



# **Domestic Violence Perpetrators: Identifying Needs to Inform Early Intervention**

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## Background

This research was commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation and the Home Office to:

- a) develop a detailed picture of domestic violence perpetrators entering the criminal justice system,
- b) identify agencies and services involved in interventions with such perpetrators, and
- c) highlight help-seeking pathways and potential opportunities for early intervention and prevention.

The domestic violence perpetrator project was carried out between June 2004 and December 2005, by teams at the University of Bristol (Marianne Hester, Nicole Westmarland and Geetanjali Gangoli) and at the Home Office (Mike Wilkinson, Caitriona O’Kelly, Andrew Kent and Alana Diamond). The research built on a prior study that looked at attrition in cases entering the criminal justice system across the North East of England, which found that a more systematic approach to repeat offenders is needed, including development of partnerships between the Criminal Justice Service, health and other agencies<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years the focus of most service provision has been on providing appropriate and timely support to victims. This has been played out against a background of the criminalisation of the consequences of domestic violence. While services and support for victims continue to be key, they must also be underpinned by appropriate prevention and intervention strategies which directly target domestic violence perpetrators and assist and enable them to stop offending.

Although there are criminal sanctions for some domestic violence offenders, most perpetrators of domestic violence will never or infrequently come into contact with the police, let alone the courts, the probation service or have had the opportunity to be referred onto a perpetrator programme. The police only come to know about less than a quarter (23%) of the worst cases of domestic violence<sup>2</sup>, and of those incidents reported about a quarter result in arrest<sup>3</sup>.

Even if a place can be secured on a domestic violence perpetrator programme; they do not provide a ‘quick fix’, are run for a fixed number of sessions, and they are not usually set up to provide practical advice on issues such as housing, employment, alcohol and drug abuse, parenting skills and legal issues<sup>4</sup>. There are very few avenues of practical support; especially for those perpetrators who recognise they have a problem and would like to change their behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> Hester, M., Hanmer, J., Coulson, S., Morahan, M. & Razak, A (2003) *Domestic Violence: Making it Through the Criminal Justice System*, University of Sunderland & the Northern Rock Foundation; Hester, M. (2006) ‘Making It Through the Criminal Justice System: Attrition and Domestic Violence’, *Social Policy and Society*, 5 (1): 79-90.

<sup>2</sup> Walby, S. and Allen, J. (2004) *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: findings from the British Crime Survey*, Home office Research Study No. 276, Home Office: London.

<sup>3</sup> Hester (2006) – footnote 1.

<sup>4</sup> Humphreys, C., Hester, M., Hague, G., Mullender, A., Abrahams, H. & Lowe, P. (2000) *From Good Intentions to Good Practice – Mapping Services for Families where there is Domestic Violence*, Bristol: Policy Press.

## The research

The research involved three separate elements:

1. The development of detailed perpetrator profiles using anonymised data from the Northumbria police, including demographic data, domestic violence and non-domestic violence incidents recorded, repeat offending, and charges and outcomes (carried out by the University of Bristol team).
2. Interviews with domestic violence perpetrators in the North East and elsewhere in England and Wales to assess their views concerning services and inputs to reduce repeat offending, along with perpetrator programme co-ordinators (carried out by the University of Bristol and Home Office teams).
3. Interviews with a wide range of agencies and organisations across the Northumbria police force area to assess the nature of direct and in-direct services provided for domestic violence perpetrators (carried out by the University of Bristol team).

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<sup>5</sup>. By tracking the 356 perpetrators involved in those earlier incidents, the current research was able to develop a longitudinal, 3-year, picture including both domestic violence and non-domestic violence offending and outcomes (sample one). A further sample of 336 domestic violence perpetrators was established based on the first week of November 2004 and tracked until the end of July 2005 (sample two). The second sample period was chosen to reflect changes in charging procedures. A total of 692 perpetrator profiles were developed, and analysis carried out for the 1,889 incidents related to these individuals.

Two separate samples of domestic violence perpetrators were interviewed, one sample by the Home Office team and one by the University of Bristol team – with a combined sample of 62. The Home Office team conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with male perpetrators in four sites throughout England and Wales. All these men were engaged on, or were about to be engaged on, a domestic violence perpetrator programme. All programmes were voluntary and accepted referrals from a range of agencies but none were mandated by Probation or accredited by National Probation Directorate. The University of Bristol team interviewed a further 17 male perpetrators from three sites in the North East of England who were on or had completed a voluntary or a Probation mandated programme, or were in prison. In addition, to overcome the problem that domestic violence abusers frequently deny and minimise their behaviour<sup>6</sup>, and to produce a more ‘rounded’ account, some programme facilitators, and a number of other individuals working with domestic violence perpetrators were also interviewed by the Home Office team (n=12). The University of Bristol team similarly carried out

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<sup>5</sup> Hester et al. (2003) – footnote 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cavanagh et al. (2001) Remedial work: men’s strategic responses to their violence against intimate female partners. *Sociology* 35(3): 695-714.

informal discussions with staff from the programmes providing the North East samples.

Interviews were carried out with 72 agencies across the Northumbria police force area<sup>7</sup> to assess the nature of services that were available to domestic violence perpetrators and to identify any gaps. Agencies interviewed included the police, specialist domestic violence services, probation, lawyers, CPS, Youth Offending, ethnic minority specialist organisations, social services, health and housing.

The researchers were also able to draw on findings regarding experiences of victimisation from the earlier attrition study, where 51 victims of domestic violence had been interviewed in relation to incidents forming part of sample one in the current research, and where CPS data was available in relation to 14 incidents.

The rest of the report is divided into three main areas: drawing primarily from the longitudinal police data sample; from the interviews with perpetrators; and from the mapping of agency responses.

### **Perpetrators involved with the Criminal Justice System<sup>8</sup>**

The sample of perpetrators recorded as having been involved in at least one domestic violence incident by the Northumbria police, and whose pattern of offending we were able to track between 2001 or 2002 and 2005, had the following demographic characteristics at the beginning of the sample period:

- The majority were men (92%)
- With a mean age of 34 years
- Most of their victims were women (91%)
- One incident involved a same sex couple (male partners)
- Nearly all perpetrators were white (94%), as were their victims (95%)

When analysed according to the number and type of incidents it was apparent that the perpetrators could be placed in one of four separate groups depending on whether they were repeat offenders:

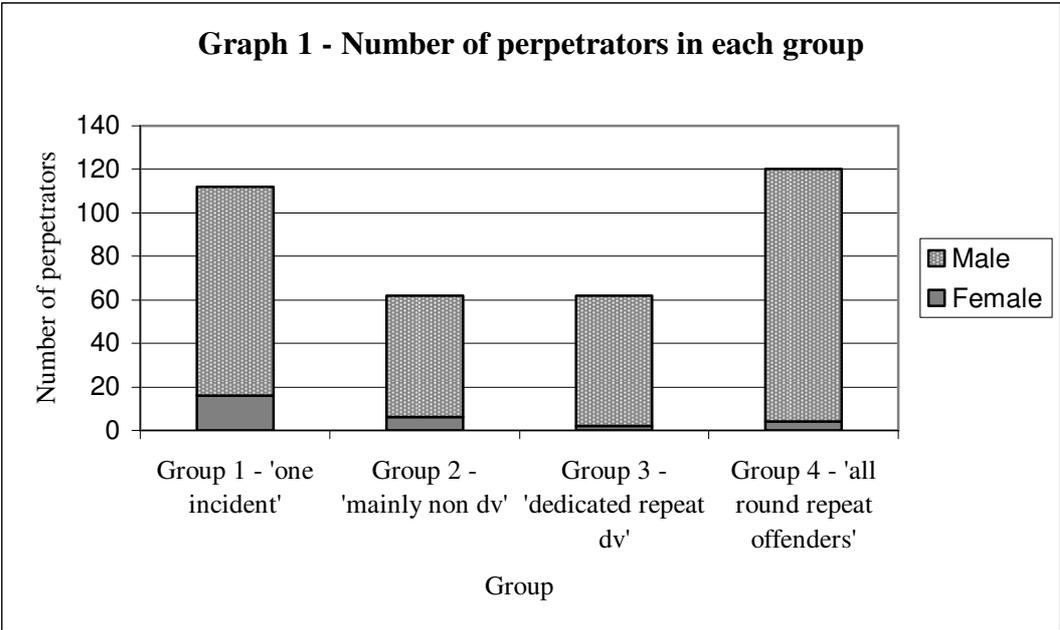
1. Group One – the **‘one incident’** group, who only had one domestic violence incident recorded on the police database. (n=112)
2. Group Two – the **‘mainly non-domestic violence’** group, who only had one domestic violence incident recorded on the police database, but had also been arrested for other, non-domestic violence, offences. (n=62)
3. Group Three – those who were **‘dedicated repeat domestic violence’** perpetrators. They had a number of domestic violence incidents recorded on the police database, but had not been arrested for other, non-domestic violence, offences. (n=62)
4. Group Four - those who were **‘all-round repeat offenders’**. This group had both a number of domestic violence incidents recorded on the police database, and had also been arrested for other, non-domestic violence, offences. (n=120)

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<sup>7</sup> Specifically in Newcastle, Sunderland, South Tyneside, North Northumberland and Gateshead, with 5 interviews carried out by researchers at the University of Sunderland.

<sup>8</sup> Quotes in this section of the report are from the University of Bristol interviews.

The biggest group was the ‘all-round repeat offenders’ (Group Four), which was also the group with the highest rate of offending. The second largest group was the ‘one incident’ group (Group One), consisting of those who only appeared to be perpetrating domestic violence related offences (see Graph 1)<sup>9</sup>.



Convictions in the ‘one incident’ group (Group One) and the ‘all-round repeat offender’ group (Group Four) were most likely to result in discharges and/or fines. Convictions for the ‘dedicated repeat domestic violence’ perpetrators (Group Three) were most likely to result in community sentences. Individuals in the ‘mainly non-domestic violence’ group (Group Two) were most likely to receive custodial sentences.

The Group characteristics are outlined in greater details in what follows, and suggest that the criminal justice interventions that were applied were most effective in relation to Group One, while they tended not to be effective, that is did not stop further incidents, with individuals from Groups Two, Three or Four.

**Group One: ‘one incident’** – The age range was 16-61, with an average similar to the sample as a whole (35 years compared to 34). As was the case for all the groups, most of the perpetrators were male. However, this group had the lowest proportion of male perpetrators and the highest proportion of female perpetrators (96/112 men, 86%, and 16/112 women, 14%). Out of the 84 domestic violence incidents where an arrest could be made, arrests were made in relation to 66 incidents (79%, 66/84), and charges were brought in 38 of these (45%, 38/66). 17 individuals of those charged (45%, 17/38) were convicted of a criminal offence and a further 6 (16%, 6/38) were bound over to keep the peace. The offenders who were convicted in this group were most likely to receive a low sentence in the form of a discharge and/or fine (see Table 1).

<sup>9</sup> Although only one incident was recorded for these individuals during the sample period, they might have perpetrated other incidents previously or may not have been reported to the police for other incidents.

**Table 1**

Sentence type	No.	%
Discharge	4	29
Monetary	8	57
Community	0	0
Custodial	2	14
Missing data	3	-
Total	17	100

Eric was an example of the ‘one incident’ group. He and his wife Gina had separated but he tried to break into the house, frightening her, the children and her elderly father. Eric was subsequently arrested and charged with criminal damage. The charge was withdrawn but he was bound over (for six months)<sup>10</sup>. Gina was happy with the outcome because the bind over stopped further incidents. To continue the effect, after the six months were up she obtained an injunction through the courts to further prohibit Eric from coming near the house.

**Group Two: ‘mainly non-domestic violence’** - There were 62 perpetrators in this group. They were not recorded as being involved in any further domestic violence incidents, but were arrested for other offences. Some, such as Alistair (below), had been found to be violent in contexts other than the domestic.

*‘I’ve never hit a woman in my life until this relationship – although I’ve hit a fair few blokes in my life.’ (Alistair)*

Most of the individuals in Group Two were male (90%, 56 men and 6 women), with an average age slightly below that of the sample as a whole (31 years rather than 34, age range 17-58).

Out of the 55 domestic violence incidents where an arrest could be made, arrests were made in 40 (73%, 40/55), and charges were brought in 30 of these (75%, 30/40). Fifteen individuals (50%, 15/30) were convicted of a criminal offence and a further 8 (27%, 8/30) were bound over to keep the peace. The majority of convictions resulted in discharge and/or fine, and there were four custodial sentences (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

Sentence type	No.	%
Discharge	2	13
Monetary	6	40
Community	3	13
Custodial	4	20
Missing data	0	-
Total	15	100

<sup>10</sup> A bind over is an alternative to a criminal conviction whereby an individual can be bound over to do or refrain from doing specific activities.

While perpetrators in Group Two were not reported for any further domestic violence incidents, they were arrested in 232 non-domestic violence incidents. The number of arrests per perpetrator for these incidents ranged from 1 to 19, with an average of 4. There were 60 convictions and 4 bind overs for these 232 arrests.

Gerry, who had the highest number of arrests for non-domestic violence offences in this group (19 arrests), received 4 convictions and 1 bind over. In 2001 Gerry was involved in a domestic violence incident with power of arrest attached but was not arrested. Since then, over a four year period, he had been arrested for drug offences, burglary, violence against the person, sexual offences, handling stolen goods as well as other offences such as breach of bail (see Table 3).

**Table 3 – Gerry’s non-domestic violence offences**

<i>Offence type</i>	<b>No. arrests</b>	<b>No. convictions</b>	<b>Sentence</b>
Drug offences	3	2	£50 fine 100 hrs CPO
Burglary	2	1	Curfew order
BOP	2		
Violence against the person	1		
Sexual offences	1		
Theft/handling stolen goods	1		
Other (breach bail, fta police etc.)	9	1	£100 fine, 12 month driving disq.
Total	19	4	

**Group Three: ‘dedicated repeat domestic violence’** - There were 62 perpetrators in this group, recorded as repeat domestic violence offenders but not as being arrested for any other offence. The proportion of men in this Group was especially high (97%, 60 men and 2 women). The average age of 36 years was higher than the overall sample, with a range of 17-62 years.

Despite their often extreme use of violence against their partners, the apparently ‘private’ nature of their offences made some of the men in this Group appear non-violent and even ‘placid’ to friends or professionals they were in contact with. For instance, Grant, who smashed a glass over his pregnant girlfriend’s head and repeatedly punched and kicked her:

*... I said to my friend, I says, would you say I was a violent person? [He looked] shocked straight away, because like, in the situations we were in, I would be the one that would try and diffuse it, say to someone, look, things aren’t that bad, you know, then try and diffuse the situation ... I says well tell that to my fiancée. (Grant)*

And Brendan, who hospitalised his wife:

*They find it funny that I’m doing this [perpetrator programme]. Even my doctor says I’m a very placid person. (Brendan)*

Looking at the initial incidents, 50 had a power of arrest and arrests were made in 41 of these, with charges brought in 18 (44%, 18/41). Seven individuals (39%, 7/18) were convicted of a criminal offence and 2 (11%, 2/18) were bound over to keep the peace, with most ending up with a discharge and/or fine (see Table 4). There was one custodial sentence resulting from these initial offences.

**Table 4 – outcomes from initial offences**

Sentence type	No.	%
Discharge	2	29
Monetary	2	29
Community	2	29
Custodial	1	14
Missing data	0	-
Total	7	100

While the perpetrators in Group Three were not arrested for any other offences, they were involved in 137 further domestic violence incidents, between one and 12 each with an average of 2. There were 6 convictions and 9 bind overs for these 137 incidents. Niles, the perpetrator with the highest number of domestic violence incidents recorded in this group (12 incidents), was arrested for two of these and received no convictions or bind overs.

Sid was a typical example of the ‘dedicated repeat domestic violence’ group. He had been violent to Beatrice during most of their relationship, his violence increasing even further after the birth of their daughter. At the time of the sample incident the police were called and he was arrested and charged with actual bodily harm and threats to kill. Sid was soon violent again to Beatrice, despite being bound over from the previous incident. Sid was charged with harassment for this attack. He then carried out a further, very severe attack on Beatrice, wounding her by pushing a glass in her face. This resulted in a charge of grievous bodily harm with intent. Sid was eventually sentenced to 27 months imprisonment. Ten months later he was again charged, with being drunk and disorderly, just as he had been released from prison

**Group Four: ‘all round repeat offenders’** - This was the largest group, consisting of 120 perpetrators, who had an ongoing history of both domestic violence and non-domestic violence offences. Group Four had a very high proportion of men, higher than the average for the overall sample (116/120, 97% men and 4/120, 3% women). The average age of 33 years old (range 17-64) was slightly younger than the overall sample. Out of the 95 initial domestic violence incidents recorded in the sample period where an arrest could be made, arrests were made in 77 instances (81%), and charges were brought in 44 (57%. 44/77). Seventeen individuals (39%, 17/44) were convicted of a criminal offence and 16 (36%) were bound over to keep the peace for these initial offences (see Table 5).

**Table 5 – outcome for initial offences**

Sentence type	No.	%
Discharge and/or Fine	2	11
Monetary	10	56
Community	3	17
Custodial	3	17
Missing data	1	-
Total	19	101

The perpetrators in Group Four were involved in 771 further domestic violence incidents and were arrested for 687 other offences across the rest of the sample period. The number of domestic violence incidents they were involved in ranged from 1 to 43, with an average of 6. There were 50 convictions and 45 bind overs for these 771 incidents. Jeremy, the perpetrator with the highest number of domestic violence incidents in this group (43 incidents), was arrested for eight offences against the person; four instances of breach of the peace and three other offences, resulting in two convictions and no bind overs (see Table 6):

**Table 6 – Jeremy’s non-domestic violence incidents**

<i>Incident type</i>	No. arrests	No. convictions	Sentence
Violence against the person	8		
BOP	4		
Other offence	3	2	£30 fine Missing data

The perpetrators in Group Four were arrested for anywhere between one and 23 non-domestic violence offences, with an average of 6. There were 218 convictions (average 1.8 convictions per perpetrator) and 22 bind overs for these 687 other offences. Jamie, the perpetrator with the highest number of arrests for other offences in Group Four (23 arrests altogether), received 9 convictions and no bind overs (see Table 7). All 9 convictions were for being drunk and disorderly and resulted in fines.

**Table 7 – Jamie’s non-domestic violence offences**

<i>Offence type</i>	No. arrests	No. convictions	Sentence
BOP	8		
Criminal damage	2		
Theft and handling stolen goods	1		
Other	12	9	9 fines ranging between £30 & £100

Lucas was a typical example of the Group Four perpetrators, who were violent to both partners and others. When he and Celia started their relationship he initially seemed nice, then became increasingly violent, and also isolated Celia from friends and family. After a number of years where the violence was becoming increasingly extreme, Celia began to report the incidents to the police although no charges

resulted. After another, particularly extreme, assault, the police arrested Lucas. He was found guilty of actual bodily harm and criminal damage, and sentenced to a community rehabilitation order (attendance at probation perpetrator programme) and a fine. Celia, however, voiced her concern that neither the sentence nor attending the perpetrator programme had had any impact on Lucas, and he was continuing to harass her as well as being violent to his new partner.

*He just went through the motions and hasn't changed at all. I'm not sure men like that can change. He denies that he ever did anything wrong, he has never apologised or indicated in any way that he's sorry. ... He had them all taken in: he just played the part they wanted to see, then walked through the door and carried on in the old way.*  
(Celia)

Data from the police indicates that following his conviction for the sample incident, Lucas was also arrested on six further occasions in relation to non-domestic violence offences. In one instance he was arrested and charged with grievous bodily harm and obstructing a police officer. He was subsequently convicted for obstructing a police officer and fined.

### **Interviews with domestic violence perpetrators**

Of the 62 men interviewed by the Home Office and University of Bristol teams, the majority were over the age of 25 (54/62). Most of the men (50/62) also had children, with an average of 2.7 per individual. Most of the men were in full-time employment, and generally engaged in either skilled or unskilled manual labour, although this varied by area and more than half the North East sample were unemployed or receiving sickness benefit at the time of the interview. Many of the men (16 of 36 who responded) had progressed no further than the age of 16 in their schooling. Nine men had gained NVQs or technical qualifications. Only a small minority had been to college and to university (6/46).

The profiles of offending were similar to those outlined from the police data above. Many of the men had had contact with the police at some time, in relation to domestic violence, other types of violence, or other non-domestic violence offending. Forty men, of the 58 who responded to this question, had had police contact as a result of domestic violence. Of the men interviewed by the Home Office team, all of whom were on voluntary programmes, it was often difficult to ascertain exactly what happened with this contact. Few reported being arrested (7/23), and there were even fewer convictions (3/23). There were 13 incidents of police contacts over 'generic' violence, with 8 arrests and 5 convictions, and 7 men had been convicted on 'other offences'. Seven of the men from the Home Office sample had also been to prison for various offences.

Fifteen of the men from the Home Office sample talked about using alcohol frequently, and 8 of occasional use<sup>11</sup>. The remainder did not mention alcohol as an issue of concern. With regard to drug taking, 9 men specifically mentioned usage. Of these, 8 talked about drugs being a problem at some point, but it was not referred to as a chronic concern. In terms of the type of drugs taken, most

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<sup>11</sup> This is fewer than the proportion recorded by Gilchrist et al. (2003) in a domestic violence probation sample. They also noted that there was a history of substance abuse in 19% of their sample.

discussed cannabis use. It is possible that there may have been some reticence in disclosing use of other class A substances. Alcohol and drugs use followed a similar pattern among the men interviewed in the North East sample.

### ***Triggers to change***

There appeared to be certain moments, or potential ‘triggers to change’. These arose when what the men saw as a natural, correct, or desirable sequence of events failed to take place. There was a range of circumstances that the men might consider to be the ‘normal’ state of affairs. For example, having a partner and children; regarding a particular mode of behaviour between himself and his partner (and children) as appropriate and ‘normal’; and the expectation that the man should be head of the household. It was when these relations became chronically disturbed that the potential for change emerged (as, unfortunately, did also the potential for the man to re-assert his control and become even more violent). At the same time, change did not usually take place without a particularly salient moment or ‘crisis’ point. Mostly this was when their partner threatened to leave, or actually left. Child contact issues were also given as a reason for help seeking. Sometimes involvement by the police following an incident might have the same effect. As one man stated;

*My wife just said, ‘I have had enough. You either sort it out or we are going to have to go our separate ways’. I did not want to lose my wife and children. (Noel – Home Office interview)*

For many men it was this profound experience of loss, or anticipation of loss, and recognition that this loss was self inflicted, that caused them to take action. However, sense of loss is subjective, and thus particular to each man. It may appear at one point and not at another, even if both sets of circumstances appear superficially similar. Some men noted the loss of a number of partners, which had had little or no effect on them. The loss of a particular partner though, at a specific stage in life, was sometimes the key to attempting to make changes in their behaviour.

While the men often reported the existence of a salient moment, the suggestion from their own accounts, and from programme facilitators, was that the appearance of problems and any degree of resolve to confront these problems were part of a process rather than a single event. For many men, over a period of time there gradually appeared a looming threat. As one group facilitator noted,

*[the men] are frightened of being on their own, not having relationships, not being able to live with other people, with women and kids, and they want to make a change to their lives..... they want to have a happy life and they know that their behaviour is destroying that happy life. (Facilitator – Home Office interview)*

### ***Help seeking***

The men were often aware that they had a problem with their behaviour, for instance:

*Over a period of years I thought, I need to change. Even in the relationship I was in before the one I have got now, I knew I had a problem. (Wayne – Home Office interview)*

But this was also something that the individual concerned had a certain stake in continuing. Agencies may come across men at points where ‘gains’ and ‘losses’

from violence are in the balance. A number of them had made some tentative efforts to seek help, but sensing that there is a problem and identifying and articulating the nature of that problem are very different things. Such men were unlikely to have the resources to undertake this move alone and it became key at this point to locate some individual or agency that could help to address their violence.

There appeared to be many challenges for any intervention. Firstly, clarification of the potential losses from domestic abuse, such as criminal justice sanctions, or issues with child contact, might act as a spur for the man to take some action. Obviously some agencies, such as the police, were possibly more equipped for this role than others. At the same time agencies may also be involved in providing some form of help for the man. It might simply involve signposting to other agencies. It may also include work to displace inertia, both through spelling out the consequences of continued abuse, and by suggesting practical steps that could be taken to address that behaviour. These steps ranged from attempts to address related problems (with alcohol/drugs) to clarifying the sources of their unhappiness and making available the resources to identify alternative ways of living.

One man stated:

*I believe if I had seen something, and I had known more about it I would have been inquisitive myself to think, "Hang on, I am going to go there because that sounds like me" and I would probably have come (to the group) sooner...personally I think it would have made me realise sooner and then it might have been easier for [partner] and she would not have threatened me with that.'* (Leonard – Home Office interview)

The implications of loss of relationship and children for men's help-seeking behaviour has an added dimension, in that women may both want and need to leave a relationship, or be encouraged to do so by the agencies with which they are in contact. The period of leaving has also been identified as especially dangerous, where the men are more likely to use or increase their violence against their partners. Using such crisis moments to focus intervention with domestically abusive men therefore needs especially careful approaches and safety planning with or in relation to the women concerned.

### ***Which agencies are men in contact with?***

Out of the 45 men interviewed by the Home Office team:

- 32 men stated that they had been to their GP prior to beginning the domestic violence programme;
- 26 men had contact with the police in relation to domestic violence (13 for non-domestic violence; 21 for other non-violent offences).
- 13 men had contact with Relate, 11 with Social Services, 6 with the Samaritans, 5 with hospitals, 5 with alcohol services, and 4 with drugs services;
- Some men had also been in contact with services such as counselling, legal aid or solicitors, and welfare services at work.

On average, the men in this sample were in contact with three agencies, however some men contacted up to nine different agencies before they took part in the perpetrator programme.

### ***Men's experience of contact with agencies***

It is possible to categorise the ways in which men and agencies came into contact, as follows:

- Proactive (direct) – where the man initiates search for, and contact with, a particular agency in an attempt to address his violence
- Proactive (indirect) – where the man initiates contact with an agency, but not directly for his violence
- Reactive – where an agency initiates contact with the man

Within these forms of contact there were some identifiable markers in terms of getting the men to the most appropriate agency. Two of the main issues were those related to problems of *reporting* violence, and those associated with *resistance* to agency contact. The effectiveness with which relevant agencies dealt with these issues was extremely important.

Some men contacted an agency themselves in order to address their violence. However, it was often unclear how direct they were in their help seeking. Some of the men appeared to have explicitly stated that they had been violent to their partner and that they wanted some help:

*I actually punched the wife...we have our arguments but after doing that it was something I never want to do again, so she went to her sister's and I went to the doctor and asked where I could go for help. (Wade – Home Office interview)*

Other men may have contacted an agency, such as the GP, with which they were familiar, but without being explicit about their violence. Some may have reported problems with anger, while others complained about other ailments, most commonly depression or 'feeling low' or 'down'. According to some men, their GPs simply prescribed anti-depressants, or they referred the men to inappropriate counselling services.

Those men who were explicit about their violence did appear, in general, to have located the relevant service more easily. There were cases, however, where violence appeared to have been mentioned (taking into consideration the difficulties with men's accounts of their actions) but where the agencies involved were unable to refer to an existing domestic violence perpetrator programme:

*the route I took...was...long. Having gone to my GP, having being interviewed with the Family Institute here...a number of times, having been to Relate where Relate felt that there was history of physical violence and they refused any more sessions...then back to the Family Institute....I went to the H. Hospital seeking anger management. I went to the W. hospital, which specialises in people with an incapacity....So I tried lots of avenues....and the only time this (domestic violence programme) was recommended came about in a chance meeting with somebody from the Family Institute. (Winston – Home Office interview)*

The issue of timeliness was important, particularly for men whose help seeking was tentative, and commitment to change questionable. For example, delays in getting

onto perpetrator programmes was a concern for men who felt ready to engage immediately. Once the perpetrator programme was found it was mostly seen as being the intended destination point of their search.

A number of men came into contact with agencies reactively, that is as a direct result of their violent behaviour. This was often contact with the police, but was also in some instances related to child contact issues (e.g. social services, or CAFCASS). Although some men contacted the police proactively with regard to their violence, for most the contact was involuntary, giving rise to possible problems of resistance to intervention or confusion of roles, both for the men and the police themselves. There was a potential conflict between enforcement and holding perpetrators to account or providing advice and referral. None the less, some men did suggest that a sanction, or the threat or consequence of sanction, gave them the incentive to initiate help seeking:

*I was having problems at home, I would be violent and abusive and I decided that I needed to change. I was arrested by the police and banned from my own pub, so I decided that I needed to change.* (Noel – Home office interview)

The same man however expressed a strong resentment at the contact:

*...distrust and disrespect for the police after that, to be honest with you. Although they were doing what they felt was in my partner's interest, I feel they were doing it for their own interest.* (Noel – Home office interview)

For some men resentment regarding police intervention and their role as a law enforcement agency, thus appeared to make acceptance of advice and help unlikely. However, not all men expressed resentment to police intervention, and some said they would have welcomed information from the police about, or even referral by them to, services and perpetrator programmes.

It was difficult to predict when an intervention might result in a successful outcome - that is, in moving the man toward a point where he wanted, and was able to, address his abuse and violence. Some of the determinants for success appeared to be related to how well problems associated with reporting of violence, and resistance to agency intervention, could be overcome. Appropriate and effective agency response often hinged on levels of awareness of the front line professionals. Methods to identify domestic violence as an issue, and to facilitate readiness to change, awareness of relevant other agencies for referral, as well as capacity for this to be done without substantial delay, seemed to be highly relevant to strengthening mechanisms of support. Some men also mentioned as important to sustaining change the development of new friendship networks where violence was not condoned.

### **Agency responses to domestic violence perpetrators**

Of the 72 agencies surveyed across the Northumbria police force area, 40 said that they provided some kind of provision regarding domestic violence perpetrators, with 24 of these offering such services indirectly as a part of their general services. Just over a third of the agencies (n=27, 37%) did not refer perpetrators on to other services, most commonly because they only worked with victims, or because they considered it outside their remit. Many of the agencies, however, said that they did not refer perpetrators on because they were not aware of services, or there were no

local services to refer them on to. This was particularly true of health care professionals.

*...we don't know where to send them...* (Health care professional – North East interview).

*We work in a mostly rural area...and there are hardly any services to refer them on to. The nearest services are nearly 60 miles away...* (Health care professional – North East interview).

Given that the perpetrators interviewed were most likely to contact health services as their first point of call for help-seeking, it was notable that the health practitioners surveyed did not feel that they had an obvious response. They recognised that due to the prevalence of domestic violence it was inevitable that some of their clients were domestic abusers, but did not see themselves as doing any focused work with such perpetrators, or did not even know how to identify them:

*GPs undoubtedly will be getting men who disclose inappropriate behaviour. No evidence of what it does.* (Health care professional – North East interview).

One health practitioner did know of training for work with perpetrators, although had not undergone the training.

Alcohol issues were brought up by some of the men in the interviews. Four agencies in the sample worked on addiction issues and a further 12 agencies said that they referred clients on to addiction centres where appropriate. The addiction services were aware that they might work with domestic violence perpetrators, however, issues of domestic violence did not always come up, or they might not be told by referrers that it was an issue:

*Ours is a...project...based on a referral basis so we may be referred perpetrators without being told they are. They may be coming to us for alcohol issues...*(Addiction Service – North East interview).

Thirteen of the agencies surveyed offered counselling services to domestic violence perpetrators, usually as part of a perpetrator programme. Three of these agencies were generic counselling services that offered help to domestic violence offenders as a part of their general counselling service, and tended to work on the domestic abuse issues via relationship issues rather than focusing on the abuser's behaviour (as is the favoured approach in perpetrator programmes).

*We believe that domestic violence is caused not by the individual but by the relationship and we try to address the problems within the relationship* (Counselling service – North East interview)

However, such a counselling approach was criticised by some of the other services, where it was felt that projects should *'challenge men's behaviour rather than provide counselling and support'*. The male perpetrators interviewed in the North East reiterated this critique, indicating they had not found the counselling sessions some of them had been offered very useful in tackling their abusive behaviour.

There was evidence that the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)<sup>12</sup> was leading to better multi-agency links in the North East. The criminal justice agencies highlighted in particular that this initiative had provided a positive environment for work with domestic violence perpetrators:

*It has been incredibly useful as a probation supervisor to work in MAPPA and develop links with the police and housing. It has led to greater information sharing and better communication than before.* (Probation service – North East interview)

Specific gaps in services were identified with regard to young men and members of Black and minority ethnic communities. It was thought that services for these groups needed to be specialist rather than generic. For example:

*The average age in our group is 35-40 years old and it's not right to put an 18 or 19 year old in that situation. The programme would be suitable for adolescent males, but not in that context. It would have to be a specific group for ... adolescent males who are abusing.* (Perpetrator programme worker – North East interview)

*(We need) services that work with BME men and young people, and are sensitive to issues of racism and discrimination.* (Perpetrator programme worker – North East interview)

Housing for perpetrators was another area identified as an important gap:

*We need some housing provision in perpetrators, both crisis provision, and general accommodation so that at the point of an assault even if the police aren't called then there's somewhere he can go so her and the kids don't have to leave. Accommodation is needed for the higher risk men, when it's not safe to do the work with them while they're living at home, and this is predominantly around child protection issues. In those situations generally social services will insist on the woman moving into a refuge, they say 'there's nowhere for him to go but there's a refuge for her'. It would also encourage women to end violent relationships because often they stay in the relationship because he has nowhere to go.* (Perpetrator programme worker – North East interview)

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## Key Findings and Recommendations

### ***What should be put in place for domestic violence perpetrators?***

- The men were more likely to seek help at some kind of 'crisis' moment, usually when the partner gave them an ultimatum or actually left, or where there were child contact issues. However, this is also when the men are likely to be especially dangerous and homicidal, and safety for the women and children concerned therefore has to be a priority for any agency intervening with the men at this time.

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<sup>12</sup> MAPPA places a duty on the police and the National Probation Service to assess and manage risks posed by domestic violence and sexual offenders in every community in England and Wales. In the most serious cases MAPPA can recommend increased police monitoring, special steps to protect victims and the use of closely supervised accommodation

- Perpetrators interviewed said that adverts in newspapers and on the radio for services would be useful to highlight domestic abuse behaviour and direct them to services.
- Some men suggested that a criminal justice sanction or threat or consequence of sanction, provided the incentive for help-seeking, and intervention might be effective at this point.
- Some men wanted the police to direct them to perpetrator programmes and/or provide information about help-seeking.
- Emergency accommodation should be made available for perpetrators so that women do not always have to be the ones to leave the home.
- Men who are violent towards women need to learn new, appropriate responses to feelings of jealousy and aggression. This requires an increase in the number of perpetrator programmes across the North East that meet Respect<sup>13</sup> standards, including more self-referral programmes.
- Health service responses should not refer perpetrators to counselling or related approaches that may re-enforce the ‘poor me’ syndrome. Instead, GPs and other health service staff should direct perpetrators to services that are critical of, and aim to change, violent men’s behaviour.
- Agencies from criminal justice, health, social care, family proceedings and other sectors need to work together to develop coherent and co-ordinated approaches to perpetrators that focus on tackling men’s violent and abusive behaviour while also ensuring safety for the women and children concerned. This should apply to the whole ‘continuum’ of domestic violence perpetrators, from early intervention to chronic and severe offenders.
- Agencies that may come into contact with perpetrators need the skills to ask about violent and abusive behaviour.
- Specialist services are needed for some groups, such as young men, and for men for whom English is not their first language.
- Services should be sensitive to issues of racism and discrimination.

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<sup>13</sup> RESPECT is a UK-wide organisation for practitioners and organisations working with perpetrators of domestic violence and associated work with women partners and ex-partners, and promotes best practice in work with perpetrators of domestic violence and associated work with women. They run a national helpline on 0845 122 8609.