the perpetrator. This is the subject of this PhD study because we do not know much about the process of this decision making, yet. Neither do we know how sergeants who review these decisions might come to either agree or reject them (Mufti? and others, 2007).

The study acknowledges the special role police officers have in combating domestic violence. They are often the first ones to address it in domestic abuse callouts, and their responses matter: to victims, perpetrators and to the public and its understanding of these offences (Townsend and others, 2006).

Knowledge of what might influence officers' decision making and, respectively, sergeants' reviews in this regard is crucial to optimising police responses to victims and perpetrators. Exploring the drivers of and influences on how police officers respond to such incidents, and their decisions around arrest via interviews with officers will hopefully provide insights into what is driving these decisions and how police responses may be more victim focused.

The outcomes of this study are therefore addressed at frontline officers handling domestic abuse callouts and sergeants reviewing officers' decisions made in such callouts.

Aim

- To conduct a qualitative research study that examines police officers' responses to women victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) who resist an intimate abuser with non-fatal force, physical or non-physical, and/or who are listed as the primary abuser where there are counter allegations.

Objectives

- To explore the perceptions and responses of police officers to women who resist in contexts of IPV.
- To describe the current criminal justice and policy context in which these decisions are grounded and, in turn, their effect on public perception and policy making.

Research methodology

- A qualitative approach will be used to capture police officers' views of women who respond to an intimate abuser with physical or non-physical force, and provide insight into the practices, policies, guidance and beliefs that might inform these views and officers' decision making at domestic abuse callouts, particularly decisions about whether and whom to arrest.
- A sample size of 15 to 20 participants of mixed gender, ranks, and, if possible, age will be collected from two forces across England and Wales.
- Participants will have either been the officer in case at a domestic abuse incident within the last year where there were heterosexual intimate partner domestic abuse counter allegations and/or the woman was listed as the perpetrator in one or more incidents between the parties. Or, they are a sergeant with experience of reviewing decision making in these cases.
- The project will employ an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) design: an innovative, strengths-based interview approach which aims to discover and foster positive change in organisations (Jardine

and van Dijk, 2023). In semi-structured interviews, topics, themes or areas will be covered which are relevant to the study subject.

- Recognising that police officers are busy professionals operating under time constraint, different options for interviews will be provided, including in-person, online via Microsoft Teams and/or phone interviews.
- Thematic data analysis will allow the identification, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data patterns. Relevant themes will be identified with the help of coding, remaining open to new themes that may emerge (Bryman, 2015).
- NVivo software will be used as an organisational tool to categorise the data to find patterns in the thematic analysis. The analysis will be manually conducted under the guidance of supervisors.

Research participation

The research will involve interviews with frontline officers responding to domestic abuse, and reviewing sergeants. For the complete study, a sample size of 15 to 20 participants will be sought of mixed gender, ranks and, if possible, age from two forces across England and Wales.

Participants will have either been the officer in case at a domestic abuse incident within the last year where there were heterosexual intimate partner domestic abuse counter allegations and/or the woman was listed as the perpetrator in one or more incidents between the parties. Or, they are a sergeant with experience of reviewing decision making in these cases.

References

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Jardine M and van Dijk AJ. (2023). 'Why do positive experiences matter?: Appreciative inquiry in ethnography for understanding and transforming policing'. In Routledge International Handbook of Police Ethnography, pages 319–334. London: Routledge.

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