HIGH HARM HIGH FREQUENCY

Police Strategies for Managing Serious Domestic Abuse Perpetrators

Foreword

Contents

In February 2023 the Government released its Strategic Policing Requirement, including details of how domestic abuse should be tackled, with the key message being that "the relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police", with measures proposed to enhance police capacity to achieve this. Proposed changes to be piloted include tagging of domestic abuse offenders, compelling offenders to notify police of name or address changes, and compelling perpetrators to attend behaviour change programmes. The Home Office plans to develop a new risk assessment tool to identify dangerous domestic abuse perpetrators (including those with no previous convictions). The government stressed to Chief Constables that they must focus on "the most dangerous and repeat VAWG perpetrators" and need to ensure that first responders, public protection teams, and local neighbourhood teams are all aware who are the most dangerous perpetrators in their force areas, and to proactively address their offending.

About the researchers

Barry Godfrey is Professor of Social Justice at the University of Liverpool. He has published on crime, offending, policing, and punishment, and frequently appears in the media. Dr Jane Richardson is a researcher in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology at the University of Liverpool who works on domestic abuse. In 2020/2021 together with international expert in domestic abuse Professor Sandra Walklate they formed part of an ESRC funded research team which investigated police and court innovations in relation to domestic abuse during and after the CV19 pandemic. This group now work with a number of police forces to improve response to victims of domestic abuse and better management of the most serious and prolific domestic abuse perpetrators.

1. High Harm High Frequency Domestic Abuse Offenders

Domestic Abuse comprises a significant proportion of incidents reported to police (between 15% and 20%). There are approximately 400,000 domestic abuse perpetrators in England and Wales. That overall total contains a small number of Repeat and Serial offenders. Repeat offenders are defined by *Safe Lives* (2018) as people in intimate relationships who offend against the same victim within a year of their last referral to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), which is approximately a third of all people currently on MARAC according to *Safe Lives*. In 2015, the College of Policing stated that definitions of repeat perpetrators were unhelpful because 'the number of times a report has been made to the police is inherently unreliable due to the way in which domestic abuse is reported/not reported. Most victims and perpetrators have experienced or engaged in domestic abuse multiple times before a first report is made so they are, in reality, already repeat cases' (**www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/context-and-dynamics-domestic-abuse#victim-and-perpetrator-definitions**). Whereas 'repeat victim' is an established and meaningful police term, the term 'repeat perpetrator' has lost currency, and there are no available national or local statistics of the number of repeat offenders.

The term 'Serial' is similarly problematic, with many competing definitions. Within just Wales, for example, North Wales police stipulated that to satisfy the definition there must be a minimum of two or more victims within one year; Gwent police, two or more unconnected victims

within no set time limit; Dyfed Powys, two or more victims over a three-year period; and South Wales three victims within one year (Robinson, Clancy, and Hanks 2014). Nevertheless, the College of Policing definition (2022) has now been widely adopted. They define serial offenders as having committed or threatened to commit domestic abuse against two or more victims (current or former intimate partners and family members) over any time period. Standardisation of terms and definitions is designed to facilitate better perpetrator management both within an individual force and between forces, although there is still considerable blurring between the two definitions, not least because most, if not all, serial offenders are also repeat offenders and because in practice there is little difference in offending behaviour between repeat and serial offenders. For example, a male born 1976 living in Cheshire offended against 'Partner 1' a total of four times in 2018 and 2019; against 'Partner 2' in 2019; against 'Partner 3' in 2021 and 2022 (7 times) and also against 'Partner 2' again in 2022. This individual therefore meets both the Repeat and Serial definition, as do almost all Serial offenders. For the purposes of our research we use High Harm High Frequency Offenders (HHHF) to refer to people who have offended more than once against two or more current or former intimate partners or family members. Whilst it is unhelpful to continually proliferate terms with different definitions, HHHF captures offenders who commit the same type of offence against intimate partners or family members in a much more meaningful and practical way than other definitions.

Understanding how HHHF offenders are currently managed, whether and why their offending reduces, and how they can be better identified and managed in the future is essential for the success of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy (**www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy**). Launched by the government in 2021, VAWG is a national strategy designed primarily to prioritise the safety of women and girls, introduce new offences to address controlling and coercive behaviour, and to prioritise the relentless pursuit of perpetrators (Home Office Policy Paper 2021). Addressing the problem of HHHF is central to reducing the number of victims, and to eradication of persistent domestic abuse.

Accordingly, research partnerships between academics and police have previously analysed how prolific domestic abuse perpetrators are identified, including the development and testing of a perpetrator identification tool (Robinson and Clancy 2015); using statistical modelling to predict high risk offenders prospectively (Bland and Ariel, 2020); and explaining the potential routes to domestic homicide (Monckton-Smith 2021; Chantler et al 2022). Indeed, our interest in HHHF was prompted by senior policy and operational police officers from 23 police forces discussing the pro-active targeting of high risk repeat domestic abuse offenders in their force-areas during the Covid lockdown period. During the course of the 2020-21 ESRC Shadow Pandemic project, we heard that some forces were increasing coordination between Criminal Justice and Witness Care; implementing more effective information sharing between

Police and CPS to prioritise trials of high-risk domestic abuse offenders; and attempting to more frequently secure remands in custody in court proceedings. In particular, many forces were establishing greater levels of surveillance for prolific high-risk domestic abuse offenders:

"We know a lot of our regular names that come through ... we'll keep an eye on them. ... our analytical Department has been asked to look at the top 10... (South-East force).

"if you have top 20 nominals who are causing the highest risk or the highest harm, collate it all with a view to a coercive control, which will gain a more considerable more robust sentence for that offender and put him or her away for a longer period of time" (Midlands force).

"we are focusing on the top 10 domestic abuse perpetrators for each area ... It's just targeting them ... created a 'plan on a page' to set out exactly what we wanted officers and relevant police staff to do ... trying to reduce repeats domestic abuse offending in the highest risk cases" (North-West force).

These measures were in place before at some level in all forces but were bolstered during the pandemic period when a rise in domestic abuse incidents was anticipated, and when both reporting and response may have been hindered by lockdown measures. Many forces have kept, and increased, their focus on HHHF following the pandemic, but there has been little evaluation of which strategies worked most effectively (or whether they worked at all).

This project, funded by the N8 Policing Research Partnership (www.n8prp.org.uk), aimed to improve understandings

of successful disruption and offender management strategies in order to build analytical capacity and refine police policy and practice towards HHHF offenders. The research results primarily from a partnership with Cheshire Police, a force which covers an area of 946 square miles, a mixture of rural and urban areas, with a population approximately one million; and the research was further supported by Merseyside, Cumbria, Sussex, and Suffolk police forces (see Acknowledgements).

2. Aims and Objectives

3. Current strategies to address repeat and serial domestic abuse offending

In 2022, in Cheshire alone there were 21,059 domestic abuse incidents, of which 17,154 were crimed, resulting in 1533 prosecutions (with an 81% conviction rate). The proportion of domestic abuse within all crime is 19% in Cheshire, which is in line with national figures (ONS data 2022). This project investigated the ability to analyse various strategies used by Cheshire and other police forces to disrupt the criminal careers of HHHF domestic abuse offenders. Knowing which strategies work most effectively in terms of reducing re-offending in HHHF DA offenders carries important implications for managing offending behaviour, improving victim-survivor engagement, and reducing operational policing costs.

In particular the project:

• Described the process by which police forces currently identify and manage HHHF domestic abuse offenders into and through their systems and processes.

• Recorded how long individuals remain on targeted processes (such as SDAP – Serial Domestic Abuse Perpetrators) and analysed their offending trajectories over time.

• Matched policing strategies against trends in reoffending/desistence from offending.

• Disseminated good practice in managing HHHF domestic abuse offenders.

Data and Methods

• We carried out an evaluation of the policies and procedures relating to domestic abuse and HHHF offenders through an analysis of documentation issued in South Yorkshire, Cumbria, Sussex, and Suffolk.

• We interviewed officers including Heads of Public Protection, IOM Leads, Harm Reduction Unit Leads; DA leads, Head of Safeguarding, Chief Constables and ACCs, Force Improvement and innovation co-ordinators, Wanted Persons Operational Lead, Manager of Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Unit, Head of Crime, Safeguarding and Incident Management, Head of Custody and Joint Justice Service, Head of Complex Domestic Abuse and Stalking Unit, and conducted a focus group formed from Complex Domestic Abuse and Stalking Unit Team. Interviews were conducted face to face or remotely using Microsoft Teams and auto transcribed using Otter AI. The interviews were used, together with the documentary analysis, to understand current policies and practices in each force, and to produce charts of the processes for managing high harm DA offenders in each force (see Appendix 1).

• Analysed Cheshire SDAP data for 2000 to 2019 for a sample of 112 offenders, with numbers of offences committed each month. This was used to assess scale and rate of offending for SDAP offenders. The data for one cohort, those offenders on the SDAP register in 2019, included details of the offences/incidents in which an individual was a perpetrator and/ or a victim (date, home office offence code, CJS outcome codes) (Appendix 2).

• Analysed data from Cheshire police for the top ten offenders currently being managed on SDAP (SDAP Top 10). For each incident reported to police the data records the complainant (anonymised for the purposes of the research), where

the incident took place, what police action was taken, and the criminal justice outcome (narrative cases studies can be found in Appendix 3). Using the information, we produced an aggregate picture of this group of HHHF perpetrators and their offending profile and also a timeline for each individual, showing their offending behaviour/victimisation over time, who they offend with, and against (Appendix 4). Where possible this offending timeline was matched against the strategies being used to manage that individual.

Positive Action

In 2019, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) expressed concerns about the falling levels of arrests in domestic abuse cases. Most forces now have a positive action policy, which means that, in general, the force supports the arrest of a suspect when dealing with domestic abuse incidents, provided that the grounds exist (**www.justiceinspectorates.gov. uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/the- police-response-to-domestic-abuse- an-update-report.pdf**) and when it is a necessary and proportionate response (https://www.college. police.uk/app/major-investigation- and-public-protection/domestic- abuse/arrest-and-other-positive- approaches). In 2022, the College of Policing issued a detailed discussion of positive action and the police response to domestic abuse (**www. gov.uk/government/publications/ police-use-of-protective-measures- in-cases-of-violence-against- women-and-girls/a-duty-to-protect- police-use-of-protective-measures- in-cases-involving-violence-against- women-and-girls#summary**). In 2019 the number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes nationally was 32, and for Cheshire 19. In 2022, the national rate was 30, and Cheshire had increased to 31 (ONS Data 2022). There has been little evaluation of the impact of the police's first responses to domestic abuse in the UK. Vigurs et al (2016) suggested that attendance by police, in and of itself, was more effective than no intervention at all. Evidence from the USA suggested that arrest leads to lower levels of re-offending, while other evidence showed more mixed results

(Bland and Ariel 2020). Myhill (2018) argued that the lack of evidence of the positive effect of arrest does not mean it is an inappropriate measure in the UK because it allows more comprehensive recording to take place, which can then inform police understanding of patterns of coercive control and repeat offending. Westmarland et al (2014) stated that graded response interventions, where the response was based on the suspect's behaviour and their offending background, showed benefits. West Yorkshire police (see Hanmer et al, 1999) found that graded response, where intervention was based on the number of times police had already attended for that offender, could reduce repeat offending and that early intervention in particular had an effect on reducing repeat incidents. Positive action remains the default approach for Neighbourhood/Response when attending domestic incidents, whether the suspect involved is a repeat, serial or first-time offender.

Multi-agency risk-management partnerships

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) were established to address the needs of vulnerable victims of domestic abuse. In MARAC meetings various relevant agencies (Police, Health, Local authority children's services; Housing; Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, Probation; Local authority adult services, and other specialists) are invited to talk about the risk of future harm in relation to children, intimate partner victims, and vulnerable adults, and to draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. In some areas, a parallel

system of Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination partnerships (MATACs) were also established (Davies and Biddle 2018). The MATAC framework is similar to MARAC but with a focus on serial perpetrators of domestic abuse rather than victims. Agencies mainly use the Recency, Frequency, Gravity, Victim (RFGV) analytical process to identify offenders who should be referred to a MATAC, referrals coming from the police or partner agencies. When subjects for targeting have been determined, subject (perpetrator) profiles are created, monthly (usually) MATAC meeting are held to monitor the offender and determine the most appropriate method of targeting each perpetrator. A review of Durham MATAC (conducted in 2020 by Cooper) evaluated to what degree a MATAC intervention impacted on the offending behaviours of 'medium' risk perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse. To do this, an algorithm was created that ranked offenders according to RFGV, resulting in 94 nominals for the period under review with a control group was comprised of 44 nominals who fitted a similar problem profile. The evaluation found a 42% decrease in the volume of medium risk DA Safeguarding Assessment Forms, from 8.9 pre- MATAC to 5.7 after the programme. They also found that even those who had not fully engaged had a change in behaviour. A similar review of the Northumbria MATAC found a 65% reduction in domestic abuse offending following MATAC intervention (**www. n8prp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ sites/315/2021/10/MATAC-N8- presentation-final-11-June-2017.pdf**). Some, but not all, police forces have adopted MATAC as a system to address the offending behaviour of medium and high-risk offenders.

Perpetrator programmes

Participation in perpetrator programmes in the UK can be imposed on individuals as part of a court order following conviction – delivered by the Probation and Prison Service – or voluntary – delivered by the charity sector through self-referral, police referral, or referral by outside agencies (Bates *et al* 2017). Kelly and Westmarland's (2015) study found that perpetrator programmes operated by charities (funded either independently or funded by/in partnership with the police) could be effective, which they attributed to the intensive group work to which some offenders responded. The DRIVE pilot (2016-2019) offers the most evidence for what works for HHHF. DRIVE was developed in 2015 by Respect, Safe Lives, and Social Finance to address a gap in work with high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse (http://driveproject.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/). The project was developed out of a need to address the many perpetrators who were repeatedly offending with either the same or new victims and used a whole system approach, aiming to combine disruption with support and behaviour change, alongside protective work with victims. Where used, DRIVE did appear to be effective in the short term for the small number of perpetrators who undertook the course, and evaluations of DRIVE and other perpetrator programmes have yielded useful information and data, however they have been limited in three ways.

In practice, less than 1% of offenders begin perpetrator programmes (Respect 2021), and there is a significant drop-out rate. The importance of managing the 99% of DA offenders who do not undertake programmes has become very evident. In plain terms, even if the capacity of perpetrator programmes was massively expanded, the overwhelming majority of domestic abuse offenders would never undertake a programme and would need to be managed through other means.

Evaluations of perpetrator programmes have tended to take the programme as the starting point – comparing the outcomes for participants who undertake the programme, regardless of the point in their criminal career that they undertook the programme. Studies

have shown that early intervention in particular had an effect, but it is not known how long this effect lasts or for whom they are effective (see Kelly and Westmarland 2015). A further problem is that research has concentrated on the effectiveness of particular singular interventions, ignoring the composite impact of multiple types of intervention on the offending trajectories of individuals, or the impact of other offender management strategies on the vast majority of HHHF offenders over time. When Kelly and Westmarland (2015) wrote their review of perpetrator programmes, they considered that an impasse had been reached in this area: "*On the one hand are repeated calls for interventions that call perpetrators to account, whilst on the other a deep scepticism about both routes for so doing - perpetrator programmes and criminal justice sanctions*" (such as disruption and incapacitation).

Disruption and Incapacitation

Disruption/incapacitation strategies extend from normal police practices and desires to frustrate offending and offenders by patrolling and responding to incidents, to a set of strategies designed to target the activities of particular high-risk offenders, particularly those who do not engage with perpetrator programmes or with other offender management structures.

"is this a person that we can potentially manage and that doesn't necessarily mean manage them in a positive way in terms of you know, I will do all the all the nice stuff which is sort out their alcohol issues, sort out their drug issues, sort out some of their mental issues or whatever it is the issues have got. It can often I mean, we will keep a much closer eye on you, and we will jump on you using all the statutory tools which are available to us, whether that be restraining orders, licence, breach PSS [post sentence supervision], in order to manage your behaviour and impact on the victims."

"If you don't want to engage with us, that won't stop us working with you. But it will be from a completely different viewpoint. We will hound you about your restraining order, any breaches, we will highlight to the local police unit - that

you weren't in at your curfew time, we'll go round and arrest you, we'll knock on your mother's door, and we'll be a general pain…" (DI Reducing Reoffending Team).

Disruption can involve *bureaucratic techniques* (constructing a 'Plan on a Page'; identify pattern of offending, suspects being tagged as 'local targets' for tasking and coordination by uniformed officers at local, area and force level; markers on vehicles; completing enquiries whilst suspect in custody; striving to meet thresholds for remand); be *responsive* (enacting 'Trigger Plans'*); or pro-active* (enhanced surveillance; frequent stop search; engage when seen on streets; vehicle stops; police cars park outside the house when they need to complete paperwork; circulating photo of subject on Pub/Shop Watch; HMRC checks; briefing other professionals e.g. GPs). However, there has been very little evaluation of the effectiveness of disruption strategies, and evidence suggests that incapacitation – usually the imposition of short-term prison sentences - has little impact on re-offending for domestic abuse offenders (Gibbs, 2018). Long prison sentences did significantly reduce reoffending following release, but only if they were ten to fifteen years in length, which is extremely costly in human and financial terms (Godfrey 2007, 2010).

Research has attempted to evaluate strategies for dealing with HHHF, including various perpetrator programmes, use of MATACs, disruption and incapacitation, and so on, but little conclusive evidence has been produced. As the Public Protection Unit Lead of one northwestern force stated to us, "there is no sense of what *actually* works". It is therefore vitally important to look at the larger group of high harm high risk domestic abuse offenders as individuals over a period of time, to analyse what they do, what happens to them, and what – if anything – stops or reduces their offending.

4. Research Findings

Routes into and through police management processes

- Across police forces, following identification for HHHF (currently defined in police policy as either Serial or Repeat DA offenders), there are no standard routes or structures for management of these types of offenders (see Appendix 1). Forces have created process systems which attempt to meet their needs (partly determined by size of force and available resources). Based on our extrapolations from documents and interviews, the process described by Suffolk police seemed simple and straightforward (Eastern Force, see Appendix 1). In this system, offenders come into the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Unit via social care agencies or through being identified by police using RFGV. If they engage with the unit, they are put into a perpetrator programme. If they do not engage with the programme or continue to offend, they are then flagged on the system, and adopted onto Operation Comfort (people can also be adopted onto Op Comfort through police referral, using data based on repeat and/ or high harm victims). Within Op Comfort they are assessed as either low risk or high risk. High risk cases are allocated to a detective with an aim to arrest within 24 hours. If 24 hours elapse without an arrest being made, the target then become a priority for all areas (Viper) or are the subject of a disruption plan (Scorpion).

"pick that job up and make sure you get the right outcome with a remand in custody and stuff like that … detectives

really having oversight of all high risk detainees and DA … we saw that a real shift towards increased remands. So I think that's been quite effective, albeit it has placed […] pressure upon CID teams, but that's certainly been a positive change".

Similarly in Norfolk: *"in simple terms our aspiration is that all high risk DA perpetrators of or vast majority thereof given other demands on the ID would be dealt with by Detective and/or our custody investigation unit who are very experienced in dealing with domestic abuse. And we're seeing, as I say, anecdotally, we're seeing good examples of perpetrators being charged, remanded, domestic violence prevention notices being used".*

The identification of high harm cases with immediate allocation to a detective and then to wider force appears to us as proactive and timely. There are clear opportunities for perpetrators to engage in behaviour change programmes and clear processes to address non-engaging offenders.

The system in Sussex involves HHHF offenders being identified by RFG, by police or by external partners and then adopted by the Complex DA Unit. From here, they can engage with a perpetrator programme, or a wider programme that addresses issues such as mental health, drug or alcohol addiction. If they do not engage then a criminal justice solution is adopted, with the aim of disruption and/or incapacitation. The option to address issues that may contribute to domestic abuse offending is a strength of this system, as these may be reasons why perpetrator programmes only addressing domestic abuse related offending work less effectively.

Profile and offending trajectories of HHHF DA offenders

- The antecedents for the 2019 SDAP cohort stretched back to 2000.

- On average there were 21 incidents per person per year. Within the total 2346 incidents, the largest offence categories were violence (48%), and property (15%).

- Approximately one sixth (358) of the incidents were classed as domestic abuse incidents, and, within those, two-thirds involved the use of violence.

- The offending profile and trajectory of SDAP Top 10 offenders is very mixed. They appear in the data as suspects (in 75% of incidents) and as complainants (in 25% of incidents), in incidents of domestic abuse, but also a range of other offences.

- Of all the incidents where SDAP Top 10 offenders were suspects, 6% were domestic abuse incidents, and 94% were non-DA incidents. When SDAP Top 10 offenders were complainants, a quarter were DA-related, and three-quarters were non-DA.

- The lives of SDAP Top 10 offenders are demonstrably chaotic, punctuated by neighbourhood disputes and disturbances, and they are often involved in drug-related offending with the usual associated disputes. There is significant evidence of poor mental health (usually present following evidence of sustained drug abuse). Whilst MH is addressed within MARAC with partners, there are few specific processes for HHHF during which MH experts could

intervene. Their offending patterns are similar to those of offenders with long-term substance abuse issues.

Police Strategies and Results

- When a SDAP Top 10 was a suspect, the two largest outcomes were that they were charged (HO outcome code 1) (34%) or that the victim did not support (HO outcome code 16).

- In a fifth of cases where police recorded an incident in connection with a SDAP Top 10, it was subsequently recorded as HO outcome code 18 (suspect was not identified).

- In over half of incidents when a SDAP Top 10 was a complainant they did not support a prosecution (HO outcome code 16).

- When SDAP Top 10 offenders appeared in court as defendants, some were bailed rather than remanded. In our police data which recorded all interactions for one SDAP Top 10, there was an entry for 2nd October 2022: *"he was remanded by police to court, the courts chose to release him not the police despite this being his 4th bail breach, police have actively sought and achieved a remand each time he is arrested, the courts however have released him again this time … I have called custody to try and work out what's gone on but doesn't appear anything is documented anywhere as to why this has occurred, and the courts are now closed so I cannot speak to them either. I can understand her frustrations however police are taking positive action each and every time he commits an offence. I'll continue to try and contact her during this shift. I have noted that a new breach of bail has been reported along with this complaint and believe officers should continue to progress this breach ASAP and once again if there is evidence of the breach take positive action and arrest him."* This was followed by another entry on 14th October *2022 – "Caller wishes to retract statements in regard to DV from her ex- partner …. caller does not feel that she is able to cope with the ongoing situation and does not feel that police are doing*

anything …she has reported that he has breached his bail conditions, but nothing has been done about it."

- When some SDAP Top 10 were reconvicted whilst subject to a suspended sentence, the suspended sentence was not activated. Additionally, some SDAP Top 10 offenders were given suspended sentences rather than immediate custody, despite having a number of previous convictions and/or record of police attending domestic abuse incidents. In 2022 (Ref 3) was convicted of an unprovoked s.47 assault on a vulnerable adult in a public place. The magistrates imposed a twelve months' custodial order which was then suspended for two years on the basis that there was 'a real chance of rehabilitation'. This would accord completely with judicial guidelines. Ref 3 has been on the SDAP register for some time, has been the subject of a large number of investigations, including domestic, violent, and sexual (rape) offences, however it is likely that the court would not have been informed of his status as SDAP. In interview, police officers expressed their frustration with court decisions: *"we've got some really good legislation, but the magistrates don't uphold it when it's breached. So DVPN, DVPOs and even down to community protection notices and criminal behaviour orders, they get breached, they get a fine and the officers say, well, what's the point of us doing all the work to get to get them?"*

- Custodial sentences stop domestic abuse offending, but there is little evidence that they are effective in the medium or long-term. The time between release from prison and reoffending was short.

5. Recommendations

The data provided shows that the police are right to focus strongly on HHHF offenders. Amongst all of the low level and nuisance offending committed by SDAP Top 10 offenders, they had also committed extreme acts of violence (rape, strangulation, serious sexual and violent assaults) and would be considered by the public to be extremely dangerous people. The repeat and serial nature of their offending profiles, and the length of time over which they have developed their criminal careers, means that they cause and continue to cause considerable problems for the public, and take up a large amount of police time and resource. Curbing their offending reduces the number of victims, reduces costs of policing, and removes a significant danger to public safety.

Data integrity

- Data which shows the trajectory of HHHF is not readily to hand; without the dedicated time given by Cheshire police, it would have been impossible to collect data relevant for this investigation. Strategies for the management of SDAP are hard to identify in the Top 10 SDAP data as they are not routinely marked in the data (Appendix 4). As strategies can be overlapping, evaluation of which strategy, if any, is actually working, is currently hard to determine.

- In the future, academic researchers and police should together examine how forces can update mechanisms for identifying, recording, and also, where appropriate, archiving HHHF, in order to increase efficiency. As part of that process, they should involve police data and Intelligence units to future-proof the development of

data-analytical processes for the identification of criminal careers/ offending trajectories, particularly in relation to HHHF domestic abuse offenders.

Police Strategies

- Practices vary across forces concerning entry and maintenance on HHHF databases (SDAP, etc), and there are large numbers who have entered and never left databases (although not actively offending) in some forces (over one thousand in some cases). Not all of these people are, or can be, given police resources, actively managed through IOM, SDAP, Perpetrator programmes and so on. Whilst some forces have an archival system, which places some HHHF offenders on a 'dormant' list (Cheshire and Sussex for example) and some are removed (Cumbria), practices across all forces should be standardised in a way which leaves a smaller group of active HHHF who are actively managed (with a robust strategy in place for each individual).

- Strategies for managing the offending of HHHF can, and do, overlap which not only makes evaluation of effectiveness difficult, it also could lead to variable responses to incidents involving HHHF. When officers attend an incident, they should be immediately aware of the prevailing strategy (ie disrupt, trigger plan, whether the individual is subject to court sanction such as a suspended sentence, participating in perpetrator programmes, and so on) in order to follow a consistent and coherent offender management programme.

- The mixed profile of offending by HHHF (with the largest proportion of their offending not being domestic abuse-related) should be recognised as an opportunity for disruption. Cumbria's 4P plan as part of Op Dart (Domestic Abuse Reduction Tactics) seems to do this: *"The 4P plan should take into account all forms of criminality, not just DA. The perpetrator should be targeted through a broad range of tactics and this may include targeting opportunities relating to drug offences, acquisitive crime, driving offences etc. aimed at maximising disruption and enforcement"* (Operational Order). Officers should take the opportunity when responding to non-DA offences to disrupt offending trajectories.

- Disrupt strategies are similar in some respects to the tactics used against OCG. With OCG these can lead to cessation, or more usually, displacement of activity. This is unlikely to happen with HHHF domestic abusers, and so disrupt would need to be allied to either increased incapacitation or to longer-term strategies to change behaviour.

- Disrupt and incapacitation strategies are likely to be very popular with the public. However, care will need to be taken to ensure that legal, ethical, and practice guidelines and policies are adhered to. Where disrupt strategies are seen to have been effective, there should be public dissemination, in order to reassure the public that proactive policing on behalf of the vulnerable is taking place.

- As with positive action, and increased, surveillance, disruption is likely to

increase numbers of arrests and offences committed in the shorter term, which ultimately may lead to custodial sentences. However, in the long term, disruption and increased surveillance following release from custody may significantly reduce offending (this model is seen in Appendix 5). It should be noted that this approach is likely to put pressure on police (and CPS/HMCTS) resources. Internal budgets and working effectively with partners across the CJS will need to be managed.

• We identified good practice regarding the management of HHF offenders with mental health problems; however, given that there is such a strong correlation between HHHF domestic abuse and mental health/ illness, we would recommend far greater co-ordination between mental health services and HHHF management processes. It seems to us that there are opportunities for earlier intervention of mental health services, which would potentially shorten HHHF criminal careers.

Information sharing

• Gaps in offending trajectories were evident when HHHF offenders moved across county or police borders; greater collaboration amongst force leads responsible for HHHF offenders would help to track offenders and improve data quality. In general, collaboration and data-sharing on a regional scale would seem desirable.
• When making bail decisions, and in accordance with current bail/ remand procedure rules, magistrates should receive sufficient information to determine whether bail is an appropriate outcome for a HHHF defendant. Currently, it appears that SDAP or HHHF flagging is not reported to the court. Similarly, magistrates should receive sufficient information to determine whether a custodial sentence should be suspended 'ie is there a realistic prospect of rehabilitation' for a convicted person who is on the database of HHHF offenders.

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1:

Routes for Serial domestic abuse offenders in four selected police forces

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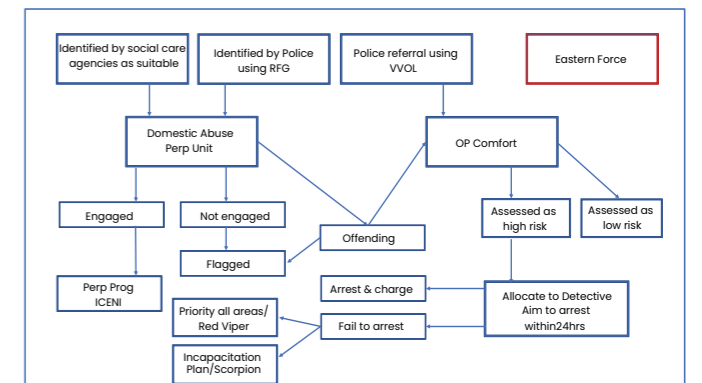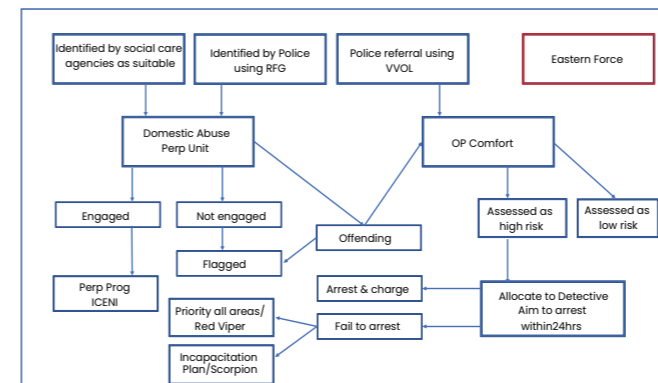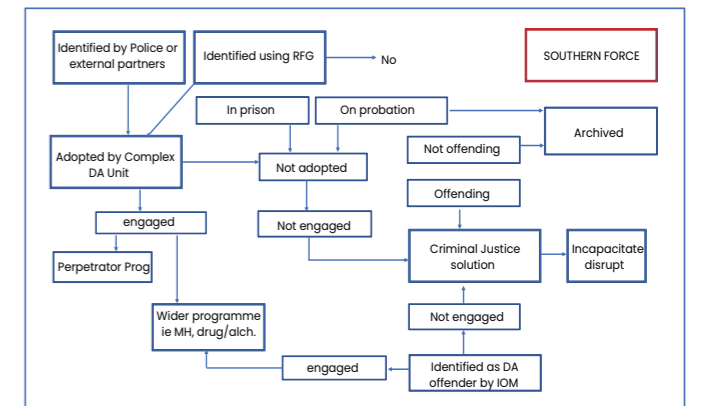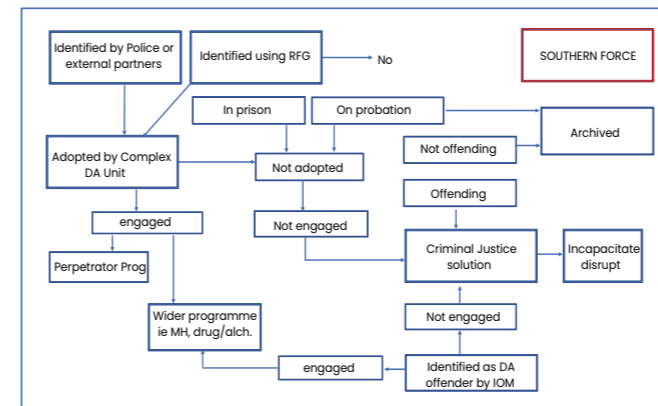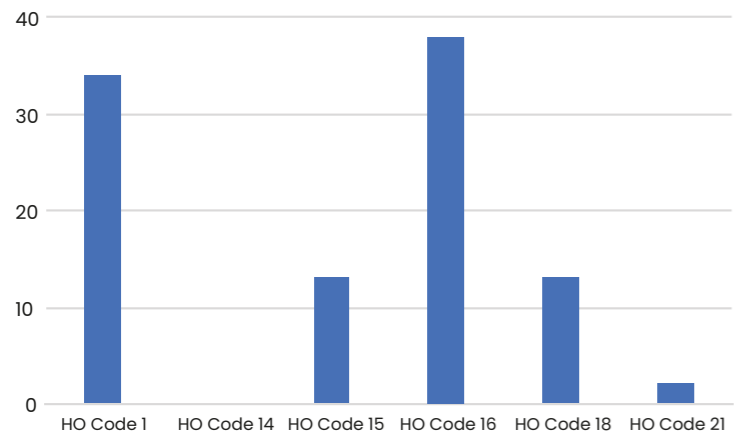
Appendix 2:
Case studies of Cheshire 'Top Ten' SDAP
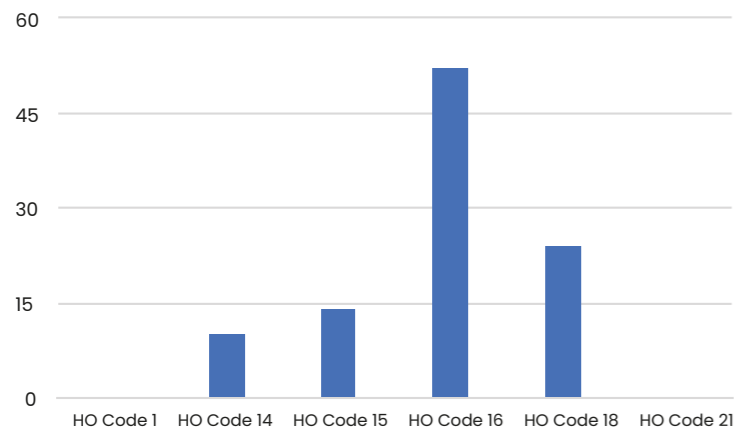
Outcomes (HO codes) when SDAP Top 10 nominal is complainant

Outcomes (HO codes) when SDAP Top 10 nominal is suspect

HO Code 1	Charged
HO Code 14	Evidential difficulties: suspect not identified: victim does not support
HO Code 15	Evidential difficulties: suspect identified: victim does support
HO Code 16	Evidential difficulties: suspect identified: victim does not support
HO Code 18	No suspect identified
HO Code 21	Further investigation not in the public interest

Appendix 3:
Case studies of offending timelines and trajectories for selected Cheshire SDAPs

1: Male, heterosexual relationships, born 1984, involved in 340 police reports over 20 years

Offending began with an indecent assault on a girl aged under 16 in 2003 when he was 19. One shoplifting charge in 2004, followed by a gap in offending until 2005 when he is a suspect in possession with intent to supply cases, public order, anti-social behaviour. (May be imprisoned in 2006). Convicted of threats and harassment, threatens arson against an informant, for an issue two years earlier. He is increasingly involved in drug-related offending (and as a victim of aggravated burglary by OCG). Increasing involvement in drug trade, threatens violence to others and is threatened by man with a gun. He reports a s.47 assault (head wound) by partner in 2007 when she found about an affair. Throughout 2008 he is involved in drug-related violence both as victim and suspect, including use of weapons, threats with weapons, PWITS and so on. He is sentenced to six years custody at Crown Court for arson endangering life in January 2009. Released on licence, he is convicted of harassment of his ex-partner and returned to prison. Release is followed by further offences, recall, further offences and so on until October 2013 until June 2015 when there are no recorded police incidents. (May be imprisoned 2013-15). When released, is subject to disrupt strategy, numerous stop search, investigations, but no charges. In 2016 his offending is erratic, subject of investigation 8 times, 2 charges resulting. He is disorderly offender (threatening shopkeepers, instigating feud with environmental health officer, shouting in street, braking windows, etc). His life is chaotic, he offends continually, low-level public order, violence, threats, etc, but no charges. He is deeply involved in drugs trade, and often victim himself of drug-related violence, burglary, and so on. He is subject to frequent mental health episodes. Bout of offending against ex-partner; threats to police, mental health workers, ambulance staff, as well as general nuisance in town. In 2021 found naked and rambling, mental health very poor, hospitalised frequently, homeless and living in a tent. He is still heavily involved in drug use and probably supply in 2022.

2: Female, heterosexual relationships, born 1980 involved in 239 incidents over 13 years

First offence is a s47 assault on her 7-year-old child in 2009. Lots of neighbourhood disputes at the same time. (May be imprisoned for this offence). Following break-down of marriage, lots of complaints about a noisy house, suspected prostitution. She is evicted along with a new partner in 2012. Sporadic offending – very infrequent – until May 2015 when she is a suspect/defendant in a string of alcohol and drug-related offences, assault PC, and public disorder. She is an outpatient at MH ward for two years, with frequent assaults on MH staff. In 2016 she is living at the YMCA, vulnerable to sexual exploitation, frequent public order and alcohol-related offending. Subject to a Plan on a Page in 2017. Infrequent offending (related to alcohol and arguments with current and ex-partners) unti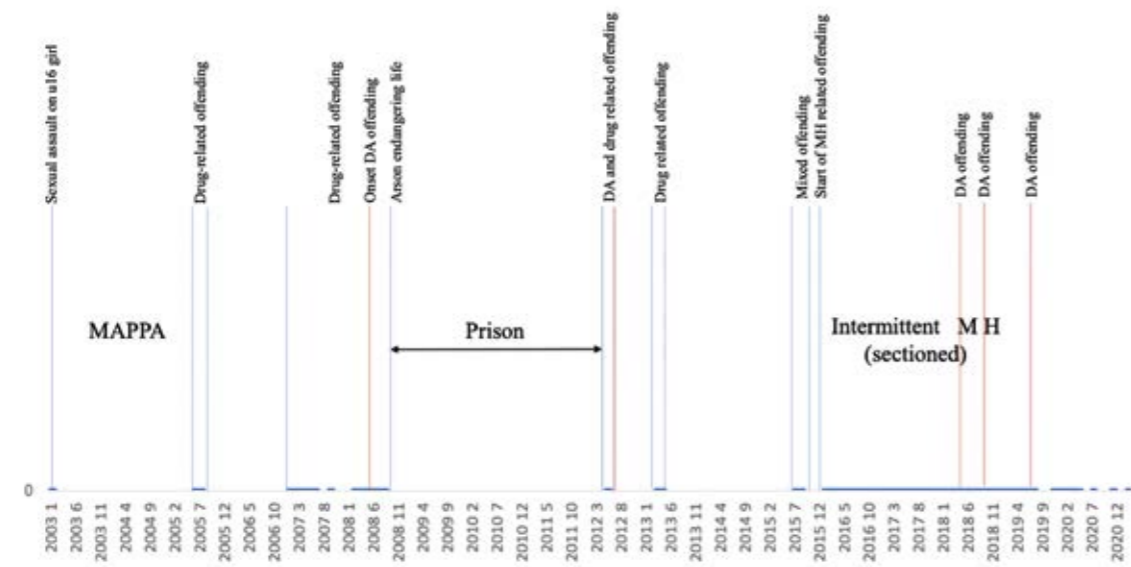l shoplifting spree in 2019 results in 18 weeks custody. Disrupt strategy put in place, frequent stop and search. In 2021 and 2022 she is repeatedly arrested for public disorder, shouting, breaking windows, and causing a nuisance to neighbours. She is involved in some Sect 39 and 47 assaults but is most often the victim of violence from partners and ex-partners. She is vulnerable to sexual exploitation and homeless. Life shows significant signs of being in constant crisis.

3: Male, heterosexual/same-sex relationships, born 1976, involved in 263 incidents in 3 years

Following loss of job and marriage in 2018, there follows sustained harassment of ex-partner for 12mths, continuing with further harassment and neighbourhood disputes, and the start of drug use in 2019. He is subject to a CBO, which he breaches, and is suspect in coercive control of new partner. By this time, he is involved in drug-use with group of friends, more neighbourhood disputes, public disorder, and assaults on new disabled and vulnerable male partner. Whilst on a suspended custodial sentence he is suspect in rape (female victim), alongside generally chaotic offending – harassment of local shopworkers, indecent exposure, fights and neighbourhood disputes. Further harassment of female ex-partner, and rape of male ex-partner. He is currently a suspect in a perversion of course of justice investigation.

Appendix 4:

Case studies of offending timelines and trajectories for selected Cheshire SDAPs matched against strategies being used to manage that individual.
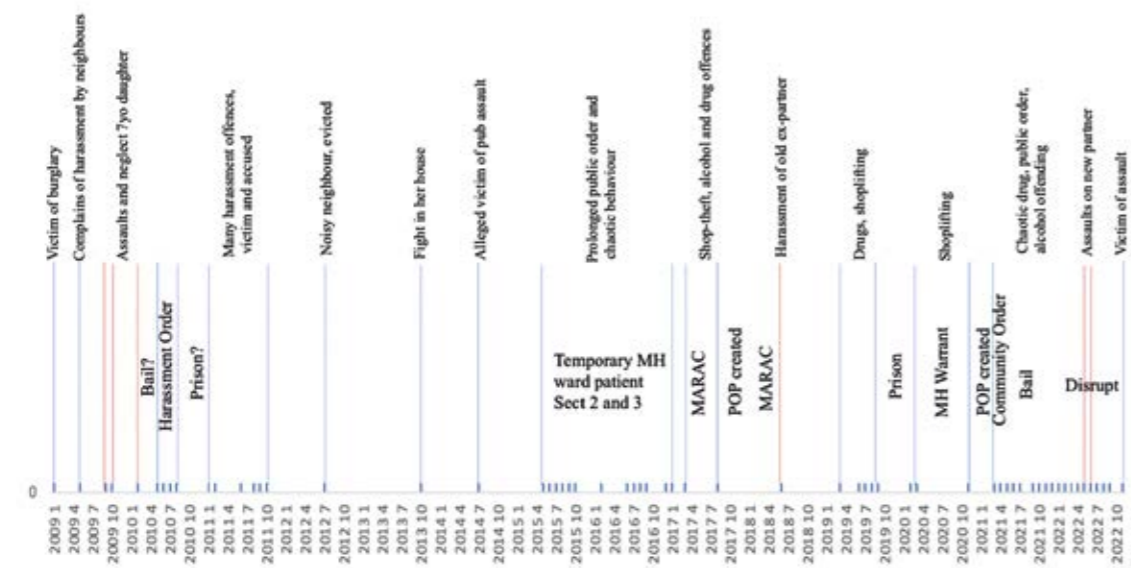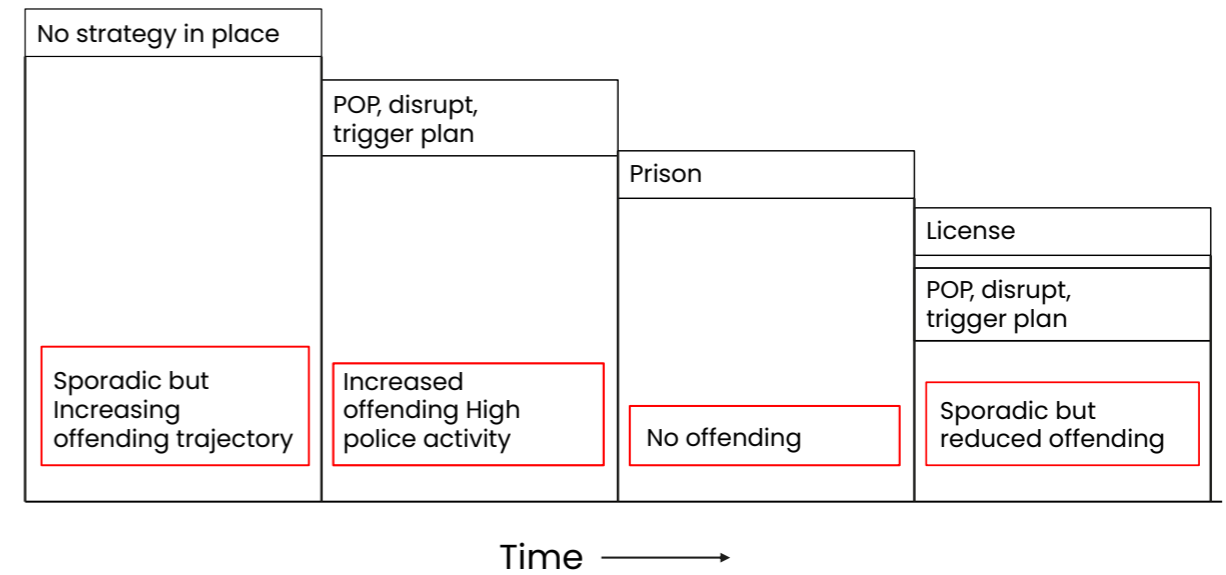
Appendix 5:

Model for managing HHHF over time

Case 1
Blue lines = non-DA related offending
Red lines = DA related offending

Case 2
Blue lines = non-DA related offending
Red lines = DA related offending