
A Research Deep Dive into Domestic Abuse in London

Paul Dawson, Barry Charleton
& Lynne Conroy MOPAC

Evidence and Insight

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M O P A C

MAYOR OF LONDON

OFFICE FOR POLICING AND CRIME

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Executive summary

About the Deep Dive into Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse is a key issue for the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime. The deep dive used an innovative and in-depth approach to examining Domestic Abuse within London. A total of **277 cases** were **randomly selected from 2019** and systematically coded against **147 variables** resulting in a novel dataset from which analytics can then proceed.

Key Findings: Victim characteristics



- Three quarters of cases (75%, n206) involved an (ex) intimate partner as suspect with one quarter (25%, n71) involving another relation (i.e., parent/sibling/child).
- 77% of victims were female (n214) and 23% (n63) male. The average age of victims was 36 years of age. 56% of victims were White, 22% Black and 19% Asian.
- Most cases (72%, n199) involved some measure of repeat victimisation.
- 19% of victims presented with at least one additional 'need', the most frequent being a mental health issue (12%).

Key Findings: Suspect characteristics



- Most suspects were male (78%, n216) with a smaller proportion female (22%, n60). The average age was 36 years of age. 51% of victims were White, 26% Black and 19% Asian.
- 44% (n123) of suspects presented with at least one additional 'need', with 16% (n44) presenting more than one need. The most frequent need for suspects was that of mental health issues (27%, n76); substance abuse (25%, n70) and suicidal thoughts (22%, n62).

Key Findings: Offence circumstances



- Nearly 70% of cases occurred within the victim's home.
- A third of cases (35%) were noted as having children residing at the location.
- Overall, physical (59%, n163) and verbal (46%, n127) abuse were the most frequent behaviours and a third of cases (31%, n85) involved both.

Key Findings: Procedural characteristics



- Three quarters of cases ended with the victim withdrawing support (73%, n201). In half of these cases it was noted the victim reported only to remove the immediate threat.
- There was an average of 15 days between initial report and victim withdrawal. Exactly half of victims (50%, n101) withdrew on the same day as reporting.
- Overall, 12% of cases resulted in a CPS charge – however, this figure represents a majority of cases which were submitted to them (68%).
- A small number of cases progressed to the CPS without victim support (6% of the overall sample but over a third of cases referred to the CPS).

Key Findings: Case outcome and predictive factors



- Analytics were only able to explore those variables influencing 'victim withdrawal'.
- The strongest predictor **increasing** victim withdrawal was the variable '*police were called to remove the threat*' (these cases were **9x times** more likely to withdraw).
- The strongest variable in **decreasing** victim withdrawal was where a '*dispute over child access*' was noted. These victims were **14x times** less likely to withdraw.

Conclusion

The Research deep dive provides valuable insights into the nature of Domestic Abuse within London. As the MPS continues to record an increasing volume of cases, it will become more and more important to improve the response and it is hoped that the results herein can aid such discussions.

Background

The Mayor's Police and Crime Plan (PCP) 2022-25 has a specific focus upon reducing and preventing violence and making London a city in which women and girls are safer and feel safer. This continues a rich vein of related work such as the appointment in 2017 of Claire Waxman as London's first independent Victims' Commissioner (taking on a key role in making sure victims' voices are heard and their experiences of services are improved); the publication of the Mayor's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy in 2018 and a refreshed VAWG strategy published in 2022.

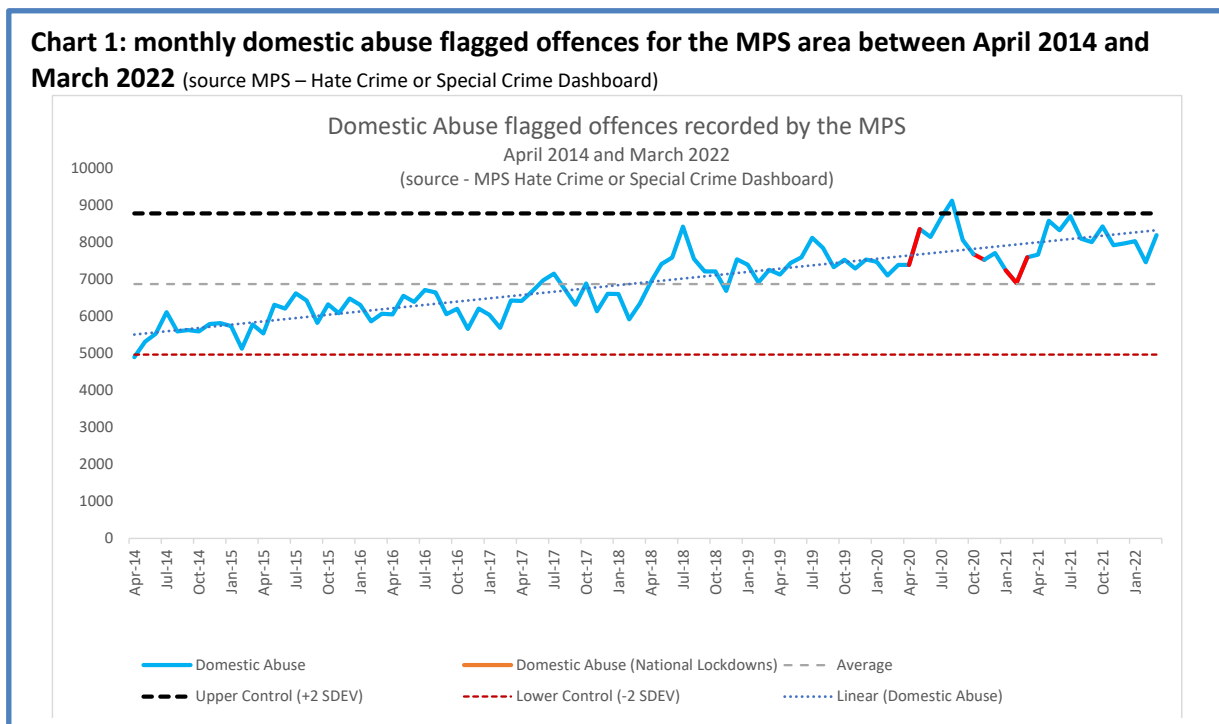
This direction has been supported by a wide array of research analytics conducted by MOPAC – be it a relevant data dashboard to monitor the numbers¹; two in-depth research reviews exploring Rape²; the evaluation of the Drive programme³; a two year evaluation of the London Survivors Gateway⁴, in-depth monitoring of victim satisfaction through surveying (the MOPAC User Satisfaction Survey and a new Victims Voice survey); as well as an upcoming evaluation of the MOPAC emergency DA accommodation provision.

Specifically focussing upon Domestic Abuse (DA), MOPAC analytics has previously sought to explore the underlying prevalence, something that proved to be a challenge. Indeed, a wide range of research shows the crime is under-reported by victims and under-recorded by the police. In 2014 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)⁵ highlighted that one in five of all reported crimes (over 800,000) go unrecorded each year, particularly in cases of violence and sexual offending⁶. In examining the topic, the MOPAC report, *Beneath the numbers*⁷ set out a 'data conundrum' – that is, as measured by Police Recorded data, DA has seen a substantial increase since 2014 (the MPS increased by 21% in the 12 months ending in March 2015 compared to the same period 2014), whereas prevalence measured by the Crime Survey for England And Wales (CSEW)⁸ has shown little change (comparing 14/15 or 17/18). Overall, the weight of evidence in *Beneath the Numbers* pointed towards the increases observed by police being *primarily attributed* to better compliance with National Crime Recording Standards rather than improved victim reporting.

Using 2017 Mid-Year population estimates with self-reported information from a London-level CSEW sample, taken across multiple years (March 2016 – March 2018) the *Beneath the numbers* report estimated approximately 246,700 adults aged 16 to 59 years who live in London would have experienced any form of domestic abuse in the previous year. This would equate to a prevalence rate of approximately 4 in 100 adults, with women more likely to experience domestic abuse than men (5.9% compared with 2.9%) resulting in an estimated ~164,000 women and ~82,000 men.

The landscape of crime and victimisation saw clear changes subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Within the wider documented crime changes - *which saw stark increases within ASB, drug offences and Hate Crime as well as notable reductions in overall Total Notifiable Offences, especially acquisitive crimes*⁹ - Domestic Abuse emerged as an area of concern.

Chart 1 shows the volume of recorded domestic abuse flagged offences, month by month for the MPS area between April 2014 to March 2022. Interrogating these data shows the steady increase in police recorded DA with historically consistent peaks, typically within the summer months, as well as the peak in August 2020 where unprecedented levels were reached. This peak follows on from the first National lockdown and could be related to the easing of such restrictions and an increased opportunity to seek help/report.



Ivandic, Kirchmair & Lindon (2020¹⁰) conducted analysis related to DA and the impact of Lockdown on a range of factors including calls for service. They reported that subsequent to lockdown, domestic calls in London increased by 400 calls on average per week compared to the year previous; noting an increase in intimate cases, a reduction in ex-partner cases, and an increase in third party reporting.

Outside of the police statistics, there has also been a range of supporting research that has explored the impact that lockdown conditions can have upon DA – on controlling behaviours¹¹; creating conditions that triggered domestic abuse¹²; magnifying existing abusive behaviour¹³; as well as affecting the availability of and access to support services¹⁴. Anderberg, Rainer and Siuda (2021¹⁵) explored the magnitude of DA during the COVID-19 pandemic noting the limitation of solely using police data, and instead developed a technique based upon internet search activity which estimated a 40% London increase at peak within DA during lockdown.

Wider data from support agencies also suggest an increase subsequent to lockdown – the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (NDAH) reported a sharp increase in calls (+65%) in April and June 2020 (compared with the first three months of the year)¹⁶, and the ManKind Initiative helpline also reporting a consistently higher contact rate each month in 2020 than the previous year, with a particularly large increase (+32%) in June 2020¹⁷. Additionally, data

showed a reduction in the number of referrals to the CPS for a charging decision by 19% in the year to March 2020¹⁸.

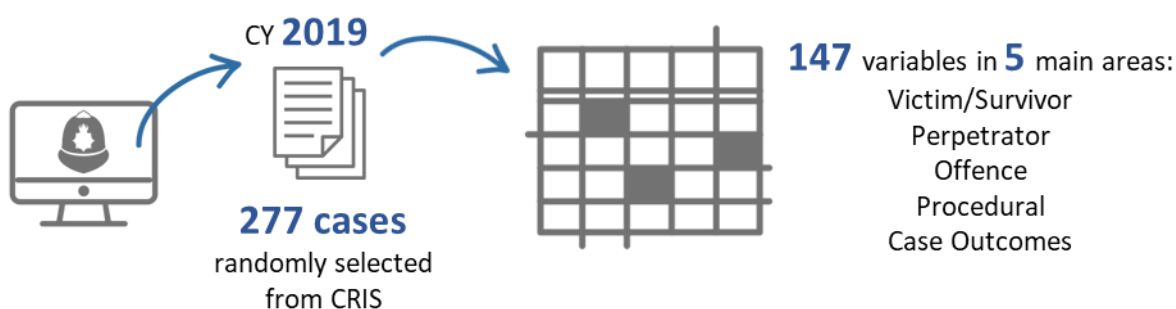
In totality, this illustrated a changing landscape within DA which prompted the MOPAC Violence Against Women and Girls Board to request new research. This brief report presents findings from the research, exploring key characteristics, demographics, needs and vulnerabilities of a sample of those who report DA to the police and those who are suspected of perpetrating DA in London; as well as the circumstances of the recorded offences and attrition through the criminal justice system.

Methodology

The research is inspired by the MOPAC Rape Review (2019)¹⁹ adopting an intensive deep dive coding approach to learning. The technique requires the development of a systematic coding framework, which is then completed by accessing individual case files to capture relevant information. The research **randomly** selected **277 cases** from recorded crimes flagged as DA by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in 2019 from their crime reporting system (CRIS). This timeframe allowed for enough time to have passed for the majority of cases to have reached a procedural completion.

The coding framework defined 146 variables divided into five categories:

- Victim/survivor characteristics;
- Suspect characteristics;
- Offence circumstances;
- Procedural characteristics (the police response and investigation) and
- Case Outcomes.



This approach enabled the research to generate rich data that is not captured or published elsewhere. The final aspect involved a series of logistic regressions to explore whether specific variables could predict outcomes. All analyses were conducted in SPSS version 24.

This method is not without limitation. The research draws from police systems, which of course were not designed as a research tool. These systems can involve inconsistent data capture by officers. For example, we are unable to determine if the absence of a variable was due to a true omission or was not recorded accurately. The approach was also limited to only those who came to police attention (i.e., we know DA is under-reported) so caution is advised in any wider generalisations. Finally, it was not possible to obtain wider Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) data on the cases to allow consideration of the full journey. Nevertheless, the data recorded provides an innovative contextual deep dive, documenting information not available elsewhere to generate new insights.

Results

As outlined, the research explored a random selection of **277 cases** from the calendar year of **2019**. Results begin with an overview of the recorded DA victim/survivors, before presenting the suspects, aspects of the offence, procedural factors and ending with an exploration of the predictive factors of victim withdrawal.

Who reports Domestic abuse in London?

The majority (77%) of victims/survivors in the sample were female (n214) with 23% (n63) being male. The average age was 36 with a range between 2 – 78 years (there were 4 victims below the age of 16). Over half (56%, n139) of victims were white, 22% (n55) Black and 19% (n46) were Asian²⁰. There were a very small number of same sex partnerships (4%) in the data.

Three quarters of cases (73%, n203) were reported by the victim themselves, while a further 11% (n30) and 8% (n22) were reported by another household or family member, or a neighbour respectively. Just 4% (n12) were reported by social support or medical services.

Most cases (72%, n199) involved some measure of repeat victimisation²¹. Repeat victimisation was high for all, but females experienced this slightly higher than males (74%, n158 vs 65%, n41). The coding also sought to capture additional needs identified through the investigation. Results demonstrate that 19% (n52) of victims/survivors presented with at least one additional need (e.g., having mental or physical health needs; expressing suicidal thoughts; being under 18 years old; having substance abuse/dependency; and/or having insecure immigration status), and 4% (n11) presented with more than one need. The most frequent need for victim/survivors was related to mental health (12%, n34).

The coding identified that DA support services were offered to the victim in 57% (n159) cases. There were some differences between recorded offers across ethnicities (i.e., 61%, n85 of white victims; 49%, n55 of black victims and 65%, n 44 of Asian victims) but none of these were statistically significant. While support services were offered in 159 cases, they were declined in almost half (48%, n76) of these instances.

There were a range of differences coded across males and females – overall, male victim/survivors were significantly more likely to have a recorded history of abusing a partner or family member themselves (24% for male versus 11% for female). Female victims/survivors were significantly²² more likely to be offered support services (61%, n131 vs 44%, n28), but this difference was largely driven by the thematic split across the ‘intimate’ and ‘other relation’ categories – with only 12% of male victims in the ‘other relation’ group offered support compared to 51% of females. A significantly²³ greater proportion of female intimate partner cases were also submitted to the CPS than male cases (21% vs 5%).

Domestic Abuse Suspects

The majority of identified suspects were male (78%, n216) with a smaller proportion female (22%, n60). The average age of a suspect was 36 years old with a range between 15 – 80. Two suspects were aged under 16. White suspects accounted for 51% of cases, 26% were Black and 19% were Asian²⁴.

As before, coding was able to document identified needs. Results show that almost half of suspects (44%, n123) were identified as presenting at least one additional need, with 16% (n44) presenting more than one need. The most frequent need for suspects was that of mental health issues (27%, n76); substance abuse (25%, n70) and suicidal thoughts (22%, n62).



Significantly more suspects (44%) than victims (19%) were identified as presenting a need. This is thought to be related to how the information was captured – namely the risk assessment tools (i.e., the DASH questionnaire²⁵) used by the police focuses more on the management of suspect risk, rather than victim vulnerability. To illustrate, in the DASH there are more questions concerning suspect needs rather than victim. This is an issue we will return to in the discussion.

The intimate versus other relation dichotomy

Three quarters of cases (75%, n206) involved an intimate relation. Breaking this down, over half (54%, n111) were ex-intimate partner with just under half being a current partner (46%, n95) as suspect. The remaining quarter involving a non-intimate other relation such as sibling, parent, or child (25%, n71). See table 1.

This intimate versus other relation dichotomy is not routinely presented in the statistics relating to DA^{26 27}, although the CSEW does make the distinction (with a consistent level of prevalence – 73% of the 2.3 million adults aged 16-74 years who according to the CSEW experienced DA in the year ending March 2020, by a partner or ex-partner, compared to 35% by another family member²⁸).

Table 1: intimate and other relation demographics

	Intimate partner		Other relation (sibling, parent, child etc)	
	Victim	Suspect	Victim	Suspect
Female	82% ^ (n 169)	18% ^ (n 37)	63% ^ (n 45)	32% ^ (n= 23)
Male	18% ^ (n 37)	82% ^ (n 168)	37% ^ (n 26)	68% ^ (n 48)
Age Range	17 to 78	17 to 80	2 to 72	15 to 64
Mean Age	35^	37^	41^	33^
White*	57% (n 105)	51% (n 89)	53% (n34)	49% (n 29)
Black	21% (n= 39)	25% (n 44)	25% (n 16)	29% (n 17)
Asian**	19% (n 35)	20% (n 35)	17% (n 11)	17% (n 10)

Means calculated excluding unknown values
 ***sex of one offender not known
 ^ significantly different between intimate partner and other relation groups

Compared to the intimate cases, the other relation cases were primarily incidents where the suspect was the (grown-up) child²⁹ of the victim/survivor (51%, n71); 32% (n23) were between siblings; 14% (n10) the suspect was a parent of the victim/survivor; and 3% (n2) another relation e.g., an Uncle.

The other relation group also presented a differing thematic profile – relatively speaking a larger proportion of male victim/survivors (i.e., 37%, n26 compared to 18%, n37 for intimate partners), who tended to be older (41 years compared to 35 years for intimate partners)³⁰; and a larger number of female suspects (32%, n23 compared to 18%, n37), who were younger (33 years compared to 37 years for intimate partners).³¹

Offence circumstances

This section presents some of the wider circumstances behind or during the offence itself, such as where the offence occurred, the different types of abuse, whether children were involved in some way and so on.

Findings indicate *most* coded DA cases occurred within the home (69%, n192). In over a third of cases the victim was reported to have children (under 16) (34%, n95) and similarly, in a third of cases, children were noted as residing at the location of the abuse itself (31% n86). Children residing within the residence was found to be statistically higher within the intimate cases (37%, n76) compared to other relations (to 14%, n10), but regardless - this raises clear safeguarding concerns.

Cross allegations were made by the suspect in a fifth (21%, n57) of cases. Just over a third of female suspects made a cross allegation (23/60, 38%) where male suspects were less likely to make one (34/216, 16%). On a similar note, coding indicated that the victim had previously been a suspect in a DA report in 14% (n39) of cases. In a small proportion of instances (4%, n10) both of these applied, and one or the other applied in nearly a third (31%, n86) of cases. These proportions are similar for both intimate partner and other relation offences, except for the 10 cases where both cross allegations were made, and the victim had been a previous suspect – all of these were intimate partner cases.

In terms of the offence itself, physical (59%, n163) and verbal (46%, n127) abuse were the most frequently coded. Nearly a third of cases (31%, n85) involved **both** physical and verbal abuse. Half of cases (49%, n135) involved two or more different types (e.g., physical, verbal, controlling behaviour, stalking/harassment, sexual assault, threats to kill). While coercive control could be identified as being part of the reported offence in 12% (n34) of all cases, the victim responded 'yes' to the DASH question in 43% (n118) of cases.

Again, there are differences seen across intimate and other relation cases, with (ex)-intimate partners significantly more likely to involve controlling behaviour³² (49%, n100 compared to 25%, n18³³); both individuals (victim and suspect) recorded by the police as suspects for domestic abuse cases at some point (17%, n34 compared to 7%, n5³⁴); and have previous instances of harassment (30%, n61 compared to 13% n9³⁵).

A more detailed breakdown of types of abuse across female/male, intimate partner/other relation splits is shown in Table 2 below. With one exception (the reported offence involving

stalking/harassment against female intimate partner victims and female other relation victims) there were no statistically significant differences either between the sexes within each relation group, or between the same sexes between each relation group.

Table 2: Types of abuse in reported offence by sex and relation

	Intimate partners		Other relation	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Physical assault	56% (n94)	68% (n25)	67% (n30)	54% (n14)
Verbal abuse	49% (n83)	46% (n17)	40% (n18)	35% (n9)
Coercive control	12% (n20)	11% (n4)	18% (n8)	8% (n2)
Stalking / harassment	33%^ (n56)	27% (n10)	7%^ (n3)	15% (n4)
Sexual assault	5% (n8)	0% (n0)	2% (n1)	0% (n0)
Threats to kill	7% (n18)	8% (n3)	7% (n3)	8% (n2)
Multiple forms of abuse	52% (n88)	54% (n20)	42% (n19)	31% (n8)
DASH: Yes to controlling behaviour	48% (n81)	51% (n19)	33% (n15)	12% (n3)

^Significant difference between intimate partner and other relation groups

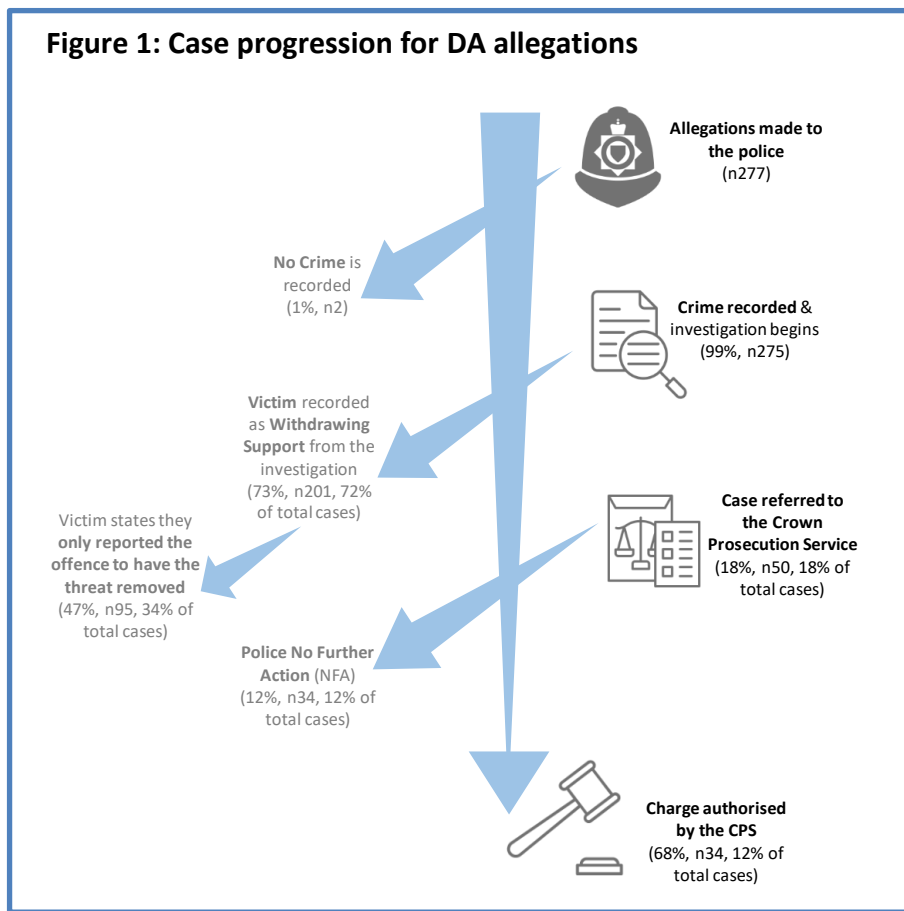
Finally, in this section - of those cases referred to the CPS (n50) more than half had a classification on CRIS for violence (n29). A quarter (n12) for a harassment, with the remaining selection made up of various offences including Burglary, Criminal Damage, Public Order and Theft and Threats to Kill. Over half (n29) involved more than one form of abuse. Children resided at the location of the abuse in 15 cases; and the victim sustained an injury in 22 cases, this being deemed moderate or severe in 3 cases.

Procedural characteristics

This section presents key findings relating to the procedural aspects of the case – covering aspects such as the overall attrition, police investigation and wider timings.

In terms of the police investigation, coding revealed the police spoke to suspects under caution in almost two thirds of cases (60%, n167) – which was either by arrest (55%, n153) and/or arranged interview (8%, n21) or both. Body worn video was documented within 55% (n153) of all cases; and an evidential statement was arranged in 59% (n163) of cases and obtained within 35% (n97).

In terms of overall case attrition through the criminal justice process, less than 1% of cases were ‘no-crime’d’ by the police; 12% resulted in Police ‘No further Action’; **73% resulted in the victim withdrawing support** and 18% were referred to the CPS. See Figure 1 for the attrition flowchart.



As outlined, by far the largest grouping regarding attrition was the victim withdrawing support. Examining those victim/survivors in more detail, almost half (47%, n95; or 34% of total cases) were recorded by the police as *'the victim reported to have the immediate threat removed'*. Whether this is accurate recording by officers and reflects a victim/survivors wishes or is somehow related to how the officers are presenting the criminal justice journey is something we will return to later.

A significantly³⁶ greater proportion of victims of Black ethnicity (53%, n29) were logged as *'report to have the immediate threat removed'*, than that of either White or Asian victims (32%, n45 and 24%, n13 respectively). The proportion of those reporting to remove the threat that were (ex)partners (73%, n69), female (75%, n71) and co-habiting with the suspect (40%, n 38) were similar in each case to the overall figures. There were no significant differences between victims of different ethnic groups in terms of stage of case progression/attrition, a breakdown of which is shown below in table 3.

With regards to victim withdrawal, 70% (n150) of female victims withdrew compared to 81% (n51) of male victims; and 70% (n144) of victims in intimate partner cases withdrew compared to 80% (n57) of victims in other relation cases. These differences were not statistically significant.

Within our sample, the CPS authorised a charge in 34 cases (12% of all those recorded, and 68% of those submitted to them). This is consistent with the national charging rate for DA cases, as ONS indicates this to be around 73% of the cases submitted.

Table 3: Stages of case progression / attrition by ethnicity

	Victim ethnicity		
	White	Black	Asian
Victim withdrawal	74% (n103)	78% (n43)	74% (n34)
Police NFA	9% (n13)	9% (n5)	13% (n6)
Submitted to CPS	21% (n29)	28% (n8)	15% (n7)
CPS Charge	14% (n20)	11% (n6)	9% (n4)

A small number of cases were identified as being referred to the CPS ‘without victim/survivor support’ (18 cases or 6% of the entire sample – but which is 36% of all 50 cases referred to the CPS). This figure is far higher than observed in the Rape Review (a figure of 0.4%). Of the cases submitted in this manner, 7 of the 18 cases were successfully charged. Obviously, these are very small numbers, something that precludes the identification of clear patterns, but when looking in more detail, *most* of these cases included an element of tangible evidence – for example, reference to body worn video (in 13); an evidential statement (in 9) and referencing other technology evidence (in 5). This suggests such investigative aspects may be key when pursuing a prosecution without the support of the victim/survivor.

The coding was also able to document the time cases took to move through the system. DA cases appeared to reach an outcome faster than observed within the previous Rape Review research. To illustrate:

- There was an average of 15 days between initial reporting and withdrawal. However, this was skewed by a small number of cases with lengthy timescales (a max of 186 days). Looking in more detail, exactly half of victims (50%, n101) withdrew on the same day the report was made to the police; this figure rises to 67% withdrawing within the first week since report. Only 5% of cases withdrew after 100 days.
- There was an average of 40 days between initial reporting and CPS submission, but again this is skewed as almost half of cases (48%, n24) were submitted to the CPS within the first week.
- There was an average of 24 days between CPS submission and Charge. The CPS completed 56% (n19) of those they charged on the same day they received the case.
- Comparing the above statistics to the MOPAC Rape Review: 38% victims withdrew within 7 days and 13% CPS submissions were within a week of the report.

Case Outcome and predictive factors

The final section seeks to replicate previous analytics conducted within the MOPAC Rape review, to establish whether specific variables were able to predict case outcomes. Given most cases were recorded as '*victim withdrawing their support from the investigation*' (73%, n=201) it was not possible to explore modelling on any wider outcomes (i.e., NFA, CPS charge) due to a low sample size. Regression analysis was used to explore which variables have the strongest association with victim withdrawal. Results can be observed within Table 4.

Table 4 – Factors significantly associated with victim withdrawal

Factors significantly associated with victim withdrawal	Likelihood of withdrawal
Police were called just to remove the threat	9 x more likely
Offence includes a physical assault	4 x more likely
Severity of abuse is increasing - self assessed on DASH	3 x more likely
Reconciliation / return to cohabitation	3 x more likely
Having a dispute over child access	14 x less likely
The police make an arrest	4 x less likely
History of Threats to Kill	3 x less likely

In terms of predicting what makes victim withdrawal **more likely**, the strongest predictor (9x more likely to withdraw) was where a case was coded as police were called just to '*remove the threat*'. Other predictors of withdrawal were when the offence included a *physical assault* (4x more likely), noting the *severity of abuse was increasing* (3x more likely) and if the police reported some *reconciliation or return to cohabitation* (3x more likely). These variables illustrate the complex and contradictory nature of the situation, but also one in which there appears a continued risk.

When predicting aspects that made withdrawal of support for the investigation **less likely** - a *dispute over child access* was the strongest predictor (14x times less likely). Other predictors were the *police making an arrest* (4x less likely) and a *history of threats to kill* (3x less likely).

Discussion

Domestic Abuse is a key issue of interest for the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime. Attempting to understand the prevalence of DA has proved to be a challenge. Research indicates the crime is underreported, and while police recorded data has suggested an increase over recent years (likely influenced by HMICFRS inspections on crime data integrity) wider National Statistics (i.e., CSEW) have not shown comparable increases. On a wider note, this itself neatly demonstrates the need to incorporate multiple data across agencies and charities and wider to generate a holistic and accurate understanding (i.e., public perceptions, crime data, helpline data, internet data).

Of course, the landscape changed subsequent to the response to the CV-19 pandemic – which fostered a range of research noting the potential impact specifically upon DA. Inspired by previous Rape Review research, MOPAC Evidence and Insight were tasked with conducting similar analytics in relation to DA, focussing upon the demographics of victim and suspect, as well as needs, procedural aspects and case outcomes. This deep dive coding used an innovative and in-depth approach to examining DA within London. A total of 277 cases were randomly selected from 2019 and coded against 147 variables resulting in an original dataset enabling a rich vein of analytics.

In terms of the findings, much of what we have identified was already established – the description of victim and suspect characteristics or the findings on repeat victimisation are widely documented in the literature. Likewise, the ethnicity breakdown from our sample shows results broadly consistent with the London population in terms of White & Asian groups, with the Black group over-represented (both in terms of victims & suspects). However, this profile is also broadly comparable to overall DA statistics for London where in 2020/21, 73% victim/survivors were female and 27% male; 55% of victim/survivors and 64% of perpetrators were aged between 25 and 44; 46% of victim/survivors were White and 36% were from an ethnic minority group; 88% of perpetrators were male and 11% were female; 53% of perpetrators were White and 46% were from other ethnic groups³⁷.

However, there are findings that are more worthy of discussion. We turn to these now.

The intimate versus other relation dichotomy

Most published research and statistics considering DA tends to present the group as a singular whole. Results of the deep dive highlighted the diversity of the cases – for example a quarter of cases involved 'non-intimate other relations', where the suspect was a wider family member, parent, sibling or (grown) child. As outlined, these cases presented a somewhat different victim and suspect profile and were less likely to be offered support services from police officers.

In terms of prevalence, similar proportions of 'non-intimate other' DA cases have been reported elsewhere (i.e., in the CSEW) but far less is known when considering the deeper context, background or nature of such cases. For example, what different dynamics would present themselves between a parent, sibling or (grown) child presenting as DA suspect. Further work to explore this group in more detail within a larger sample would clearly be beneficial. Ultimately, the question should focus on how best to ensure adequate and

specialist provision to this group and whether existing staff working in the area would benefit from additional learning and development to improve the support offer.

The effective capture of victim need...?

A notable finding obtained from the coding was that fewer needs were identified for the victims as compared to the suspects. Indeed, only 19% of victims had an identified need. This could point to limitations in police data capture or coding, but in most likelihood, this is attributable to the nature of the police response to risk reduction and the investigation itself. To illustrate, within the DASH there are far more suspect focussed questions as opposed to victim focussed (i.e., questions explore whether the suspect - not the victim - has threatened suicide or has substance abuse/dependency).

This raises the wider issue of *effective* risk assessment. In 2009, National Policing leads endorsed the DASH as a model to improve the policing response to DA; and the majority of police forces in England and Wales use this tool. Turner *et al* (2021³⁸) stressed the value of the DASH approach especially in encouraging positive change towards the policing of DA but also noted the variable quality of data capture. Similar findings on the inconsistent implementation of the DASH, officer usage, and the accuracy of the tool to identify the risk of harm have also been reported (see Robinson *et al* 2016³⁹ or Wire & Myhill, 2018⁴⁰).

This is clearly a sensitive area, but it is worth exploring how to better capture the potential needs of victims (within a timely and broader procedurally just and non-judgemental approach) not only to better understand risk or the impact(s) of the offence but to enable better signposting to support services.

Addressing suspect needs

Almost half of suspects (44%) presented with at least one identified need. The most frequently identified were mental health (27%); suicidal thoughts (22%) and substance abuse (25%), with 16% presenting more than one need. This reveals a considerable amount of presumably unmet need. The MOPAC evaluation of the London Croydon Drive scheme⁴¹ - a scheme working with high harm DA perpetrators - also showed clear areas of need for this group (i.e., 61% of preparators had multiple needs) and broadly similar results were found in the national Drive evaluation conducted by the University of Bristol⁴².

From a rehabilitative perspective, there is a wealth of research that indicates that addressing offender need is a core aspect of future behaviour change (McGuire, 2013⁴³). In this way, there may be learning from the offender management landscape (i.e., such as Integrated Offender Management (IOM), Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) or the historic Prolific and Other Priority Offenders Programme (PPO)) and their approaches which seek to pull together partners; delivering a local response and balancing 'carrot and stick' in the management of offenders. Likewise, the 'pulling levers approach' (Braga, 2008⁴⁴) and its focus upon an evidence base; key offenders; a varied repertoire of legal actions towards the offender, as well as balancing other social and wider community communication may provide value (Morgan et al, 2020⁴⁵).

On this point, the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Panel (DAAP) within the DRIVE programme would appear to be the nearest template to the above, pulling in a variety of support and disruption interventions within a regular meeting of partners to discuss cases. The MOPAC

evaluation of Croydon Drive outlined that the DAAP was viewed as a unique and key component of the overall service. However, it also outlined partner attendance to the DAAP was an ongoing issue during the programme and that whilst most agencies and practitioners were supportive of working with offenders, there remained some scepticism of the benefits of such perpetrator work. In this way, securing and maintaining continued staff buy-in to the rehabilitation and management of DA perpetrators would be beneficial in any future endeavours.

Understanding victim withdrawal

The majority (73%, n=201) of DA cases were closed by the police under the category of '*victim withdrawing their support from the investigation*', this is higher than seen in the Rape Review research (65%). The majority of these withdrawals also occurred quickly – with exactly half of victim/survivors (50%, n101) withdrawing **on the same day** the report was made to the police; rising to 67% within the first week since report. Half of those that withdrew were coded as wanting the immediate threat removed.

This highlights multiple issues. Immediately, it illustrates the narrow window of opportunity afforded to police, community responses or other agencies when seeking to engage or promote follow-up. Being able to respond in such a timely fashion would further likely require prompt mobilisation, rapid data sharing as well as multi-agency support amongst other aspects. The limited available timeframe would also likely necessitate a different communication style to best engage. Work to assess the current practicality of such a timely and coordinated response would be worthwhile so to drive improvements.

The second aspect of *reporting to remove the threat* questions as to whether this is an accurate reflection of victim/survivor 'wants' and how they are using the police for threat removal; if it is linked to the volatile nature of DA offending itself; or if it is somehow related to how the officers are presenting the case to the criminal justice system. Knowing what 'success' looks like for a victim/survivor is key, as a justice conclusion may not be the goal. In this manner, our previous Rape review research highlighted issues such as not wanting to relive the stress, a desire to move on and the act of reporting in itself being enough as reasons for withdrawal. Similar issues have also been reported within DA attrition as well as wider factors around wanting longer term protection or an understanding of the cyclical nature of the offence (see also Barrow-Gint, 2016⁴⁶ or Hester, 2005⁴⁷). Understanding this in more detail would be clearly beneficial, as well as consideration and usage of evidence-led prosecution, something that occurred in 6% of the overall sample but over a third of cases referred to the CPS.

The analytics on the predictors of victim withdrawal also illustrates the complexity of the challenge herein. Other than '*called to remove the threat*', the aspects that made withdrawal *more likely* were the presence of physical abuse (4x), noting the severity of abuse was *increasing* (3x), but also an apparent *reconciliation or return to cohabitation* (3x). This mix of these variables again clearly illustrates the complex and somewhat contradictory nature of the offence, whilst also demonstrating the continued risk in the situation.

The variables that predicted a *reduced* likelihood of victim withdrawal were more straightforward – that of *disputes over child access* (14x), *police making an arrest* (4x) and a

history of *threats to kill* (3x). The disputes over child access overall was the strongest overall variable in predicting withdrawal (or the lack of in this case). This could be interpreted in several ways – for example, that where children are involved the victim is more determined to seek an outcome and remain engaged. Similarly, there could be different levels of support or investigation when there are such disputes. The *Police making an arrest* could well be showing the victim of the ability of the system to protect them thus encouraging engagement, and the final aspect potentially indicates a threshold where victims/survivors may feel they want to proceed with a prosecution.

Sitting comfortably underneath the concept of victim withdrawal is the issue of public confidence in the system. There is a wealth of research exploring how confidence in the police can facilitate prosocial and positive engagement. For example, as measured by the MOPAC Public Attitude Survey, those individuals holding positive views of the police are more likely to state they would help the police, provide information to police and even comply with police orders (for example, 71% of those with high levels of confidence report to be ‘very likely’ to provide information to police versus only 58% of those with low levels of confidence⁴⁸).

Within victim withdrawal, overall there was little difference in that approximately three quarters of each ethnicity withdrew. However, Black victims were significantly more likely to be logged as reporting to remove the threat. Research demonstrates that Black Londoners have lower public perceptions in the police – be it confidence, trust, issues of fair treatment or many other aspects⁴⁹. Furthermore, given the overrepresentation of Black victims and suspects in the sample, this further suggests work to redress such inequality (such as the Mayoral Action Plan⁵⁰) may also be able to yield wider benefits such as improved willingness to engage with the system if successful.

Ultimately, regardless of ethnicity, victims need to have confidence in the system not only to initially *reach out* but to subsequently *engage* and *maintain* throughout. While there is a strong evidence base relating to confidence in the police and the role of fair treatment, effective engagement and police effectiveness (Jackson et al, 2012⁵¹) less is known about the larger drivers of confidence towards the Criminal Justice System. This should be addressed.

New research

There are a variety of areas where new research would add value and develop the evidence base further. Many of these have already been raised such as understanding the needs of both victims and suspects. Some of the gender differences are worthy of further exploration – such as understanding cross allegations, the roles of children in attrition, or why males were less likely to receive support or their cases to be submitted to CPS. This itself leads to more nuance in exploring the ‘other relation’ cases and support provision. Likewise, better end-to-end research tracking cases through the *entire journey*, incorporating CPS information would be advantageous and elucidate a more complete understanding of the process. However, by far the clearest need for future research would be aimed at exploring the issue of victim withdrawal. This could explore facets involving victim decision making, victim confidence of the system, exploring what success looks like for different victims and/or police communication styles and outward support with victims. Across all of the

above, there would also be benefits in looking beyond criminal justice research/data, into wider domains such as children's social work, health, hospitals and family courts (and so on) which would all contribute to the far richer understanding of the issue.

Summary

The research deep dive into Domestic Abuse provides valuable insights into the nature of the offence within London. As the MPS continues to record an increasing volume of cases, it will become more and more important to improve the response and it is hoped that the results herein can aid such discussions.

References and endnotes

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- ⁵ Now Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
- ⁶ Crime-recording: making the victim count' © HMIC 2014 ISBN: 978-1-78246-660-
- ⁷ Beneath the Numbers: An exploration of the increases of recorded Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences MOPAC Evidence and Insight https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/201902_beneath_the_numbers_-_an_exploration_of_the_increases_of_recorded_domestic_abuse_and_sexual_offences_v1.pdf
- ⁸ Domestic abuse <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2021>.
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- ¹⁶<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020>
- ¹⁷ The ManKind Initiative operates a confidential helpline available for all men across the UK suffering from domestic abuse. Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronavirusCovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020#domestic-abuse-during-the-coronavirus-Covid-19-pandemic-data>
- ¹⁸<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020>
- ¹⁹ MOPAC Evidence and Insight (2019). The London Rape Review: A review of cases from 2016 https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_rape_review_final_report_31.7.19.pdf
- ²⁰ Ethnic categorisation was based upon police IC code as recorded on the CRIS reports. White refers to combined figures for IC1 (white, northern European, n118) and IC2 (white, southern European, n21). Asian refers to the combined figures for IC4 (Asian, n44) and IC5 (East Asian, n2). In addition, there were n8 IC6 (Arabic) victims (3%).

²¹ Coding of repeat victimisation was based upon victim account/response to DASH questions as well as five year interval checks – therefore could be at any time and/or with a different suspect.

²² p0.05

²³ p0.05

²⁴ As detailed above (ref footnote 19), ethnic categories were based upon police IC code and were grouped. White suspects comprise n104 IC1 and n14 IC2. Asian suspects comprise n44 IC4 and n1 IC5. In addition, there were n8 IC6 (Arabic) suspects.

²⁵ The Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour-based violence (DASH 2009) questions are a risk identification, assessment and management model used by police services in the UK. A bank of questions is asked when attending what appears to be any domestic incident to identify, assess and manage ongoing risk.

²⁶ MOPAC Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Dashboard.

[Domestic and Sexual Violence Dashboard | London City Hall.](#)

²⁷ Metropolitan Police Crime Dashboards.

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²⁸ Crime Survey England and Wales. Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2020

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²⁹ Where the suspect was a child of the victim, be aware that these were mostly adult children (average at 29). The full age range was 15 – 50, but of the 36 cases only 8 were below the age of 20.

³⁰ Almost half (46%, n12) of male other relation victims were abused by their child, while in 39% (n10) cases it was a sibling.

³¹ Victim and suspect age ranges for other relation cases were 2-72 years and 15-64 years respectively. The victim withdrew from the police investigation in 80% (n57) other relation cases, while 18% (n13) were submitted to the CPS, 7 cases (10%) being charged.

³² Based on response to relevant DASH question.

³³ p0.01.

³⁴ Not statistically significant with Yates' correction.

³⁵ p0.01.

³⁶ p0.01.

³⁷ Metropolitan Police domestic abuse recorded offences.

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_domestic_abuse_safe_accommodation_needs_assessment_-_november_2021.ppsx

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⁴⁹ [Action Plan Dashboard | London City Hall](#)

⁵⁰ [Mayor's Action Plan focuses on disproportionality of police powers | London City Hall](#)

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