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Community safety practice briefing

Making it count

A practical guide to collecting and managing domestic violence data

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The collection, management and sharing of data are central to the development of effective strategies for tackling domestic violence. This briefing provides a practical guide for local partnership agencies involved in this process. It examines the rationale for data collection, outlines the processes required to deliver this work effectively, and identifies key tips for overcoming barriers through a problem-solving table. It is aimed at all agencies within the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

Contents

2	<i>Introduction</i>
2	<i>What is domestic violence?</i>
2	<i>The nature and extent of domestic violence</i>
2	<i>Under-reporting and under-recording</i>
3	<i>Why collect data on domestic violence?</i>
4	<i>Legislative powers</i>
4	<i>Making the most of partnerships</i>
4	<i>Collecting data on domestic violence: some general principles</i>
4	<i>Who should collect data?</i>
5	<i>Co-ordinating data collection</i>
5	<i>Separating the survivor from the perpetrator</i>
7	<i>Using data to develop effective responses</i>
7	<i>Conclusion</i>
7	<i>Further advice and guidance</i>
8	<i>Bibliography</i>
8	<i>Footnotes</i>

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Introduction

The collection, management and sharing of data are central to the development of effective strategies for tackling domestic violence. This process enables partnerships to scope the extent and nature of domestic violence, as well as tracking survivors through the plethora of agencies that are often contacted for support, guidance and help.

Given the challenging nature of tackling domestic violence, the diversity of agencies contacted by survivors and the need to ensure confidentiality at all times, collecting data can be a complex and problematic process. This is often caused by a lack of understanding by agencies of benefits of collecting and sharing data and of the legislative powers that enable Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP) to collect data for the purposes of reducing crime and disorder. This is often compounded with barriers from front-line staff with regard to asking survivors about domestic violence and collecting and recording information.

This briefing provides a practical guide for local partnership agencies with regard to the collection, sharing, management and use of domestic violence data. It examines the rationale for data collection, outlines the processes required to deliver this work effectively, and identifies key tips for overcoming barriers through a problem-solving table. It is aimed at all agencies within the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, all of which should be engaged in the process of monitoring domestic violence.

A note on language

In line with common practice among groups working with women affected by domestic violence, the word 'survivor', not 'victim', is used in this briefing to describe those affected by domestic violence.

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence and abuse is best described as the use of physical and/or emotional abuse or violence, including undermining of self confidence, sexual violence or the threat of violence, by a person who is or has been in a close relationship.¹

Domestic violence can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse's or partner's property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone, and stalking.

It can also include violence perpetrated by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim. It can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The wide adverse effects of living with domestic violence for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. They link to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance abuse, mental health problems and homelessness.

Domestic violence is not a 'one-off' occurrence but is frequent and persistent aimed at instilling fear into, and compliance from, the victim.

The nature and extent of domestic violence

Domestic violence accounts for the highest percentage of violent crime in the UK, which is even more significant given the high levels of under-reporting and under-recording of incidents by survivors and agencies, respectively.

The statistics that are available do provide some picture of the prevalence and nature of violence in the home, for example:

- Every week two women are killed in the UK by their current or ex partner.²
- 30 per cent of women experience an act of violence³ by a male partner at some point in their lives.
- Every year in England and Wales approximately 63,000 women and children spend at least one night in a refuge.
- Domestic violence accounts for one quarter of all violent crime.⁴

Research has also demonstrated the significant range and number of agencies that tend to be contacted by survivors for help and support as a result of domestic violence, ranging from criminal justice agencies, specific domestic violence services, health, housing, education, employers, etc. It was reported in *Living Without Fear*⁵ that survivors will often contact up to up to ten agencies before receiving the help they need.

Under-reporting and under-recording

There are high levels of under-reporting by survivors to agencies and significant under-recording of incidents by agencies, which results in a lack of information about the true nature and extent of domestic violence, locally, regionally and nationally.

Under-reporting

It is estimated that only 25 per cent of survivors will report to the police and 2 per cent to Women's Aid,⁶ and that survivors will suffer an average of 35–37 assaults for an average period of seven years before informing any agency.⁷

These high levels of under reporting are caused by a number of factors, including, for example:

- fear of not being believed
- not being 'asked' by professionals
- fear of reprisals from the perpetrator
- love
- shame
- guilt

Under-recording

In addition to under-reporting, there are often a range of reasons why agencies do not record information on domestic violence with regard to clients and staff, including:

- lack of experience of domestic violence issues
- fear of responding to survivors and the potential outcome
- it being perceived as a 'private issue'
- lack of resources or time
- lack of understanding with regard to confidentiality issues
- concerns about data protection issues

Why collect data on domestic violence?

It is estimated that only nine per cent of agencies involved in carrying out work related to domestic violence collect data.⁸ This results in relatively little evidence being available about the scale and nature of work being undertaken by agencies in relation to domestic violence, which may result in:

- threats to survivors' safety due to information not being used effectively
- survivors often having to disclose their experiences to several different agencies
- a failure to share information between agencies, resulting in several agencies each having a partial

picture of cases. This is likely to prevent the identification of those survivors most at risk, which could limit the appropriateness of their response.

- offenders often not being made as accountable for their actions as they could be, due to information about previous incidents or the escalation of violence not being recorded.
- a failure to monitor the effectiveness of each agency's response.
- resources not being adequately allocated to domestic violence services, because the scale of the workload is not known.

The main purpose of collecting data is to ensure that women and children's safety is maximised by 'sharing information among practitioners in a way that will hold individual offenders accountable and maintain accountability among various agencies in the criminal justice system'.⁹

Even where domestic violence against the woman is recognised, people are often unaware of the impact that this can have on children:

- In 90 per cent of domestic assaults on women which occur in the home, children are in the same or an adjacent room.¹⁰
- Over a third of children of domestic violence survivors are aware of the abuse.¹¹
- Child abuse by a male parent is 15 times more likely to occur in a home where domestic violence is present.¹²

A range of national guidance¹³ has highlighted the need for and benefits of collecting co-ordinated domestic violence data for the purposes of developing effective strategies:

- assessing the prevalence of domestic violence
- assessing the forms and severity of violence and abuse experienced by survivors
- understanding the impact of domestic violence on cross cutting issues, such as gender, race, disability, nationality, age, etc.
- scoping the range of agencies currently being assessed by survivors
- scoping the range of needs and services provided to survivors
- developing baseline figures for which to assess the effectiveness of interventions

- providing evidence of levels of need and service provision for the purposes of funding

The collection of co-ordinated data will enable partner agencies to monitor the take up of services by survivors and to measure the impact of interventions against baseline figures set.

In addition to this, the process of monitoring will increase levels of awareness of domestic violence by agencies, which will should have an impact on the number of referrals of survivors to agencies for help and support. This will lead to earlier interventions for survivors and an overall reduction in the number of 'repeat presentations' by survivors to different agencies.

This will have cost benefits for a range of agencies that are currently responding to the symptoms of domestic violence, by enabling specialist agencies to tackle the root cause.

Legislative powers

Collecting data for the purposes of reducing crime and disorder is currently a priority for local CDRPs under Section 117 of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) (CDA). This legislation provides 'explicit powers for people to disclose information to a number of agencies if the disclosure is necessary or expedient' for the purposes of reducing crime and disorder.

It is essential that information data sharing protocols are developed and signed up to by all partner agencies, to ensure that information is handled and shared appropriately.

Guidance to the CDA (1998) states that the Data Protection Act (1998) (DPA) should not be used as a barrier to collecting and sharing information. Rather, it should be used as a tool to inform partnerships about appropriate data collection, which is shared in accordance with relevant legislation.

To ensure compliance with the CDA, CDRPs should therefore be collecting and sharing information from a range of partner agencies for the purposes of developing effective crime and disorder audits and strategies to reduce domestic violence. However, this information should be collected and shared in accordance with the DPA (1998) and the Human Rights Act (2000) (HRA).

Making the most of partnerships

Because no single agency can tackle domestic violence and survivors contact a whole range of agencies, it is essential that a partnership is developed between key agencies for the purposes of collecting information.

This partnership is best developed through local domestic violence forums, which should have a strategic focus and report back to the local CDRP to ensure that strategic issues are developed and acted upon, appropriately, by local partnerships. This will also enable a clear line of accountability to be developed.

Collecting data on domestic violence: some general principles

In order to facilitate the effective collation and analysis of domestic violence data it is essential that partner agencies fulfil a range of criteria, including:

- developing a shared definition of domestic violence
- developing and implementing (across all partner agencies) agreed information sharing protocols under the CDRP, which should be developed in accordance with the CDA (1998), the DPA (1998), and the HRA (1998)
- sharing information across a wide range of agencies to ensure the identification of cross-cutting strategic issues across different thematic areas of work
- developing co-ordinated domestic violence policies and good practice guidance for front line staff and managers
- selecting a dedicated liaison officer in each agency to take responsibility for staff training and the dissemination of information
- delivering multi-agency domestic violence training for all staff in participating agencies, including front-line staff and managers
- selecting a central, independent data collection and analysis point for data to be collected, analysed and disseminated
- ensuring the need for confidentiality for survivors and the security of data

Who should collect data?

As many agencies as possible should be involved in the recording process. In addition to statutory, public sector partners (local authority, police, probation, health service and fire service), voluntary and private sector organisations and companies should be involved, in order to give as many people as possible the opportunity to report domestic violence.

Agencies should record domestic violence with regard to staff as well as service users.

Lead agency

On the whole, it is more practical for one agency to take responsibility of collecting and maintaining information within one central and 'independent' database. Different agencies may take this role in different areas, depending on which organisation has the resources to carry this work forward.

Co-ordinating data collection

Inter-Agency Monitoring Forms

It is essential that agencies collect co-ordinated data through the development of 'inter-agency/common monitoring forms' or other common systems to be used by partner agencies, to facilitate the development of data that will:

- be shared between agencies
- be used to generate baseline data from which to measure the impact of interventions and their cost effectiveness
- enable partner agencies to share key information to assist in the tracking of survivors
- provide evidence needed for the purposes of crime and disorder strategies and potential funding opportunities

It is equally important to have a realistic assessment of the potential for each agency to contribute to the database – different agencies will have varying levels of capacity and experience to contribute to data gathering.

One way around this is to consider developing a tiered data reporting system. This will have different levels of detail required from different agencies – perhaps relating to how frequently or how intensively the organisation works with survivors of abuse. This will allow agencies to respond with different levels of commitment, and may encourage more agencies to engage with data collection.

Central database

Each partnership should develop a central database to collate, analyse and disseminate the data gathered. This information should be held securely and accessed by dedicated staff, who have received relevant and appropriate training, ie data protection training.

Because many survivors do not wish to report to the police, It is important that this database is located separately from the police.

Type of data required

Home Office guidance ¹⁴ sets out the standards for the data that CDRPs should collect. This should include:

- a unique 'client code', to reduce double counting and to enable the tracking of survivors through different agencies
- the demographics of the survivor, perpetrator and child/children, and other relevant information (ie gender, age, racial origin, sexuality habitation status, disabilities, etc)
- the nature and duration of the relationship between the survivor and the perpetrator
- a distinction between current and previous incident/s which have taken place (including date, type, severity of injury, as well as previous injury history)
- repeat victimisation
- contact made with any agencies for help/support (including date of contact, help requested, outcome of the contact)
- criminal and civil legal process information
- information about referrals of survivors on to other agencies

Separating the survivor from the perpetrator

It is imperative that survivors are asked separately from their partner about violence and abuse to ensure their safety. For agencies that would see clients on an appointment basis, it is good practice (if possible) to develop procedures that routinely separate all female clients from their partners for a short period. This will enable staff to ask questions in privacy and safety.

In addition, data on perpetrators should be kept separate from data on the survivor: under the DPA (1998), a person has the right to access any information about themselves, which may enable perpetrators to view details on the survivor if they are kept together.

SOME COMMON PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Table 1 Some common problems and suggested solutions

Common difficulties	Suggested solutions
Frontline staff not asking about domestic violence when faced by a suspected survivor of abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provision of domestic violence awareness training that includes methods of posing sensitive questions. ● Clear agency policies and procedures for dealing with domestic violence issues. ● Staff awareness of resources available to provide support and advice to survivors. ● Monitoring the implementation of policies and procedures. ● Identifying a lead officer within each agency to provide support and information to other members of staff.
Staff not recording or returning data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provision of training to increase awareness of rationale for, and methods of, collecting data. ● Establishing routine systems or questioning and recording information to ensure data has to be recorded as part of job roles. ● Monitoring the completion and returning of forms for staff. ● Providing regular feedback on what the aggregate information reveals, and how it is being used to develop services. ● Identifying a lead officer within each agency to provide support and information to other members of staff.
Agencies failing or refusing to share data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Address any concerns about additional workloads by keeping recording mechanisms close to existing work methods, and by considering minimising data requirements. ● Identify benefits of, and uses for data. ● Address any confidentiality issues that may have arisen. ● Training for staff on the requirements to collect data under the CDA (1998), DPA (1998) and HRA (2000).
Consent and confidentiality issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consent from survivors does not have to be obtained with regard to the collection and dissemination of non-personal/identifiable information. ● Ensure that survivors of abuse are asked to consent to any personal details being recorded and shared with other agencies. ● Where clients do not consent to having their data recorded, no personal records should be put on the database - although anonymised data may still be collected.
Quality of data recording is poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provision of training for staff completing returns. ● Procedures set up for managers/the central collating agency to quality check forms and feedback findings. ● Consider simplification of data requested.

Using data to develop effective responses

The following are some examples of how the data, once collected, could be used to develop effective local responses to domestic violence.

- **Child protection** Domestic violence and child protection policies and procedures could be linked, eg an agreed number of police call outs to an address where there are children should trigger a response from the child protection register.
- **Scaled response** The number or frequency of previous calls to the same address could be used to determine the most appropriate level of agency response.¹⁵
- **Maximising survivor safety** All relevant professionals should be fully aware of the existence of injunctions, powers of arrest, bail conditions, or procedures under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Any information about breaches should be shared with relevant agencies (courts, probation service, etc). Any threats made against women and their children (either directly to them or to agency staff) should be recorded and an assessment made as to whether additional safety measures are required.¹⁶
- **Making the offender accountable** Each part of the legal system should be aware of the restrictions placed on an offender's behaviour by individual agencies (eg the police or courts), so that any breaches can be responded to effectively.
- **Maximising survivors' use of the data** If survivors have access to the data, they can use reports to inform other agencies of their experiences, rather than having to personally disclose very sensitive details to each individual agency. It is essential that agencies record the date, severity of the violence and a range of other details, as well as other agency involvement, relating to every reported incident, so that if the victim wishes to prosecute she has full evidence at her disposal.
- **Inter-agency case management** In this way, any delays in processing individual cases or reacting to breaches can be identified. (This will involve recognising the impact that such delays can have on the victim, who might be intimidated into removing charges by the perpetrator.)¹⁷
- **Equal opportunities** Data can and should be analysed to identify any bias in providing effective services that might arise in relation to age, class, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, etc.

- **Performance monitoring** Data can be used to assess the achievements of service implementation. Key outcomes can be identified, and the progress towards any targets can be monitored through the establishment of baselines.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is the highest-volume single category of violent crime, yet one of the most under-reported by survivors and under-recorded by agencies. It is imperative, therefore, that local partnerships recognise the need to develop recording and monitoring systems as an integral part of tackling domestic violence effectively.

Domestic violence increases in severity and frequency over time, which will result in survivors contacting a number of agencies for a range of help and support, often without disclosing the root cause - domestic violence. Without adequate integrated systems to monitor and share information about domestic violence, agencies will never be able to adequately deal with and respond to survivors. This will result in a failure to identify those women and children most at risk or becoming yet another statistic.

Further advice and guidance

Clear and concise guidance is available on recording data on racist incidents, which covers many issues relevant to the domestic violence field. Guidance for agencies within and outside the criminal justice field can be found at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/ppd/oppu/code.htm

Further advice can also be obtained from:

Information Sharing & Data Exchange
Action Against Crime & Disorder Unit
Home Office, Room 528
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT
Helpline: 020 7273 2179
E-mail: Information.Sharing@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

The following government publications contain guidance on recording and monitoring data on domestic violence:

- *Raising the Standards* is an Inter-Departmental Initiative to help address domestic violence throughout the UK.
- The Home Office has published *Living Without Fear* (1999) and *Guidance for agencies: collecting and managing data* (2000).
- The Department of Health published *Guidance on Domestic Violence* in 2000.

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Footnotes

- 1 Domestic Violence definition taken from 'Raising the Standards' Inter-Departmental Initiative to help address domestic violence throughout the UK and Northern Ireland. Another definition commonly used is from the Home Office, which is: 'Any violence between current or former partners in an intimate relationship wherever and whenever it occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or financial abuse.' This is a gender-neutral definition, although the Home Office (like many other organisations) recognises that in most cases of domestic violence, women are abused by their male partners.
- 2 Malos E. and Hague G. 1993
- 3 'More severe than being pushed, grabbed or shaken'; Mooney 1994
- 4 British Crime Survey 1998
- 5 The Cabinet Office, 1999 Home Office
- 6 British Crime Survey 1996
- 7 Yearnshire S. 1997
- 8 Stanko *et al.*, 1998
- 9 Falk and Helgeson, 1999
- 10 Mayhew *et al.* 1993
- 11 British Crime Survey 1996
- 12 McKiernan and McKay 1994
- 13 *Guidance for agencies: collecting and managing data*, Home Office 2000; *Domestic Violence Guidance*, Department of Health 2000; *Raising the Standards Inter-Departmental Government Initiative to address domestic violence*, 2002
- 14 *Guidance for agencies: collecting and managing data*, Home Office (2000)
- 15 Hanmer *et al.*, 1999; Bridgeman and Hobbs, 1997
- 16 Falk and Helgeson, 1999
- 17 Falk and Helgeson, 1999