



Who Does What to Whom? Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators

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Background

This research was commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation to explore how male victims and perpetrators of domestic violence may differ from female victims and perpetrators with regard to the nature and number of domestic violence incidents recorded by the police. The report explores ‘who does what to whom’, taking into account both context and consequences.

The research provides a unique picture of the nature of domestic violence reported to the police. Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour over time, and the research reflects this by building a longitudinal picture (tracking cases over six years) rather than focusing merely on a snapshot or a single incident of domestic violence.

In previous research involving the North East of England the vast majority of domestic violence perpetrators recorded by the police were found to be men (92%) and their victims mainly female (91%). Many more repeat incidents were also recorded for male than for female perpetrators (Hester et al. 2006)¹. This pattern has been found to be typical in police records across many areas of England and reflects the greater impact on women of such abuse. (Hester & Westmarland 2005; Westmarland & Hester 2007)².

Where policy is concerned, since the 1990s there have been a number of initiatives aimed at developing criminal justice approaches to domestic violence. This has involved a focus on pro-arrest and increases in prosecution and conviction. The pro-arrest policy was put forward in the Revised Home Office Circular 19/2000 and more recently in the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance (Centrex 2004). These documents require police to: take positive action in all domestic violence cases by exercising any powers of arrest where they exist and where it is necessary and proportionate in order to carry out an effective investigation and/or prevent further offences. Alongside this policy it is recognised that the police may be faced with conflicting accounts and counter allegations of domestic violence from the two parties involved. The ACPO guidance urges officers to identify the primary aggressor in such situations and to avoid arresting both parties. For instance, dual arrest

¹ Hester, M., Westmarland, N., Gangoli, G., Wilkinson, M., O’Kelly, C., Kent, A. & Diamond, A. (2006) *Domestic Violence Perpetrators: Identifying Needs to Inform Early Intervention*, Bristol: University of Bristol in association with the Northern Rock Foundation and the Home Office.

² Hester, M. & Westmarland, N. (2005) *Tackling Domestic Violence: Effective Interventions and Approaches*. Home Office Research Study 290, London: Home Office; Westmarland & Hester (2007) *Time for Change*, Bristol: University of Bristol. In other police force areas the proportion of male victims and female perpetrators may appear much higher due to different recording practices by the police. For instance, if incidents are not deemed to be crimes (e.g. arguments), or if counter allegations are made, both parties may be entered on the same police record as victims and perpetrators. This has been the recording practice for instance in Northampton, resulting in 57 per cent of instances specifically involving female victims (Hester & Westmarland 2005: 108).

should not be made in instances of counter allegation where one party is acting in self-defence.

Criminal justice and other agencies have also been encouraged to increase partnership working in order to support and provide safety for victims. The *Domestic Violence, Crimes and Victims Act 2004* has continued this approach, placing further emphasis on criminalizing domestic violence and increasing the possibility of arrest of perpetrators in domestic violence situations (Hester et al. 2008)³.

While the majority of incidents of intimate partner domestic violence recorded by the police involve male-to-female abuse, little is known about the nature of the incidents where men are recorded as victims and women as perpetrators, nor about the circumstances where both partners are recorded as perpetrators. This research was commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation to fill this gap and to examine the implications of gender where individuals are identified as domestic violence perpetrators by the police. The research is especially important as it is the first study in the UK to examine the issue of gender and domestic violence perpetrators in any detail and over time.

Other studies and issues

National representative surveys indicate that while men and women in heterosexual relationships may experience similar domestic violence behaviours, there are also important differences. For instance, women experience a greater amount and more severe abuse from male partners. The recent British Crime Survey data on partner abuse (Povey et al. 2008)⁴ found that a fifth of men, 22%, and a third of women, 33%, had experienced abuse from a partner since the age of 16, and that the physical and emotional impacts on female victims were significantly greater than on male victims. Echoing this gender distinction regarding the impacts of domestic violence and abuse, men tended not to report partner abuse to the police because they considered the incident “*too trivial or not worth reporting*” (ibid.: 67).

Data on the prevalence of heterosexual domestic abuse in general populations thus show larger differences between men’s and women’s experiences of domestic violence when impact is also taken into account. As a consequence, women are the largest group to seek help and be in contact with services⁵. Based on research with female victims, we may also expect that domestic violence reported to the police involves behaviours (whether physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, financial etc.) used as an

³ Hester, M., Westmarland, N., Pearce, J. and Williamson, E. (2008) *Early evaluation of the Domestic Violence, Crimes and Victims Act 2004*, Ministry of Justice Research Series 14/08. London: Ministry of Justice. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/domestic-violence-report-2004.pdf>

⁴ Povey, D. (Ed.), Coleman, K., Kaiza, P., Hoare, J. and Jansson, K. (2008) *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2006/07 (Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2006/07)*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 3/08. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/hosb0308.pdf>.

⁵ Hester & Westmarland (2005) see footnote 2 above.

ongoing pattern of fear and coercive control by one person against another with whom they have or have had a relationship⁶. Such ‘archetypal’ domestic violence (or ‘intimate terrorism’⁷) will usually involve one partner being violent, involve frequent abuse, and is likely to escalate and to result in serious injury. Within this context it has been found that women, in particular, may use ‘violent resistance’ against violent male partners⁸. Echoing this, women’s use of violence has been found in a number of studies to be defensive or retaliatory rather than initiating⁹.

In the US a pro-arrest policy was implemented from the early 1990s, and has been taken further than in the UK, with mandatory arrest and prosecution in some US locations. The approach has resulted in a notable increase in the number of women being arrested for perpetrating domestic violence in the US. DeLeon-Granados et al. (2006)¹⁰ suggest that this increase may be the result of the police becoming more ‘real’ about violence where they previously minimised that by women. Also, that male perpetrators may be manipulating the system resulting in disproportionate arrests of women. Miller (2001)¹¹, for instance, found that the men may ring the police first in order to pre-empt women asking for help.

In addition, a systematic review of the literature has found that men may be over-reporting instances of being victims of domestic violence while at the same time being perpetrators of domestic violence. The alcohol use of one or both partners can also impact on the boundaries between victim and perpetrator with subsequent difficulties in assessing risk and in determination of who is the primary aggressor¹².

These issues have led to further questions in the current research about:

- The extent and severity of the domestic violence and gender of the perpetrator.
- How ‘sole perpetrator’ violence might differ depending on whether it is a male or a female perpetrator.
- Men’s and women’s use of domestic violence where both partners are making allegations.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Johnson, M. P. (2006) ‘Conflict and Control: Gender Symmetry and Asymmetry in Domestic Violence’, *Violence Against Women*, 12 (2): 1003-1018.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Saunders, D. G. (2002) Are physical assaults by wives and girlfriends a major social problem? A review of the literature, *Violence Against Women*, 8 (12): 1424-1448.

¹⁰ DeLeon-Granados, W., Wells, W. & Binsbacher, R. (2006) Arresting Developments, Trends in Female Arrests for Domestic Violence and Proposed Explanations. *Violence Against Women* 12 (4): 355-371.

¹¹ Miller, S. L. (2001) The paradox of women arrested for domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, 7: 1339-1376.

¹² Hester, M., Williamson, E. and Gangoli, G. (forthcoming) *Exploring the service and support needs of male, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered and black and other minority ethnic victims of domestic violence: Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)*. London: Home Office.

- Whether there has been an increase over time in women recorded or arrested as domestic violence perpetrators.

Method

The current research uses and builds on the data from two previous research projects also funded by the Northern Rock Foundation: the research on attrition and domestic violence cases going through the criminal justice system (Hester 2006)¹³; and the research on domestic violence perpetrator profiles, identification of their needs and early intervention (Hester et al. 2006)¹⁴.

In April 2001, Northumbria Police introduced a computer-based system for recording and linking domestic violence incidents across all police districts. Using this database the previous attrition study developed an initial picture of incidents, attrition and police practice across three police districts and in relation to three time periods - April 2001, June 2001 and March 2002. The second study developed 692 perpetrator longitudinal profiles, and analysed the 1,889 incidents related to these individuals. The 692 profiles involved tracking the 356 perpetrators from the attrition study to provide a 3-year picture, combined with a further 336 domestic perpetrators sampled from the first week of November 2004 and tracked until the end of July 2005.

In the current research, three separate, longitudinal, and comparative samples, 96 cases overall, were developed from the previous 692 perpetrator profiles. This included a total of 126 individuals identified as perpetrators¹⁵ (see Table 1 and further details below). The word 'case' is used here to denote all the incidents recorded over time in relation to any one intimate partner couple. The cases were tracked from 2001 to 2007, thus providing a picture of up to six years of involvement with the police. The data covered the period since the new police guidance in 2004, and some cases extend into the period since January 2006 when common assault became an arrestable offence.

The Northumbria domestic violence database, set up from 2001, was designed to be 'victim-led', with incidents recorded and retrievable via victims' details. Ostensibly a separate record was made for each incident reported to the Northumbria police, and the police decided in relation to each incident who to record as victim and who as offender. However, the police may find it difficult at times to record the appropriate victim and/or perpetrator for an incident. In instances where the police decided that the woman was the victim in one incident but her male partner was the victim

¹³ Hester, M. (2006) 'Making It Through the Criminal Justice System: Attrition and Domestic Violence', *Social Policy and Society*, 5 (1): 79-90.

¹⁴ Hester et al. (2006) see footnote 1 above.

¹⁵ Some cases also involved other perpetrators, for instance another family member or another partner, but the focus here is on the main intimate partners.

in another incident, each were recorded as a victim in the relevant incident record. This provides a rough guide to relationships where there is ‘dual perpetration’. Thus where one or more incidents were recorded involving the same parties the overall pattern of incidents was one of the following:

1. ‘sole perpetrator’ involving the man as perpetrator and woman as victim;
2. ‘sole perpetrator’ involving the woman as perpetrator and man as victim; or
3. ‘dual perpetrator’ where both male and female partners are recorded at some a time as the perpetrator.

Table 1 – the three comparative samples

	Sole perpetrator samples		Dual perpetrator sample
Cases included	All cases with women as sole perpetrators	Random sample of cases with men as sole perpetrators	Random sample of cases where both men and women were recorded in separate incidents as perpetrator
Number of cases	N=32	N=32	N= 32
Gender of perpetrators	32 female perpetrators	32 male perpetrators	32 male and 32 female perpetrators – 64 individuals altogether

In order to explore issues related to gender and domestic violence perpetrators, three separate samples of cases involving sole male, sole female and dual male/female perpetrators were developed that would allow direct comparisons (see Table 1 above). The initial stage for development of the samples involved identifying all cases where women were recorded as the only perpetrator from the 692 perpetrator profiles (from the earlier studies), tracking cases back in time to 2001 where this had not already been done, and tracking all cases forward to June 2007. This resulted in a sample of 32 sole female perpetrators in heterosexual relationships¹⁶. As the vast majority of the 692 cases in the previous studies involved male-only perpetrators, a random sample of 32 sole male perpetrators were selected to allow direct comparison with the sole female perpetrator sample. The male-only perpetrators were also tracked back to 2001 where this had not already been done, and forward to June 2007. A further 32 cases were randomly selected from cases where both men and women had at some time been recorded as perpetrator and as victim (i.e. ‘dual’ perpetrator cases), and again tracked between 2001 and 2007. This provided the third sample for direct comparison.

¹⁶ 58 cases were initially identified as involving only women perpetrators. However when tracked over time many of these involved dual perpetration. There was also one instance with a female same sex couple, which was left out of the analysis as all the other cases were male-to-female.

The narratives recorded on the police domestic violence database in relation to the 96 cases were downloaded at police headquarters and anonymised in situ. The narratives included a description of the incident as related by the parties, summary of the incident from a police perspective, action taken by the police and in some instances a comment on the incident and/or history of the case. These provided a unique picture of the progression of cases over time as recorded by the police. Interviews with 51 victims had been carried out in relation to cases examined in the earlier attrition study. Five of these victim interviews (one male, four female) were directly related to the current samples and this data was therefore also included in the analysis. The narrative and interview data was subsequently coded to develop themes and concepts¹⁷.

In addition, a database was established with a range of demographic features and criminal justice progression and outcomes relating to the 126 individual perpetrators and 96 cases.

Findings

Comparison of the 96 cases where men, women or both were recorded by the police as domestic violence perpetrators, revealed a number of clear differences between these groups as well as other important patterns. Analysis of the police and interview data indicated differences by gender, including the nature of incidents, levels of repeat perpetration, arrest and conviction. There were also some differences between cases involving sole perpetrators and where both men and women were recorded as dual perpetrators. Further issues included use of alcohol and drugs, illness, children and age.

When do incidents take place

The largest proportion of cases related to couples still together in a relationship (nearly half the cases - 48%). Just over a quarter involved violence post-separation of the partners (27%). The remaining cases involved couples in process of separation with incidents recorded both during the relationship and also after separation (25%).

Gender and incidents

Generally individuals were recorded as having been perpetrators in between one and 52 incidents of domestic violence. However, the difference between men and women was stark, with men significantly more likely to be repeat perpetrators¹⁸. The vast majority of men had at least two incidents recorded

¹⁷ The analysis involved reading and re-reading the narratives and interviews to identify general themes and build further categories. Qualitative data was loaded on to an NVivo8 database for ease of analysis and coding. Quantitative parameters were loaded on to an SPSS database so that general patterns could be generated.

¹⁸ Statistically significant at Chi-Square 43.619 $p < .000$

(83%), many a lot more than that, and one man had 52 incidents recorded within the six year tracking period. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of women recorded as perpetrators had only one incident recorded (62%), and the highest number of repeat incidents for any woman was eight. These data indicate that the intensity and severity of violence and abusive behaviours from the men was much more extreme. This is also reflected in the nature of the violence used.

Table 2 – types of abusive behaviour by gender

	Of male perpetrators %	Of female perpetrators %
Verbal abuse	94	83
Physical violence *	61	37
Threat *	29	13
Harassment *	29	11
Damage to partner's property	30	16
Use of weapon	11	24
Damage to own property	6	11

* statistically significant difference between men and women

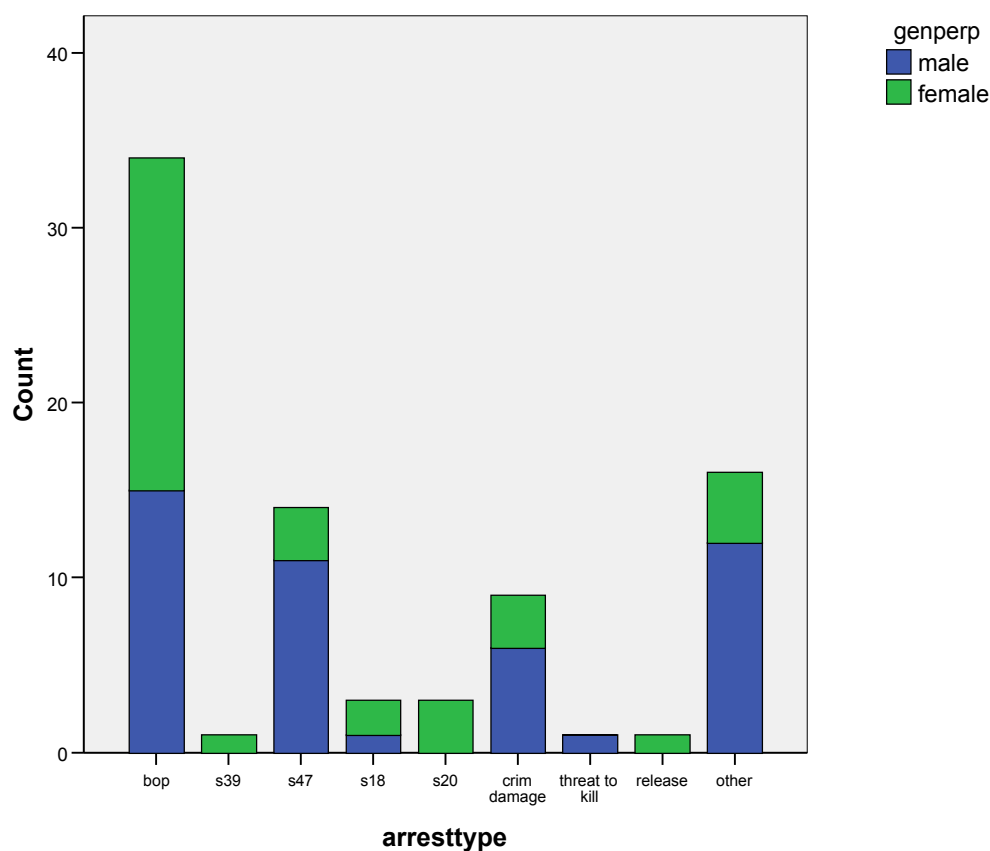
According to the incidents described by the police, men were significantly more likely than women to use physical violence, threats, and harassment¹⁹ (see Table 2). While verbal abuse was used in most incidents by both men and women, men were also slightly more likely to be verbally abusive. Men were more likely to damage the women's property, while the women were more likely to damage their own. Men's violence tended to create a context of fear and related to that, control. This was not similarly the case where women were perpetrators.

Incidents with women as perpetrators mainly involved verbal abuse, some physical violence, and only small proportions involved threat or harassment. However, women were much more likely to use a weapon, although this was at times in order to stop further violence from their partners. The police descriptions also characterised female perpetrators as to a greater extent having mental health or other health issues. The police were more likely to question whether they had identified the correct perpetrator in instances involving women.

¹⁹ Statistically significant at Chi-Square, physical violence 8.290 $p < .015$, threats 4.827 $p < .028$, harassment 6.015 $p < .014$

Incidents, arrests, charges and convictions

Graph 1 – highest level of arrest for male and female perpetrators



As might be expected from the nature and severity of the domestic violence incidents, there were more arrests overall of men than of women. All cases with seven or more incidents, most of which involved men, led to arrest at some time. This echoes US findings that male domestic violence perpetrators have more extensive criminal histories than female perpetrators²⁰. None the less, women were arrested to a disproportionate degree given the fewer incidents where they were perpetrators. Women were three times more likely to be arrested. During the six year tracking period 47 (73% of all male perpetrators) and 36 women (56% of all female perpetrators) were arrested, with men arrested once in every ten incidents (in 11% of incidents) and women arrested every three incidents (in 32% of incidents).

As indicated in Graph 1, Breach of the Peace was the highest level of offence for which most men and women were arrested. Men were most likely to have actual bodily harm (s 47), criminal damage or other offences (including affray and drunk and disorderly) as the highest levels of offences

²⁰ Muftic, L. R. & Bouffard, J. A. (2007) 'An evaluation of gender differences in the implementation an impact of a comprehensive approach to domestic violence', *Violence Against Women* 13 (1): 46-69.

resulting in arrest. Men were arrested for threats to kill, but not women. In contrast (and reflecting women's use of weapons), violence by women resulted in arrests for a wider range of, and more serious, offences involving assault – from common assault (s39), to grievous bodily harm (s18) to grievous bodily harm with intent (s20).

Men appeared more likely than women to be charged or cautioned. This was the case for a quarter of the men (16/63, 25%) and only one in six of the women (5/62, 8%)²¹. According to the data available, the charges resulted in three of the men being convicted (for Breach of the Peace, assault and criminal damage), and one of the women being convicted (for Breach of the Peace).

Has there been an increase in women recorded as domestic violence perpetrators?

The trend identified in the US, that there has been an increase in the number of women arrested for domestic violence is seemingly echoed by the Northumbria police force data. By looking at possible changes between incidents from 2001/2 and from 2004 (the two samples tracked in the previous studies), and comparing the same geographical areas, a small increase across this period in the proportion of women arrested as domestic violence perpetrators as compared to men can be discerned (from 9% to 11%), although this is less pronounced than those resulting from the mandatory arrest policies in the US. The increases for women recorded as perpetrators, but not necessarily arrested, are slightly higher (8% to 12%) indicating a clearer underlying trend.

Sole perpetrators

Cases involving men as sole perpetrators were those most likely to result in intense fear and control of partners. Example 1 provides a typical example of such a case where the woman (Mrs Purple) was not able to disengage from the violent partner (Mr Purple) due to extreme fear and because intervention by agencies was not making her safe. A large proportion (66%) of the men who were the sole perpetrators, were also arrested for domestic violence related offences (compared to 47% of the women).

Example 1 – Mr and Mrs Purple²²

Male as sole perpetrator – fear and control

Mr Purple had 24 incidents of domestic violence against his female partner recorded over two and half years. The nature of the abuse meant that it was extremely difficult for the woman to get away from the man. Mr Purple and Mrs Purple lived together on and off, and he repeatedly tried to get into the

²¹ The data regarding charges may not be complete and the figures should be taken as estimates.

²² To ensure anonymity, all names used for perpetrators and victims/survivors throughout the report are fictitious.

house when he had been told to live elsewhere. He assaulted Mrs Purple, threatened to kill her on a number of occasions including threats with a hammer and a knife. There were four children, who were eventually removed by Social Services to live with the grandparents. Mrs Purple was also provided with an alarm by the public protection unit. The police record notes on one occasion that the woman was refraining from involving the police because of further negative consequences from Social Services: *'She has nothing to do with [man] but he keeps turning up at her address, most of the time drunk. She doesn't always ring the police because Social Services have told her if she has more domestics she won't ever get her children back'*. While the man was arrested for BOP (on numerous occasions), for possession of a weapon, assaults (s47 and s39) and was taken to court for common assault (s39), he was never convicted. The reason appeared to be that the woman repeatedly retracted her statements and they appeared to be continuing the relationship. Towards the end of the research period Mrs Purple was recorded by the police as saying that *'she is fearful of [man] and only sleeps with him occasionally to stop him damaging her property or threatening her'* indicating that it was fear of her partner that had stopped her from further engagement with the criminal justice system.

Only one of the women recorded as the sole perpetrator was similarly described by the police as creating a context of fear and control of the male victim (see Example 2). In this instance the woman was very ill.

Example 2 – Mr and Mrs Silver

Female as sole perpetrator – fear and control

This case involved a couple in their 70s, Mr and Mrs Silver, where the woman had become increasingly ill from a terminal brain tumour and also drank heavily as a result. When the police was contacted she had become very aggressive and physically violent, breaking Mr Silver's arm and making him sleep on the floor. She was arrested and charged for serious assault (grievous bodily harm with intent, s. 20). The male victim stayed with friends and relatives on a few occasions to remain safe, although his main concern appeared to be his wish to look after and obtain help for his wife with the police recording that he *'wants to help her'*.

Many cases where women were recorded as sole perpetrators were also characterised by the police as the women being alcoholic or possibly as mentally ill. While some of these cases involved physical violence from the woman, including potential use of weapons, the male victims appeared not to fear the perpetrator or to be controlled by her. In Example 3, for instance, Mr Teal appears to actively 'manage' violence from his wife and to protect himself by removing potential weapons from her reach, removing himself from the vicinity, or actually restraining her.

Example 3 – Mr and Mrs Teal

Female as sole perpetrator – lack of fear

This case had seven incidents involving Mrs Teal recorded by the police over two and half years. Descriptions of the incidents mentioned that Mrs Teal had been drinking and this had led to verbal and at times physical abuse of her husband. Her husband had also on occasion been drinking but was not similarly presented as abusing alcohol. Despite his wife's attacks on him Mr Teal did not appear in fear of Mrs Teal. For instance '*[Mrs Teal] had been drinking that evening with her husband, however she continued drinking until this morning ...her husband asked her to go into another room so workmen could ...carry out some work. After he asked this [Mrs Teal] became very abusive, this continued into the kitchen where she threatened to get a knife... [Mr Teal] removed the knives before she could get near them and called the police*'. On another occasion, after attending a party, Mrs Teal again continued drinking when they returned home, and eventually attacked her husband while he was asleep. The police record that '*He then got up, dressed and went outside into his vehicle on the drive and went to sleep*'. On further occasions the couple were reported as having argued and one time Mrs Teal had hit Mr Teal resulting in her being formally cautioned by the police for common assault. Another time Mrs Teal was deemed to have scratched Mr Teal on the neck, while he was reported '*to protect himself by restraining her*', resulting in a charge of common assault against Mrs Teal.

Comparing sole and dual perpetrator cases

When we compare cases involving only one perpetrator and those where both men and women are perpetrators, considerable differences in the patterns of repeat perpetration are apparent, in particular differences between male and female perpetrators. As Table 3 shows, in cases with only one perpetrator recorded, half the cases (50%) involved one domestic violence incident and virtually all (95%) involved between one and eight incidents. While most of the female sole perpetrators (78%) had only one incident recorded, a similar proportion of the male sole perpetrators (78%) had between two and 24 incidents recorded. Men as sole perpetrators had a total of 137 incidents recorded and women as sole perpetrators only 44.

In contrast, there were more than four times as many repeat incidents in the cases where both men and women were recorded as perpetrators than where they were sole perpetrators (see Table 3). A total of 400 incidents were recorded across the 32 dual perpetrator cases (compared to only 181 across the 64 sole perpetrator cases). Almost three-quarters of dual perpetration cases had more than one incident recorded, and nearly half (46%) had between three and 52 incidents recorded.

The pattern is again clearly gendered. In dual perpetrator cases just under half the women (45%) had only one incident recorded compared to 13% of the men, and no more than eight. In contrast more than a quarter of

the men had more than nine incidents recorded, and up to 52 repeat incidents. Overall the men in dual perpetration cases had 330 incidents recorded and the women 70 incidents.

Table 3 – number of domestic violence incidents for sole or dual perpetrators, by gender

No. of incidents	One perpetrator			Both as perpetrators		
	Totals %	Of male perpetrator % N=32	Of female perpetrator % N=32	Totals %	Of male perpetrator % N=32	Of female perpetrator % N=32
1	50	22	78	29	13	45
2	21	25	19	25	22	29
3-8	24	44	3	32	38	26
9-24	5	9	-	8	15	-
25-52	-	-	-	6	13	-
	100% N=181 in 64 cases	100% n=137	100% n=44	100% N=400 in 32 cases	100% n=330	100% n=70

Dual perpetrators

Cases where both partners were recorded as perpetrator were very varied. In nearly half the cases at least some of the incidents took place post-separation (13/32), with issues of divorce and child contact common in such cases. Some of these had few incidents and low levels of violence. However, echoing other studies²³ post-separation violence also included instances of extreme harassment and ongoing abuse, in particular from male perpetrators. Dual perpetration cases also included the greatest number of instances where both partners were heavy drinkers or alcoholics and where the circumstances appeared quite chaotic. Alcohol abuse by partners in some instances made it unclear who the perpetrator was. In other cases it was unclear why both had been recorded as perpetrators as only domestically abusive activities by one of them (virtually always the man) had been recorded.

Alcohol

One of the cases where data was available from the police databases and also from an interview with one of the victims (the man in this case) was that of Mr and Mrs Amber (see Example 4). This example shows some of the difficulties in identifying the main perpetrator, especially when the focus by the police is on definable crimes. The example indicates the tendency to see as the perpetrator the individual who is abusing alcohol, although

²³ For example Radford, L. & Hester, M. (2006) *Mothering through Domestic Violence*. London: Jessica Kingsley

alcohol use by women in particular has in other studies been found to be a response to experience of abuse from partners²⁴.

Example 4 – Mr and Mrs Amber

Dual perpetrators

At least three incidents were recorded by the police in relation to Mr and Mrs Amber over eight years, of which two were within the research period. Overall this appeared to involve mainly male-to female abuse. In the first instance Mrs Amber was recorded as victim and Mr Amber as perpetrator (of a possible section 39 assault). The police recorded the second as an incident with a male victim and female perpetrator, apparently deciding on the direction of the violence from Mr Amber's injury (scratches) and that Mrs Amber was drunk. A further incident was also recorded on the police database nearly five years later, when Mrs Amber called the police to report that her husband and son '*have just beaten up herself and her daughter*', and where she was again very drunk. In this latter case the police say there is no clear victim or perpetrator, although they record Mr Amber on the victim database. The interview with Mr Amber, as male victim, indicated that he did not see the violence from his wife as particularly frightening, presenting it as part of arguing and suggesting this is an everyday normal activity of married couples: '*that's what married couples do isn't it?*' He described the situation where he received scratches as being merely '*an argument that had got out of hand*' with both of them shouting at each other. He did not want his wife arrested or charged, and described it as heavy handed that the police none the less removed her and arrested her for Breach of the Peace as she (according to the police record) '*became abusive*' when they intervened.

The antipathy to the police may also explain why there were no more incidents recorded by the police until nearly five years later – by which time the circumstances appeared to have worsened, with Mrs Amber's drinking increasing. We do not have interview data in relation to this incident, but the police recorded that: '*All three parties stated that [female] is an alcoholic and that it has put pressure on their family life. [Female] has gotten extremely drunk and soiled herself when in bed. Her husband...has tried to clean her up and an argument has started.*' It was Mrs Amber who phoned the police in this instance and reported that her husband and son had assaulted her. When the police talked to the parties however, all stated that '*there had not been any*' assault. It may be, as previously, that the incident was minimised although it may also have been the case, as the police record states, '*[Mrs Amber] was very drunk upon police attendance and was incapable of making any sense at the time.*'

²⁴ For overview see Humphreys, C., Regan, L., River, D. & Thiara, R. (2005) Domestic Violence and Substance Use: Tackling Complexity, *British Journal of Social Work*, 35 (7): 1-18.

While the majority (63%) of all perpetrators in the sample appeared to abuse alcohol to some degree, more of these cases involved dual perpetrators (28 of 32 dual perpetrator cases, 88%, and 35 of the 64 sole perpetrator cases, 55%). Overall, there was a significantly higher likelihood of the assumed perpetrator being arrested if alcohol was also an issue²⁵. While 80% of those who appeared to abuse alcohol were arrested, this applied to only 41% of those not abusing alcohol.

Men were more likely to be recorded as abusing alcohol in both sole and dual perpetrator cases (66% and 78% of men compared to 44% and 68% of women). In some of the cases where the men were heavy drinkers the women appeared to ‘manage’ the men’s behaviour by calling the police to remove the men. Intervention by the criminal justice system did not appear to stop the violence or aggression when the men were drunk other than in the short term as the men were removed. Few instances appeared to involve referrals to alcohol services.

The case with the highest number of incidents recorded (52 incidents) involved partners who were both alcoholics, with high levels of chaotic behaviour and violence (see Example 5)

Example 5 – Mr and Mrs Violet

Both as perpetrators and alcoholics

Fifty two incidents involving Mr Violet as perpetrator and two involving Mrs Violet as the perpetrator were recorded by the police over six years, with a history of further incidents prior to the research period. Both were alcoholics, with friends who were also alcoholics. Descriptions of the incidents by the police indicate that it was mainly Mrs Violet who rang them and that they considered Mr Violet to be the main perpetrator. The police attempted to get her referred to other support, but she usually declined. The typical pattern involved the woman contacting the police as the man was at her back door ‘*in a drunken state and repeatedly banging on the door to be let in*’ and she wanted him removed from the house. Over time Mr Violet was increasingly violent – he smashed Mrs Violet’s face in, smashed up the contents of the house, threatened to kill her and twice he also put the gas on in attempts to burn the house down. He was arrested for BOP at least seven times and once for being drunk and disorderly, but there were no convictions resulting.

Mrs Violet was also recorded as violent in a manner that appears to be what Johnson (2006) calls ‘violent resistance’, within a context where she was more often on the receiving end of abuse and harassment. For instance, the police described the woman as defending her child: ‘*husband beating daughter up and caller hitting husband*’. Mrs Violet also used a weapon and therefore the injuries to the man were severe. The police record that on the

²⁵ Statistically significant at Chi-Square 19.705 with continuity correction, $p < .000$

first occasion *‘[Mrs Violet] had scratches to her neck and [Mr Violet] had a 2" cut to his head which required hospital treatment, but neither made accusations of assault and it was not pursued further’* and *‘both parties were drunk’*. In a further incident the woman was thought to have cut the man’s throat with a knife. This resulted in a charge for grievous bodily harm with intent (s20), eventually discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service as Mr Violet did not want to provide evidence and said it was an accident. He was hoping to get back with Mrs Violet and *‘states that he loves [her] and he will marry her as soon as he is divorced’*. Mrs Violet was also arrested for BOP after a drinking session.

Both Mr and Mrs Violet were further arrested for grievous bodily harm with intent (s20) and cautioned for assaulting a woman friend.

Children

The presence of children and children becoming involved in some way in the incidents – for example ringing the police – was a constant theme throughout many of the cases. Children were recorded in over half of cases (55%) as having been present when the violence or other abuse took place. In cases involving post-separation violence, issues related to child contact were mentioned as a feature in nearly a third of cases (30%). Reference to this by the police typically included statements such as *‘verbal disagreement over access to children’*; and *‘this incident is over access to their children’*. The police were also recorded on occasion as providing advice to parents about contact or about obtaining further advice from a solicitor. For instance: *‘Advice was given to both re the importance of the child’s welfare in these situations and the fact that it is important for [child] to have regular contact with both parents as long as there are no concerns’*

A further instance (Mr Green and Ms Grey – Example 6) where both police and interview data was available, provides an example of how women may negotiate safety with very violent male partners, including having to ‘allow’ access to the children. The example of Mr Green and Ms Grey also involved use of self-defensive violence by the woman. This example shows the importance of involvement of other agencies, in addition to the criminal justice system.

Example 6 – Mr Green and Ms Grey

Negotiating safety where male perpetrator is very violent

In a period of just under three years there were 14 incidents with Mr Green recorded as the perpetrator and one with Ms Grey as perpetrator. During this period there were descriptions by the police of extensive domestic violence against Ms Grey by Mr Green. This largely involved threatening and aggressive behaviour and also three instances where the police described Mr Green as pushing and punching Ms Grey. Ms Grey is reported by the police as being frightened of Mr Green. She took out a civil protection order, although the police record her saying that *‘he ignores injunctions and*

arrests'. While there was power of arrest against Mr Green in five instances he was arrested in only three – for criminal damage when he forced a window to get into the house; for being over the limit when in charge of a car; and for BOP after chasing Ms Grey up the street and assaulting her. Generally Mr Green had left the scene prior to the police arriving and was not arrested. Most of the violence took place post-separation of the couple, and increasingly involved arguments about the children and child contact. The one incident involving Ms Grey as perpetrator also provides the largest narrative on the police database. In this instance Mr Green was stabbed in the arm by Ms Grey in what appears to be defensive retaliation after she had managed to get him to move out. She said that she did it, and was arrested for grievous bodily harm with intent (s20). Mr Green did not want to pursue the matter further. He at first said that it was youths who did it and then that he fell on a spike. The Crown Prosecution service decided to drop the case. After this, Mr Green appeared to be even more intent on seeing the children. The police indicate that Mr Green was using the children to get back at Ms Grey – for example ringing the police to say she was taking drugs in front of the children (although he was drunk when he rang). This was seemingly part of the ongoing harassment, and eventually resulted in him getting a staying visit, with Ms Grey recorded by the police as saying that she only *'allowed it to prevent a scene at the school'*. Also, when Mr Green did have one of the children staying overnight, he overslept and consequently did not take her to school. In the interview, Ms Grey talked about how involvement by Social Services had been a positive experience and had in the end enabled her to get Mr Green to move out.

Identifying a primary aggressor

Following the ACPO guidance, which urges officers to identify the primary aggressor in situations with dual perpetrators, the police generally identified just one perpetrator and one victim in relation to each incident. Dual arrests were made in only a couple of incidents.

The records often indicated in some way whom the police considered to be the primary aggressor. For instance, in one case the police record that *'[Mr Yellow] seemed to be the instigator on most occasions to the arguments..'* This example involved potentially more serious violence by the woman, which the police see as her retaliating to protect herself: *'but he was in fact at risk of becoming seriously injured as a result of [Mrs Yellow's] methods of retaliation'*. The comment continues: *'[Mr Yellow] would argue with [Mrs Yellow] and say something really hurtful thus drawing her into the argument, male had on occasions punched and slapped her. [Mrs Yellow] not having the physical strength to retaliate has in the past gone to the kitchen, deliberately boiled the kettle and poured the boiling water over his feet, she has stabbed him in the neck (scar injury noted) and used other kitchen utensils to assault him with'*. None of these incidents were reported at the time and no sanctions resulted. However, the police discussed and developed a safety

plan with the couple such that both ‘*agreed that if there was tension brewing to try and avoid it by leaving the room and or house*’. Mrs Yellow also ‘*agreed that if [Mr Yellow] did become violent that she would not fight back but flee and contact the police*’.

Weapon

As indicated earlier, women were recorded as more frequently using a weapon. Moreover, women who used a weapon did so primarily in cases where the man was also recorded as perpetrator (77% of dual perpetrators using weapons were women), while men were more likely to use a weapon where they were recorded as the sole perpetrator (60% of sole perpetrators using weapons were men). As exemplified by the instance of Mr and Mrs Yellow immediately above, and in Example 5 (Mr and Mrs Violet) and Example 6 (Mr Green and Ms Grey), women tended to use weapons in order to protect themselves.

Dropping out of the system

Previous research in the North East of England has shown a variety of reasons as to why cases may ‘drop out’ of the system and not progress from arrest through charges to conviction²⁶. These include decisions by victims to withdraw, failure by the police to obtain adequate evidence and lack of sensitive approaches by the courts. Policy developments have attempted to deal with these, for instance by placing greater onus on the police and courts rather than victims. The current research indicates that not only may women refuse to provide statements or withdraw statements, but men do so as well. However, they may do so for different reasons. Both men and women were often reluctant (or incapable) of providing statements or pursuing a case where they had both been drinking heavily and ‘arguing’. For example in one case where the police talked about both as alcoholics, there were 12 incidents by the man against the woman (assault, verbal abuse and damage), and two from the woman to the man. The police recorded that: ‘*Generally woman does not want to pursue any charge, and sometimes cannot remember what has happened*’, (as also found in the case of Mr and Mrs Amber, above). Men, however, did not provide a statement in some cases where their partners had used violence in retaliation or self-defence, and/or they had themselves been extremely violent (as in the cases of Mr and Mrs Violet and Mr Green and Ms Grey). Women who were victimised at times withdrew statements, minimised or denied violence had taken place against them where male partners were also very threatening and controlling (as in the case of Mr and Mrs Purple).

²⁶ Hester (2006), see footnote 13.

Conclusions

The research found that:

- While cases were very varied, there were distinct patterns by gender, with significant differences between male and female perpetrators of domestic violence in many respects.
- A vastly greater number of incidents were attributed to men, as either sole or dual perpetrators.
- Violence used by men against female partners was much more severe than that used by women against men, and a greater proportion of male perpetrators were also arrested.
- The number of women recorded or arrested as domestic violence perpetrators had increased slightly over time.
- Men and women appeared to experience and use violent/abusive behaviour in different ways, with violence by men more likely to involve fear by and control of victims.
- Cases where men and women were both recorded as perpetrators were more varied than those involving sole perpetrators, and included the largest number of repeat incidents.
- The majority of the perpetrators appeared to abuse alcohol to some degree, especially men, and more often in cases involving dual perpetrators. Abuse of alcohol was also more likely to lead to arrest.
- The police generally identified just one perpetrator and one victim in relation to each incident
- Children were present in the majority of incidents, and some incidents were related to child contact.
- The police generally identified just one perpetrator and one victim in relation to each incident
- Women were more likely to use weapons, and often in order to protect themselves.
- Men and women who were victims appeared to refuse to give statements, or to withdraw statements, for different reasons.

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