



# **Prevalence and Characteristics of Serial Domestic Abuse Perpetrators: *Multi-Agency Evidence from Wales***

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Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol  
Rheoli Troseddwyr Cymru

National Offender  
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# Executive Summary

## Overview

The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru partnership commissioned this research to achieve a clearer picture of whether and how 'serial domestic abuse' is being understood, defined and recorded by Police forces, Probation providers and Third Sector partners across Wales. Phase one of the research included a qualitative mapping exercise along with a quantitative analysis of n=6642 anonymised domestic abuse perpetrator records provided by Wales Probation Trust. This report sets out findings from phase two which entailed interrogating agency files to gather more detailed information on a random sample of perpetrators (n=100).

Objectives for this phase of the research included:

- 1) **Estimating the prevalence** of serial domestic abuse
- 2) **Evaluating agency information** and the overlaps (and gaps) across agencies
- 3) **Identifying any distinguishing characteristics** of serial domestic abuse perpetrators
- 4) **Providing new evidence** to inform developing policy and practice in this area

## Findings

Prevalence estimates varied considerably across the three main sources of information used in this research (Police, Probation and Third Sector), ranging from 4% to 20%. A key finding from this research is that different agencies are identifying different individuals as serial (from the same sample of 100 domestic abuse perpetrators) with only a very small degree of overlap across agencies (at best only 1 out of 100).

Using Probation data, it was difficult to empirically distinguish 'serial domestic abuse perpetrators' from non-serial perpetrators. While serial perpetrators were also likely to be repeat perpetrators, only a fraction could also be considered 'high risk' using Probation risk assessment tools (OASys and SARA). Therefore, in the case of domestic abuse offending, the categories of serial/ repeat/ high-risk should not necessarily be considered interchangeable or synonymous.

Serial perpetrators *do*, however, differ to some extent in their individual risk profile as assessed by the Spousal Abuse Risk Assessment (SARA) risk factors. For example, serial domestic abuse perpetrators are more likely than non-serial domestic abuse perpetrators to have past assault of family and stranger/acquaintance violence, recent escalation in violence, past use of weapons and denial of spousal assault, amongst others.

A profiling exercise of the 'top ten' serial perpetrators was conducted to identify whether those prioritised by Police forces represent a distinctly different, and more dangerous, group of perpetrators. This exercise revealed that, in addition to each force developing

their own definition of what constitutes a serial perpetrator, different methods and processes are utilised across forces to target this group of perpetrators, if this is done at all. Only two of the four Welsh forces (South Wales and Dyfed Powys) routinely target serial perpetrators within their force operational processes, thus highlighting that not all forces necessarily view serial perpetration as synonymous with the highest priority offending. Cross-force comparison showed that the profile of 'top ten' serial perpetrators varied considerably across forces, and whilst all but one perpetrator was 'known' to Probation, only one-third of this group could be identified by Probation as serial perpetrators.

### *Implications*

In conclusion, the evidence derived from this exploratory study does *not* suggest that 'serial domestic abuse perpetrators' represent a qualitatively different group – one that is distinctive, can be reliably identified, and that has a profile calling for a particular course of action in terms of multi-agency response and risk management. This in turn suggests that the conceptualisation of 'serial domestic abuse perpetrator' should be informed not just by the *quantity* of victims but also the *quality* of, and motivations behind, the abusive behaviour. For this reason, we recommend that serial offending be considered alongside repeat and high-risk offending behaviour in the determination of who is a **priority perpetrator** and that this determination should instigate a more intensive and targeted multi-agency response.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of the research

The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru partnership commissioned research (within the IOM High Risk of Harm work-stream) to a) develop a shared definition of serial domestic abuse perpetrators and b) undertake analyses of Police, Probation and, where feasible, third sector agency records to profile serial domestic abuse perpetrators in Wales. To achieve an all-Wales, multi-agency definition and profile of serial domestic abusers, the research was conducted across two phases.

Phase one (December 2013 – May 2014) consisted of a feasibility study to determine the nature and compatibility of the data held by relevant agencies in Wales. The phase one report is available at <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/63750/> and includes qualitative research (interviews with Police, Probation, and third sector agency representatives) along with a quantitative analysis of n=6642 anonymised domestic abuse perpetrator records provided by Wales Probation Trust.

This report sets out findings from phase two (June – October 2014). For this phase of the research we interrogated agency files to gather more detailed information on a random sample of perpetrators (n=100) with the overall aim to provide much needed empirical evidence in a rapidly developing policy landscape.

## 1.2 Method

### *1.2.1. Research questions and objectives*

A key aim of this study was to assess the feasibility of identifying ‘serial perpetrators’ from existing IT systems since, as established by phase one of the research, agencies do not routinely identify or monitor ‘serial’ perpetrators. Using existing information (e.g., from the SARA and/or OASys routine assessments of offenders by Probation), is it feasible to identify ‘serial’ offending? If so, what are the characteristics of ‘serial’ perpetrators? Can we reliably differentiate ‘serial’ perpetrators from ‘repeat’ or ‘high’ risk perpetrators (i.e., to what extent do these categories overlap)? What are the implications of this research for informing agency responses to domestic abuse? In particular, does the evidence contained in this report suggest that specific responses should be developed for ‘serial’ perpetrators? Thus the objectives for phase two of the research are as follows:

- 5) **Estimating the prevalence** of serial domestic abuse

- 6) **Evaluating agency information** and the overlaps (and gaps) across agencies
- 7) **Identifying any distinguishing characteristics** of serial domestic abuse perpetrators
- 8) **Providing new evidence** to inform developing policy and practice in this area

### *1.2.2. A random sample of 100 domestic abuse perpetrators*

Wales Probation Trust made available a sample of convicted domestic abuse perpetrators for research purposes. A total of n=6642 individual perpetrators were included in the anonymised dataset, representing all perpetrators who had a first OASys assessment completed in Wales during the period 01/02/2013 to 31/03/2014. Information about this group of perpetrators was analysed in the phase one report and included:

- CRN and PNC numbers
- Local Authority area and region
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Age at time of assessment
- Age at first conviction
- Parenting responsibilities
- DV flag on OASys and Delius
- Alcohol, drugs, mental health issues
- SARA risk factors
- Summary risk judgments (OASys risk of harm, SARA risk to partner, SARA risk to others)

For this report, we drew a random sample of 100 perpetrators from the dataset. Multi-agency information about these individuals (held by Police, Probation and third sector partners) was collected and analysed for this report.<sup>1</sup>

## **1.3 Policy and research context**

A number of studies corroborate notions of gender asymmetry within the perpetration and victimisation of domestic abuse. Significant differences are evident in the frequency,

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<sup>1</sup> All data was shared and managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. A named representative from the research team and each third sector partner was required to sign a Joint Working and Confidentiality Agreement in order to participate in the research. All data has been anonymised in the preparation of the final report.



severity and impact of abuse according to the sex of the perpetrator or victim. The subsequent paragraphs provide an overview of the gendered nature of domestic abuse and examine the implications of this upon repeat and serial abuse. A brief summary of the current policy context is provided, indicating the challenges of addressing the specific problem of serial domestic abuse perpetrators.

Internationally, victimisation surveys routinely indicate that men are the primary aggressors in the majority of all recorded domestic abuse incidents (see for example Mclean and Beak, 2012; Smith et al., 2010; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). Heterosexual men have been found to initiate significantly more violent episodes against their partners than vice versa (Hamberger and Guse, 2002). Indeed, a series of qualitative studies reveals that women are far less likely to instigate domestic abuse; rather, their violent behaviour often occurs in the context of self-defence (Downs et al., 2007; Hester, 2013; Miller and Meloy, 2006; Saunders, 2002). In addition, men in heterosexual relationships are more likely than women to commit 'severe abuse' (Hamberger and Guse, 2002) such as beating, choking, strangling, sexual assault, coercive controlling behaviour, on-going physical violence and serious physical injuries. Women are also significantly more likely than men to fear injury and death from domestic abuse (Ansara and Hindin, 2009). In contrast, the British Crime Survey has repeatedly identified that men tend not to report their victimisation to the police as they consider the incident 'too trivial or not worth reporting' (Smith et al., 2010: 67). Recent research on UK perpetrators finds that women primarily use verbal abuse against partners, with some displaying physical violence and only a small proportion using threatening or harassing behaviour (Hester, 2013). In addition, it is important to note that female perpetrators are more likely than male perpetrators to be mentally ill (Hester, 2013: 635).

A number of authors have explored the repetitive nature of domestic abuse perpetration and victimisation. Richards' (2004) analysis of the British Crime Survey posits that domestic abuse is more likely than any other type of criminalised behaviour to involve repeat victimisation. She notes that whilst isolated incidents of domestic violence do occur, victims are invariably exposed to repeat abuse prior to seeking the support of relevant authorities. Men have been identified as significantly more likely to be repeat perpetrators compared to women. Hester's (2013:627-628) analysis found that 83% of male perpetrators were repeat offenders with at least two recorded domestic abuse-related incidents. In contrast, 62% of female perpetrators had only a single incident recorded.

Whilst extant research provides important insight in to the repeat nature of domestic abuse, our understanding of the ways in which perpetrators may abuse subsequent partners once an initial abusive relationship is over is limited. As highlighted by ACPO (the Association of Chief Police Officers), there is evidence that serial domestic abuse constitutes a sizeable problem in the United Kingdom – with an estimated 25,000 serial perpetrators in contact with the police at any one time (Moore, 2009:8). Richards' (2004) strategic overview of approximately 400 sexual assault, 'serious' incident and domestic violence cases found evidence that some men instigate one abusive relationship after another. In addition, Hester and Westmarland's (2007) analysis of Northumbria Police

data identified that 18% of perpetrators who re-offended did so against a subsequent new partner.

Welsh Government has recently highlighted its intention to strengthen services and improve awareness and accountability to domestic abuse as part of new legislation: *'Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill'*. It remains the case, however, that relevant agencies are only just beginning to understand the implications of serial domestic abuse. Recall that phase one of this research (Clancy et al., 2014) found that a systematic process to ensure serial perpetrators are routinely identified and flagged across relevant agencies does not currently exist in Wales.

The recent HMIC inspection *'Everyone's Business: Improving the Police Response to Domestic Abuse'* (2014) concluded that many forces across England and Wales are not policing domestic abuse adequately. A number of recommendations to improve the overall police response to domestic abuse were made, many of which focus on the way police forces identify and target serial and repeat perpetrators of domestic abuse. Therefore, although tackling domestic abuse is as a priority for all Police forces in England and Wales and is emphasised in almost all Police and Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plans (Chamberlain, 2014), there is a considerable need for improved understanding of, and responses to, serial domestic abuse perpetrators.

### **1.3 Structure of this report**

The remainder of this report falls into three chapters. Chapter 2 draws upon Police, Probation and Third Sector agency data to provide a descriptive overview of the prevalence of serial domestic abuse in Wales. Chapter 3 focuses upon the characteristics of serial perpetrators and examines the extent to which these perpetrators represent a distinct group within the wider category of domestic abuse perpetrators. Finally, Chapter 4 summarises the results and implications of the study, and provides some recommendations for policy-makers, practitioners and future research.

## Chapter 2: Prevalence of serial domestic abuse perpetrators

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of the random sample of perpetrators (n=100) drawn from the dataset of 6642 domestic abuse perpetrators in Wales in order to contribute to the limited evidence base about the prevalence of serial domestic abuse.

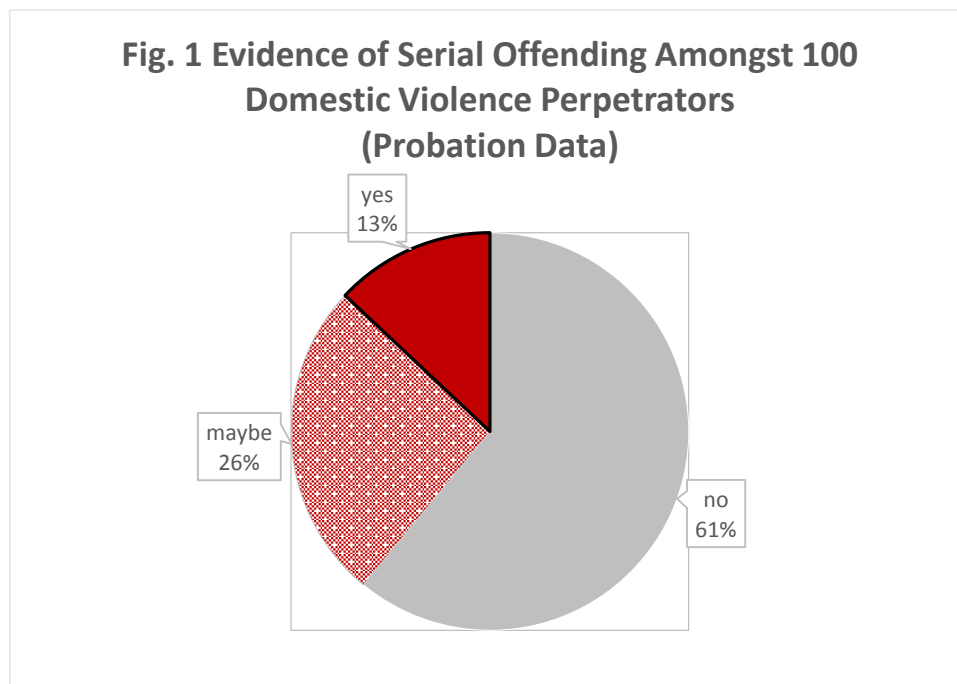
### 2.1 Estimates using Probation data

Coding and analysis of information held in Probation files about a random sample of 100 domestic abuse perpetrators was conducted in order to estimate the prevalence of serial offending amongst those individuals already known to be domestic abuse perpetrators (i.e., these individuals have a 'domestic abuse flag' against their Probation record). As indicated in Section 1.2 of this report, a variety of information from different parts of the OASys and SARA assessments was used to make a summary judgment about whether perpetrators could be identified as 'serial perpetrators' using the available evidence. This exercise was undertaken in the absence of a dedicated question, risk factor, or identifying 'flag' in the case-file recording system pertaining specifically to serial domestic abuse offending.

Figure 1 below provides one of the many possible ways to estimate of the prevalence of serial domestic abuse offending. The Figure 1 estimate is based on a fairly broad or liberal (as opposed to restrictive or conservative<sup>2</sup>) conceptualisation of serial offending: any perpetrator with a Probation record that contains evidence of offending against more than one current/former intimate partner (i.e., violence and abuse committed against children or other family members was not included), with no time limit imposed, was considered to be a 'serial perpetrator':

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<sup>2</sup> Another viewpoint is that *any* estimate of serial domestic abuse offending that is based exclusively on criminal justice data will be conservative because there is so much under-reporting of domestic abuse (Hoare and Jansson, 2008), coupled with the fact that those incidents that *do* get reported are unlikely to result in conviction (Hester, 2005).



This estimate of 13% equates to **863 serial perpetrators in Wales**, according to Probation data.

As Figure 1 makes clear, in only a small minority of cases was there evidence to suggest that the perpetrators were 'serial' because they committed abuse against more than one intimate partner. In contrast, a substantial proportion were considered 'maybes', and most of the perpetrators in the dip sample did not have *any* evidence of serial offending in their records (although, as previously mentioned, no single agency's records will represent the totality of their offending behaviour). Analysis of the files indicated that many more perpetrated *repeat* (rather than serial) domestic abuse, which we will return to later in this report.

More detailed (although still limited) information about those 13 perpetrators that could be reasonably judged to be 'serial domestic abuse perpetrators' is provided in Table 1 (next page):

**Table 1. Basic details for 13 serial domestic abuse perpetrators.**

Pseudonym & Demographic Characteristic of Perpetrator	Number and Type of Victims	Offending Time Frame			Probation Assessments	
		DV in last year	DV in last 3 years	DV in life time	# OASys	# SARA
<b>“Trevor”</b> Male, 28, White-British	Two offences against two ex-partners	yes	yes	yes	2	0
<b>“Adam”</b> Male, 20, White-British	Two offences against two ex-partners	yes	yes	yes	2	2
<b>“Mike”</b> Male, 55, White-Other	Offences against ex-wife and ex-partner	no	no	yes	3	3
<b>“Matt”</b> Male, 38, White-British	Offences against current partner and three previous partners	yes	yes	yes	10	5
<b>“Chris”</b> Male, 40, White-British	Offences against current wife and ex-wife	no	no	yes	11	5
<b>“David”</b> Male, 40, White-British	Offences against ex-wife and two ex-partners	no	yes	yes	17	12
<b>“Ken”</b> Male, 37, White-British	Offences against two ex-partners	no	yes	yes	1	4
<b>“Fiona”</b> Female <sup>3</sup> , 31, White-British	Offences against two ex-partners	no	yes	yes	24	0
<b>“Lawrence”</b> Male, 45, White-British	Offences against two ex-partners	yes	yes	yes	3	2

<sup>3</sup> All female perpetrators in the sample of 100, including this woman, were known to be victims of domestic violence (as well as perpetrators).

<b>“Harry”</b> Male, 31, White-British	Offences against current partner and two previous partners	yes	yes	yes	27	7
<b>“Sam”</b> Male, 29, White-British	Offences against current partner and one previous partner	no	yes	yes	26	6
<b>“Malcolm”</b> Male, 30, White-British	Offences against two ex-partners	yes	yes	yes	15	1
<b>“Nick”</b> Male, 31, White-British	History of offending against partners	unclear	unclear	yes	9	6

Apart from gender and age, the basic details contained in Table 1 indicate a fair degree of variation amongst this group of perpetrators. For example, less than half (6 of the 13) of these individuals were actively offending (i.e., known to have committed domestic abuse within the past year). Two of the perpetrators (“Mike” and “Chris”) had quite dated offending histories, with no domestic abuse committed within the past 3 years (and in one case, much longer). Furthermore, as indicated by the number of Probation assessments (OASys and SARA), some had fairly limited (known) offending histories, whereas others, such as “Harry” and “Sam”, were prolific offenders (both for domestic abuse as well as other types of crimes, both violent and acquisitive).

Further details about those perpetrators deemed to have ‘maybe’ committed serial domestic abuse reflects the challenge of categorising perpetrators in this way, particularly when coupled with an absence of information (i.e., questions on assessment tools) designed specifically to identify this form of offending. An additional challenge is that files might contain compelling evidence of other types of related offending (e.g., sexual violence or other forms of violence against women or girls). Should this type of information be included in assessments about serial domestic abuse, and if so, how? The characteristics of perpetrators in the ‘maybe’ category aptly illustrate these challenges:

- The most common reason was a lack of information in the files to substantiate claims that domestic abuse had been committed against more than one intimate partner.
- Linked to the above, a handful of perpetrators had such extensive violent offending histories that it seemed highly unlikely they would not also be serial domestic abuser perpetrators (although for each there was only evidence of domestic abuse against one partner).

- In five cases there was evidence that perpetrators committed violence against other family members (but there was no documented offending against more than one intimate partner), and in most cases these were female family members, lending credence to the idea that this individual might be a serial domestic abuse perpetrator.
- Three perpetrators had evidence of serial sexual offending (in all cases unconnected victims who were under-aged girls) but there was no known serial domestic abuse.

## 2.2 Estimates using Police data

In phase one of this research (published in July) we established that, whilst all four of the Welsh forces have adopted the standard ACPO definition of domestic abuse, each force has developed their own definition of what constitutes a 'serial domestic abuse' (see Table 2 below):

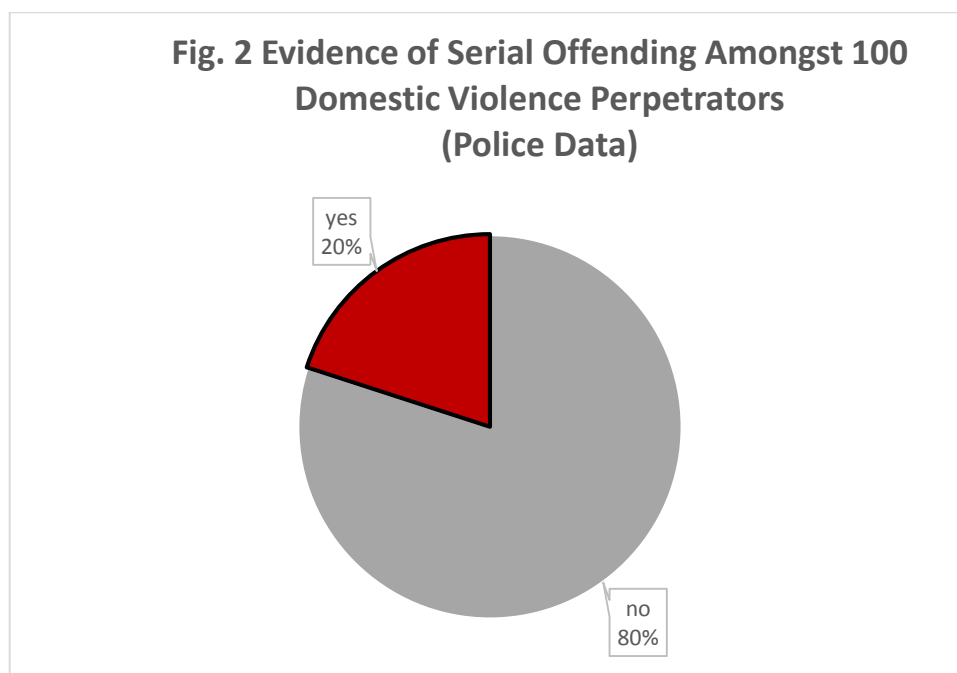
South Wales	Alleged abuse against three or more unconnected victims
Gwent and Dyfed Powys	Alleged abuse against two or more unconnected victims
North Wales	Alleged abuse against two or more unconnected victims within twelve months
ACPO (2009)	Alleged to have used/threatened violence against two or more victims who are unconnected to each other (as opposed to repeat offending against the same victim or persons in the same household) <sup>4</sup>

These definitions presumably inform police decision-making about which perpetrators may be considered to be serial perpetrators. Figure 2 (next page) indicates the proportion of the dip sample (100 perpetrators) that police identified as serial perpetrators, using their own data and making their own assessments according to their force's definition. As

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<sup>4</sup> ACPO (2009) *Tackling Perpetrators of Violence Against Women and Girls*. Review for the Home Secretary. <http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2009/200909CRIVAW01.pdf>

previously mentioned, it is worth remembering that the 'no' category should be interpreted with caution as it includes both cases where the perpetrator was not known to the force as well as those where the perpetrator was known, but was deemed not to be a serial perpetrator.

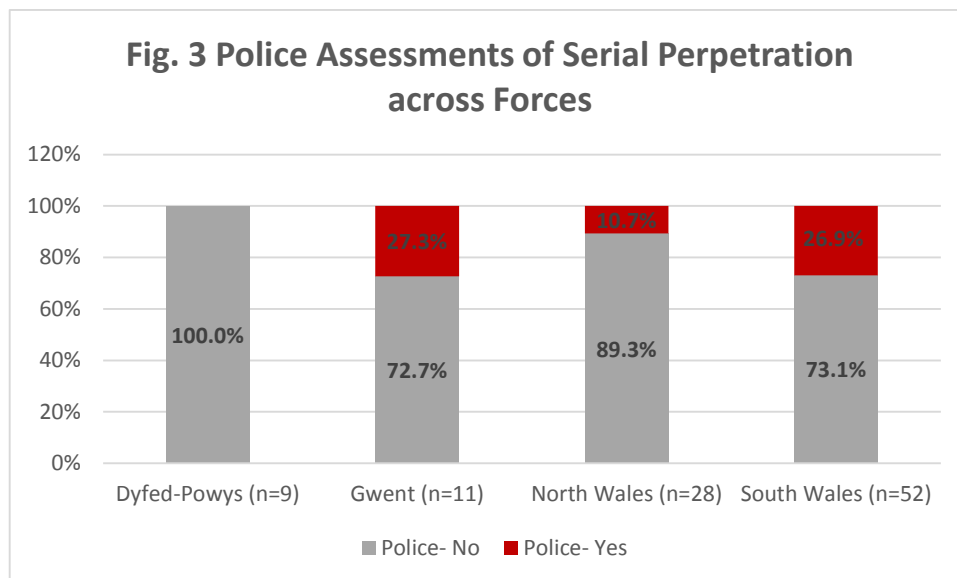


This estimate of 20% equates to **1328 serial perpetrators in Wales**, according to Police data.

Figure 3 (next page) indicates the degree to which there is variation across forces. Keeping in mind the different sample sizes for each force, it is evident that some forces identify a much greater proportion of perpetrators to be serial perpetrators than do others. Specifically:

- Dyfed-Powys: 0 of 9 were determined to be serial perpetrators (0%)
- Gwent: 3 of 11 were determined to be serial perpetrators (27.3%)
- North Wales: 3 of 25 were determined to be serial perpetrators (10.7%)
- South Wales: 14 of 52 were determined to be serial perpetrators (26.9%)

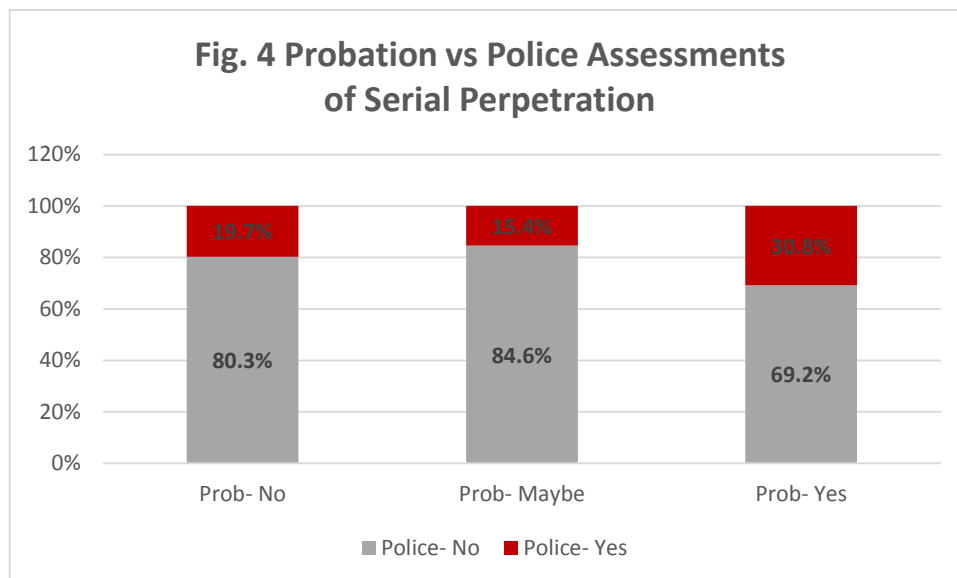




## 2.3 Probation and Police data overlap

To summarise, 100 perpetrators were randomly sampled from the available Probation files. Evaluating the information within them led to 13 being identified by the research team as serial perpetrators (using the least restrictive definition of offending against at least two unconnected victims who were ex/partners, with no time restrictions). Police searched their systems and evaluated their information for these same 100 perpetrators and came to the conclusion that 20 could be considered serial perpetrators. Interestingly, there was only a small degree of overlap between Police and Probation assessments – 4 perpetrators (“Trevor”, “Adam”, “Matt” and “Malcolm”) were considered to be serial perpetrators according to both Police and Probation data. What, if anything, can be said about these four perpetrators? An explanation for why these four individuals were identified by both Police and Probation, whereas others were not, is not immediately apparent. These four do not seem distinctive in any discernible way. Three of the four were judged to be medium risk by Probation. One was MAPPAs Category 2. Two were from the South Wales police force area and two were from Gwent.

Figure 4 below illustrates the degree of overlap between these two agencies. As stated, of the 13 identified within Probation data as serial perpetrators, 4 (30.8%) were also identified as such by Police, whereas 9 (69.2%) were not. The 20 identified within Police data as serial perpetrators were mostly considered *not* to be by Probation (12 of 20 or 60%), with 4 (20%) considered ‘maybes’ and in the other 4 cases (“Trevor”, “Adam”, “Matt” and “Malcolm”) there was agreement between the two agencies that the individual in question was a serial perpetrator.



Mostly this small degree of overlap appears due to the different pictures of offending held by the two agencies. Probation is working with convicted perpetrators, and whereas the assessment process (using OASys or SARA) might reveal past additional offending, this would depend on the Probation officer managing the assessment, how much information they request and/or obtain from Police records, and the amount of disclosure from the perpetrator. In contrast, Police forces are privy to information about offending that may or may not result in convictions. Information contained within intelligence logs, incident records and arrests give perhaps a fuller (and also potentially more immediate) picture of offending. This could explain the greater prevalence estimates using Police data and those cases where serial perpetration was not apparent from only looking at Probation data.

The following observations may be made from applying different definitions to the data held by Police and Probation:

- Less stringent definitions requiring two victims across any time frame (e.g., Gwent, Dyfed Powys and ACPO) will produce larger numbers – in this sample equating to 13 serial perpetrators according to Probation data (i.e., the Figure 1 pie chart) or 29 serial perpetrators according to Police data.
- A more stringent definition in terms of the number of victims (e.g., South Wales) produces a smaller number – in this sample 3 or possibly 4 perpetrators according to Probation data.
- Applying the most stringent definition requiring multiple victims with a time limit imposed of the past year (e.g., North Wales) produces a figure of zero serial perpetrators according to Probation data.

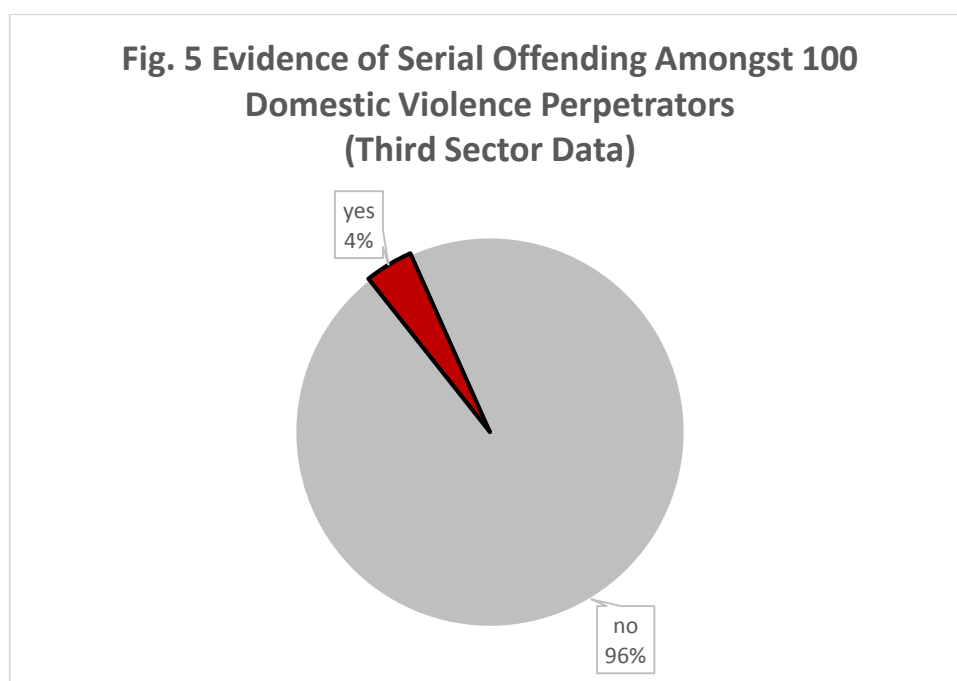
Researcher interpretations of the Police data using a similar threshold as applied to the Probation data (two unconnected victims who are partners or ex-partners, with no time

restrictions), revealed that the number of serial perpetrators would increase from 20 to 29.

## 2.4 Estimates using Third Sector agency data

The same dip sample (100 perpetrators) was also shared with four support service agencies<sup>5</sup> working with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse to provide an indication of the degree of overlap between agencies in, and outside of, the Criminal Justice System. Agency staff were asked to 'match' the names with data held on their internal databases and assess (using the broadest definition of more than one unconnected ex/partner victim) whether any could be identified as serial perpetrators.

Less than a quarter of the 100 perpetrators were 'known' across the Third Sector agencies (22%), and only four individuals could be identified as serial perpetrators using the information held in their records (see Figure 5).



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<sup>5</sup> Safer Wales, Atal y Fro, Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre and Blaenau Gwent Domestic Abuse Service (BGDAS).

This estimate of 4% equates to **265 serial perpetrators in Wales**, according to Third Sector data. This estimate should be interpreted with caution as the agencies participating in this study represent a very small sample of domestic abuse support services across Wales.

## **2.5 Third Sector, Police and Probation data overlap**

A comparison of the four perpetrators identified as serial abusers by Third Sector agencies was made with Police and Probation assessments. Three of the four were judged *not* to be serial by Probation. Only one individual (“Harry”) (recall Table 1) was assessed by both Probation and Third Sector agencies as a serial perpetrator and shown to have offended against three victims according to Probation, whilst the support service data identified two victims.

On the other hand, South Wales Police (the relevant force) identified none of the four perpetrators as serial. Whilst three of the four perpetrators were identified as having more than one unconnected victim, none met the South Wales force criteria of a serial perpetrator (alleged abuse against 3 or more unconnected victims). Interestingly, if the individuals had been arrested in the Dyfed Powys or Gwent Police force areas, three of the four would have been identified as serial perpetrators. Conversely, the North Wales force would not have identified any as such.

Table 3 (next page) illustrates the profile held for the four individuals using Police, Probation and Third Sector data and shows that for three of the four cases, Third Sector data yielded a higher number of victims than either Police or Probation assessments and in one case, highlighted domestic abuse that had not come to the attention of criminal justice agencies. Crucially, none of the 100 domestic abuse perpetrators would have been identified as serial by all three (Police, Probation and Third Sector), using the South Wales Police definition. Even relaxing the Police definition would have only produced multi-agency agreement for only 1 out of 100 perpetrators (“Harry”).

<b>Table 3. Data held for four perpetrators identified as serial by Third Sector.</b>			
<b>Pseudonym &amp; Demographic Characteristic of Perpetrator</b>	<b>Police Number and type of victims</b>	<b>Probation Number and type of victims</b>	<b>Third Sector Number and type of victims</b>
<b>“Harry”</b> Male, 31, White-British	Six incidents against two ex-partners	Three victims, current and two ex-partners	Two victims, victim type and N incidents unspecified
<b>“Jack”</b> Male, 53, Unknown ethnicity	None – no previous DV	One victim, ex-wife, multiple incidents	Two incidents against two victims
<b>“Brian”</b> Male, 48, White-British	Twenty-four incidents against two ex-partners	Multiple incidents against one ex-partner	Ten incidents against three victims
<b>“Albert”</b> Male, 34, White – Any Other White Background	Seven incidents against two ex-partners	One ex-partner, no data of N incidents	Ten incidents against three victims

Despite the small number of Third Sector agencies contributing to this study, their data yielded information which was additional to that already known to Police and/or Probation, thus contributing to our knowledge of crime that remains unreported to criminal justice agencies; the so-called ‘dark figure’ of crime. A much more complete picture of serial perpetration (both reported and unreported) could be achieved by coordinated and robust data sharing across Police, Probation and Third Sector agencies across Wales.

## 2.6 Chapter summary and conclusion

***Estimating the prevalence of serial domestic abuse:*** Analysis of 100 perpetrator records produced prevalence estimates that varied considerably across the three main sources of information used in this research (Police, Probation and Third Sector), ranging from 4% to 20%. Probation data yielded an estimate of 13% with a history of serial domestic abuse offending. The data held by Police forces in Wales, however, produced a larger estimate of 20%. Our research showed that some Police forces identify a much greater proportion of perpetrators to be serial perpetrators than do others (ranging from 0% to 27%). Information held by a small number of Third Sector agencies participating in the research produced an estimate of 4%. Third Sector data yielded a higher number

of victims than either Police or Probation assessments and in one case, highlighted domestic abuse that had not come to the attention of criminal justice agencies.

***Evaluating agency information and the overlaps (and gaps) across agencies:*** A key finding from this research is that different agencies are identifying different individuals as serial (from the same sample of 100 domestic abuse perpetrators) with only a very small degree of overlap across agencies. In only 4 cases (“Trevor”, “Adam”, “Matt” and “Malcolm”) was there agreement between Police and Probation that the individual in question was a serial perpetrator. Mostly this small degree of overlap appears due to the different definitions being used and information about offending held by the two agencies. Crucially, none of the 100 domestic abuse perpetrators would have been identified as serial by all three (Police, Probation and Third Sector), using the South Wales Police definition. Even relaxing the Police definition would have only produced multi-agency agreement for only 1 out of 100 perpetrators.

Several issues pose a significant and substantial challenge to research in this area, which in turn have implications for the development of reliable and effective responses specific to serial domestic abuse:

- Changing definitions and understanding about what types of behaviour constitute domestic abuse
- A lack of a specific criminal offence for domestic abuse
- Under-reporting of domestic abuse to police by victims and witnesses
- High attrition of domestic abuse cases through the criminal justice system
- Variation in data and recording practices across agencies (see Phase 1 report)

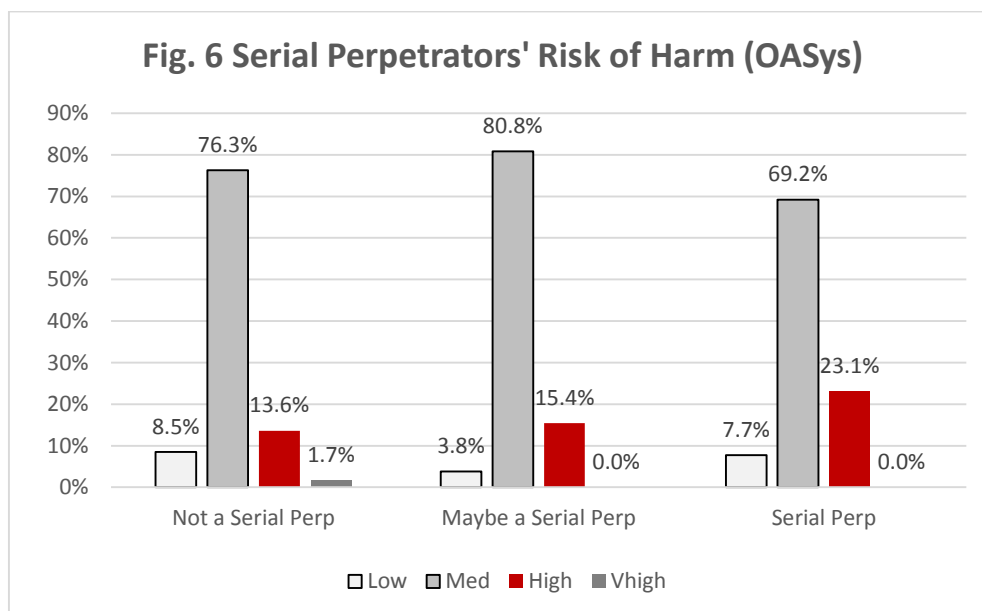
Taken together, these issues along with the findings in this chapter suggest that the picture any one agency has about the victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse must be considered, at best, incomplete. Establishing conclusively who is or who is not a domestic abuse perpetrator, let alone whether their offending can be considered to be repeat, serial and/or high risk, is indeed a very tenuous exercise. This must be borne in mind when considering the feasibility of developing shared definitions and practices around the identification and management of serial perpetrators. The objective of reliably distinguishing ‘serial domestic abuse perpetrators’ from those who are not *might* represent an exercise in futility, and one that *might* distract busy practitioners from responding effectively to the most prolific and dangerous perpetrators.

# Chapter 3: Characteristics of serial domestic abuse perpetrators

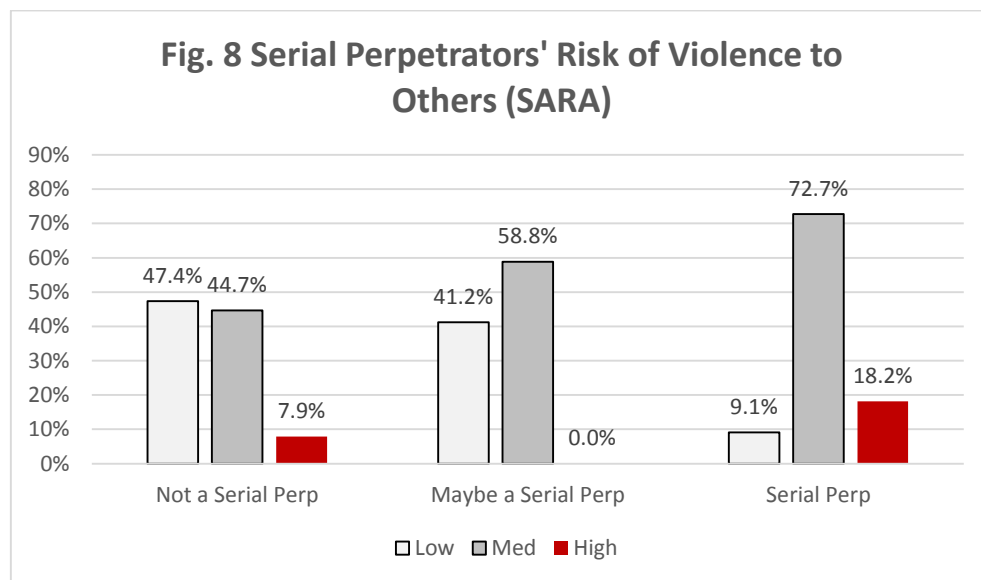
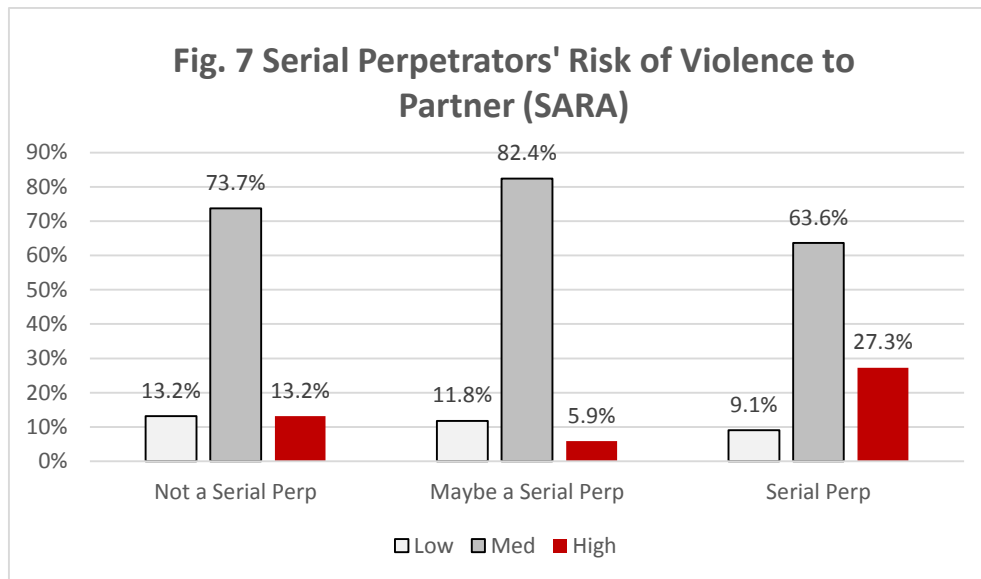
## 3.1 Probation data

### 3.1.1. Summary risk judgments

Recall that the Probation files contain many types of information about perpetrators, including three **summary risk judgments** as well as the **individual risk factors** contained in the SARA risk tool. The three clustered bar charts below (Figures 6, 7, 8) illustrate the relationship between a perpetrator's status in terms of serial offending (no/ maybe/ yes) against their summary risk judgment, in other words the overall judgment made by Probation officers about their level of risk (low/ medium/ high/ very high) using the OASys and SARA risk assessment tools.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> In 2 files the OASys 'risk of harm judgment' was missing, and in 34 files the SARA summary judgments were missing. The analyses in Figures 6, 7 and 8 are based on the available information (i.e., n=98, n=66 and n=66).



It should be noted that these relationships were not statistically significant. Technically, this means that the observed differences in risk between the groups (not a serial perp/ maybe a serial perp/ serial perp) should *not* be considered meaningful.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the risk profiles of serial perpetrators, according to information held in Probation files, does not sufficiently differentiate them from domestic abuse perpetrators that are *not*

<sup>7</sup> However it is important to recall the small sample size, and thus limited statistical power, available for analysis.



known to be serial perpetrators. Thus, these perpetrators are more similar than different, at least in terms of their risk profile as indicated by Probation data.

Furthermore, it is notable that all three charts indicate that only a fraction of serial perpetrators were assessed as high risk. Specifically:

- 23.1% of serial perpetrators are considered at high risk of harm (OASys)
- 27.1% of serial perpetrators are considered to be at high risk for committing violence to partners (SARA)
- 18.2% of serial perpetrators are considered to be at high risk for committing violence to others (SARA)

Thus, according to the available information within Probation files, 'serial perpetrators' should not be considered synonymous with 'high-risk perpetrators'. Some serial perpetrators might be considered to be at high-risk of further offending, while others (the majority, in fact) are not. This is important evidence which should be brought to bear on any development of specific responses to serial domestic abuse offending, and begs the question of which perpetrators should be the focus of enhanced interventions (i.e., serial, repeat, high risk, or some combination of these?).

### *3.1.2. Individual risk factors*

Assessments across a number of individual risk factors also makes an important contribution to the limited evidence base available for this under-researched group of perpetrators. Table 4 (next page) indicates the prevalence of the various risk factors across the three groups (not a serial perp/ maybe a serial perp/ serial perp). The percentages indicate the proportion of each group that has evidence of this risk factor in their files.<sup>8</sup> The group with the highest proportion for each risk factor is indicated by a grey-shaded box. As can be seen from the table, for the majority of the risk factors (14 out of 20), serial perpetrators have higher proportions than the other two groups. This is a fairly consistent pattern, and for many risk factors, the differences are substantial (i.e., two or three times more prevalent amongst serial perpetrators), although most of these differences are not statistically significant.<sup>9</sup>

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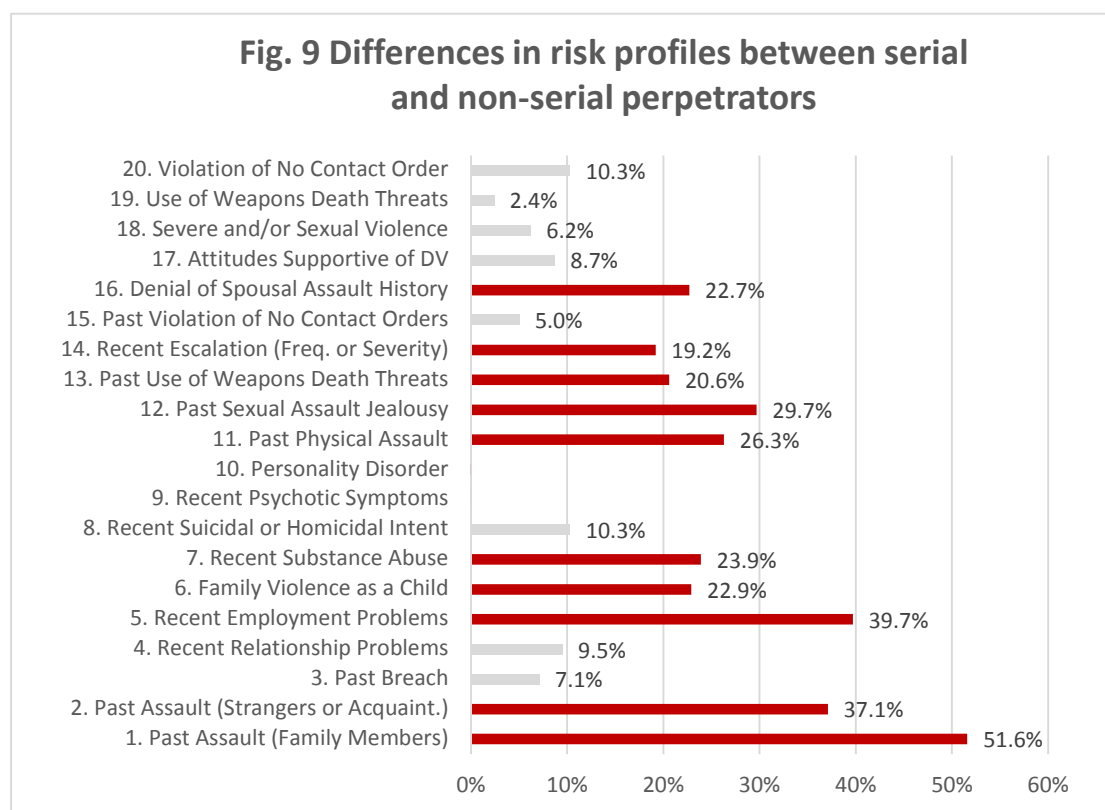
<sup>8</sup> Recall that the SARA risk factors are scored 0 = absent, 1 = sub-threshold, and 2 = present. For ease of interpretation, these were recoded into two categories (0=absent and 1= sub-threshold and present combined).

<sup>9</sup> Although very few of these bivariate tests were statistically significant, it is important to keep in mind the small sample size (n=66) and thus limited statistical power available for analysis.

<b>Table 4. Individual risk factors and serial offending.</b>				
<b>SARA Risk Factor</b>	<b>Not a serial perp</b>	<b>Maybe a serial perp</b>	<b>Yes a serial perp</b>	<b>P-value<sup>10</sup></b>
1. Past Assault of Family Members	21.1%	35.3%	72.7%	.006
2. Past Assault (Strangers or Acquaint.)	44.7%	35.3%	81.8%	.043
3. Past Breach	47.4%	41.2%	54.5%	.785
4. Recent Relationship Problems	63.2%	66.7%	72.7%	.836
5. Recent Employment Problems	42.1%	58.8%	81.8%	.058
6. Family Violence as a Child	31.6%	23.5%	54.5%	.221
7. Recent Substance Abuse	57.9%	58.8%	81.8%	.336
8. Recent Suicidal or Homicidal Intent	7.9%	23.5%	18.2%	.263
9. Recent Psychotic Symptoms	13.2%	5.6%	9.1%	.677
10. Personality Disorder	18.4%	41.2%	18.2%	.167
11. Past Physical Assault	73.7%	64.7%	100%	.094
12. Past Sexual Assault Jealousy	15.8%	17.6%	45.5%	.097
13. Past Use of Weapons Death Threats	15.8%	17.6%	36.4%	.310
14. Recent Escalation (Freq. or Severity)	26.3%	52.9%	45.5%	.131
15. Past Violation of No Contact Orders	13.2%	11.8%	18.2%	.882
16. Denial of Spousal Assault History	50.0%	70.6%	72.7%	.215
17. Attitudes Supportive of DV	36.8%	47.1%	45.5%	.733
18. Severe and/or Sexual Violence	21.1%	23.5%	27.3%	.907
19. Use of Weapons Death Threats	15.8%	5.9%	18.2%	.546
20. Violation of No Contact Order	7.9%	29.4%	18.2%	.115

<sup>10</sup> Indicates whether this is a statistically significant relationship (e.g.,  $p < .05$  is the conventional rule of thumb to indicate the two variables are statistically related with only a small chance of error).

Looking at the same information in a different way, Figure 9 below illustrates where serial perpetrators seem to be most different from non-serial perpetrators (the 'maybe' group was not included in this analysis<sup>11</sup>). The bars in the chart provide a visual of the differences between the two groups, with longer bars (higher percentages) indicating potentially bigger differences (i.e., much higher prevalence amongst serial perpetrators compared to non-serial perpetrators).<sup>12</sup> The ten risk factors with the largest differences are indicated in red.



<sup>11</sup> Analysis of the 'maybe' group combined with the serial perpetrators reveals a similar, if less pronounced, trend (i.e., higher prevalence in contrast to the 'no' group, but the differences were less dramatic).

<sup>12</sup> Two risk factors (9. Recent psychotic symptoms and 10. Personality disorder) were less rather than more likely amongst serial perpetrators, but these differences were very small (4.1% and 0.2%, respectively) and were not included in the figure for reasons of clarity.

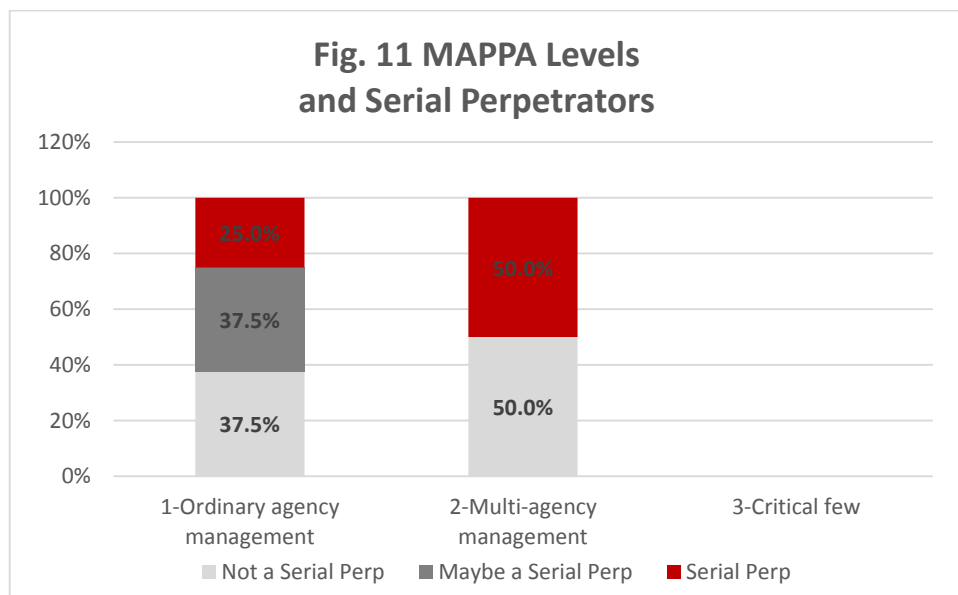
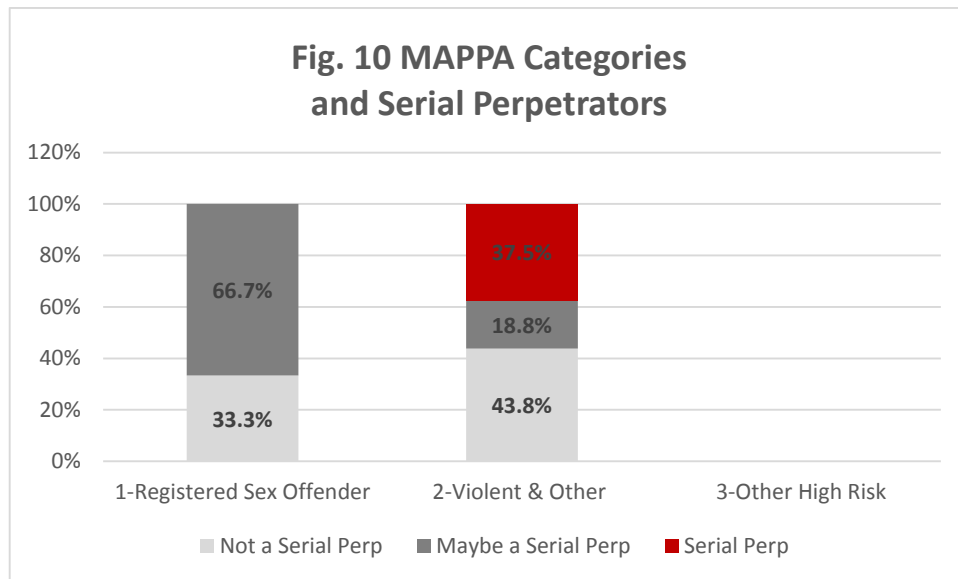
Substantial differences (indicated by the red bars) indicate particularly important risk factors that could be important for distinguishing serial perpetrators from the rest, and include:

- past assault of (family members),
- past assault of (strangers or acquaintances),
- recent employment problems,
- experiencing family violence as a child,
- recent substance abuse,
- past physical assault,
- past sexual assault and jealousy,
- past use of weapons and/or death threats,
- recent escalation, and
- denial of spousal assault history.

In conclusion, it appears that serial perpetrators are more likely to have evidence in their files of these risk factors, but they are not more likely to be labelled as 'high risk' in terms of the summary judgment applied by Probation staff. It is likely that this is a reflection of the type of assessment tools used by Probation staff. The SARA tool for example, has been designed specifically to measure and assess the characteristics of domestic abuse, whilst the OASys tool provides a broader assessment of the risk of harm from any type of offending. It appears that whilst the OASys assessment can indicate to an Offender Manager when a SARA assessment should be completed, the two tools remain separate and data from the SARA assessment is not incorporated as part of the OASys risk score (see also pp. 27-28 from the Phase 1 report).

### *3.1.3. MAPPA data*

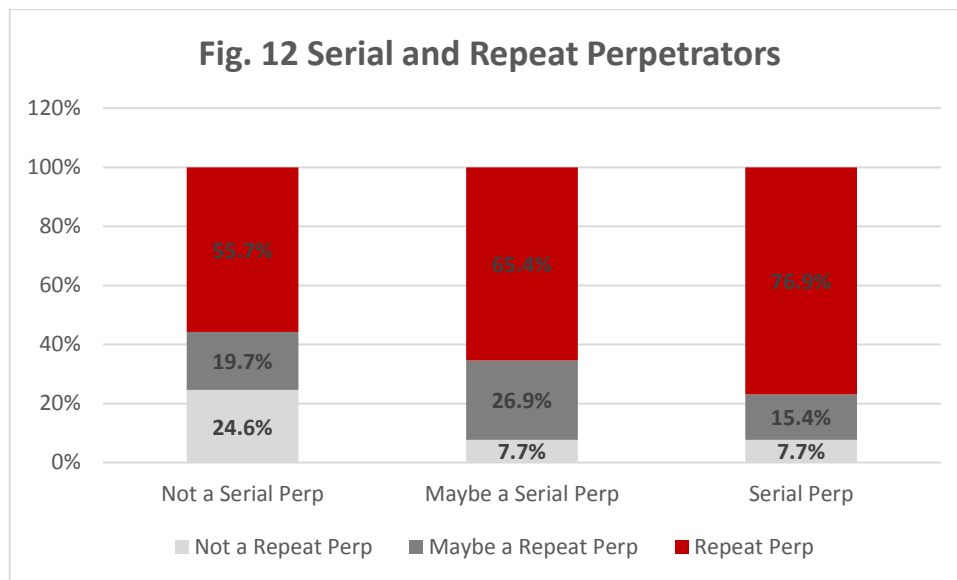
Figures 10 and 11 compare the use of MAPPA across the three groups of perpetrators. Half of the 13 serial perpetrators were the subjects of MAPPA arrangements. Specifically, six were Category 2 (violent and other sexual offenders), and of these, four were being managed at Level 1 (ordinary management) and one was being managed at Level 2 (active multi-agency management). This analysis suggests that the two MAPPA designations that might be expected to be used for serial perpetrators (Category 3 – other high risk and Level 3 – critical few) are not.



**3.1.4. Serial perpetrators compared to repeat perpetrators**

Part of the difficulty in assessing whether a perpetrator is a serial perpetrator is due to the often extensive and complicated offending histories of the people involved. For example, as shown in Figure 12 (next page), most serial perpetrators also can be identified as repeat offenders (i.e., they are known to have committed domestic abuse on more than one occasion against a victim). Specifically, 10 of the 13 serial perpetrators

(76.9%) also had evidence of repeat offending against their victims.<sup>13</sup> These ten individuals constitute a small proportion of the total number of repeat perpetrators (10 of 61 or 16.4%). In other words, serial perpetrators are likely to be repeat perpetrators, but not vice versa.



### 3.1.5. What Probation data tells us about serial perpetrators in Wales

- Nearly all serial perpetrators are **male** (12 out of 13) and **White-British** (12 out of 13). Their average age is **35 years old**.
- Serial perpetrators' known **offending histories** were highly varied: some were very limited whereas others were prolific offenders.<sup>14</sup> Less than half seemed to be actively offending (i.e., were known to have committed domestic abuse within the past year).

<sup>13</sup> Only one serial perpetrator had no evidence of repeat offending (i.e., he was known to have committed only one offence against each of his two victims). The other two perpetrators were considered to have 'maybe' committed repeat offending, because the information within the files was not conclusive.

<sup>14</sup> It is *not* the case that younger perpetrators in this sample have not yet had time to acquire more extensive offending histories, as their age was *not* correlated with the number of assessments in their files (neither OASys nor SARA).

- Only about 1 in 5 serial perpetrators are considered to be at **high risk** of offending (according to summary risk judgments in OASys and/or SARA).
- Yet serial perpetrators have a **more disturbing risk profile** than other perpetrators (with a higher prevalence for 14 out of 20 SARA risk factors). Serial perpetrators were twice as likely to have: committed assaults against family members, strangers and/or acquaintances; experienced recent employment problems; had recent problems with substance abuse; committed sexual assault against current or previous partners or have histories of extreme sexual jealousy; used weapons and/or made credible death threats. They can be characterised as “generally violent men” (men who are violent inside and outside of the home) with problems around substance abuse and unemployment. Importantly they do *not* seem to suffer disproportionately from mental health problems (e.g., suicidal ideation/intent, psychotic or manic symptoms, personality disorders, etc.).
- Half of serial perpetrators are the subjects of **MAPPA**.
- Most serial perpetrators (10 out of 13) were known to have committed **repeat offending** against their victims.

## 3.2 Police data

### 3.2.1. *‘Top Ten’ serial perpetrators*

Preceding sections of this report have highlighted the degree of variation in the offending and risk profiles of serial domestic abuse perpetrators. However, the need to develop a shared understanding of whom and what constitutes the most dangerous perpetrators within this group in order to effectively target resources remains. A brief profiling exercise of the ‘top ten’ serial perpetrators deemed by Police to be the highest priority was therefore conducted to identify whether those prioritised by forces represent a distinct group of perpetrators within the wider category of serial perpetrators.

As highlighted in phase one of this research (see also Section 2.2 of the current report), each force has not only developed their own definition of what constitutes a serial perpetrator, but also utilises different methods and processes to target this group of perpetrators. Two of the four Welsh forces (South Wales and Dyfed Powys) routinely target serial perpetrators as a priority group. However, Gwent’s Domestic Abuse Unit currently focuses their operational procedure for priority perpetrators upon those linked with the highest risk, repeat Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) victims, whilst the North Wales force focuses resources upon the most prolific repeat offenders. In short, not all forces necessarily view serial perpetration as synonymous with the highest priority offending.

As a result of their current procedures, analysts in both Gwent<sup>15</sup> and North Wales were required to manually undertake detailed individual-level analyses of perpetrators' offending histories in order to fulfil the data request for this phase of the research. Using manual extraction, both the Gwent and North Wales forces were able to return the number of distinct victims for each perpetrator, whilst North Wales also returned the number of domestic incidents within the previous 12 months.

As a result of this variation across forces, the data returned for this group of perpetrators differed substantially (see Table 5).

<b>Table 5. Data returned for 'top ten' serial perpetrators, by Police force.</b>	
South Wales	1 perpetrator (N victims)
Gwent	10 perpetrators (N victims)
North Wales	10 perpetrators (N victims and N incidents reported in last 12 months)
Dyfed Powys	10 perpetrators (N victims and N incidents reported in last 12 months and ever)

Although the South Wales force routinely compiles lists of the top ten serial perpetrators as part of their operational targeting process, the Domestic Abuse Management Information tool used to report upon domestic abuse occurrences held on the NICHE system, does not distinguish between reporting persons<sup>16</sup> and victims. Consequently, the number of victims attached to each perpetrator is inflated. Whilst this data can provide an indication of the most prolific serial perpetrators, which is sufficient for operational policing purposes, accurate victim data as required for the research could not be reliably extracted without undertaking a manual analysis of each individual record. Data was subsequently returned for just one individual in South Wales, who was shown to have committed three crimes (rather than incidents) against three victims ever.

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<sup>15</sup> Gwent force currently compiles monthly lists of priority referrals to MARAC, based on a number of risk factors including vulnerability of the victim, frequency and severity of incidents. North Wales routinely targets priority perpetrators based upon the frequency of 'repeat' offending; for the purposes of this research, offenders with two or more victims in the past 12 months were identified and the ten most prolific offenders selected on this basis.

<sup>16</sup> 'Reporting persons' can include a range of individuals in addition to the victim of the offence.



In contrast, the only force in Wales *not* currently utilising the NICHE recording system (Dyfed Powys), returned a list of ten perpetrators with number of distinct victims, number of domestic violence incidents ever, and in the previous 12 months.

### *3.2.2. Demographic profile of serial perpetrators*

The 'top ten' data returned by Welsh police (n=31 perpetrators) was analysed for further detail. Similar to Probation data, all perpetrators are male (100%) and almost three-quarters (74.2%) are less than 40 years old. None was aged 60 or over.

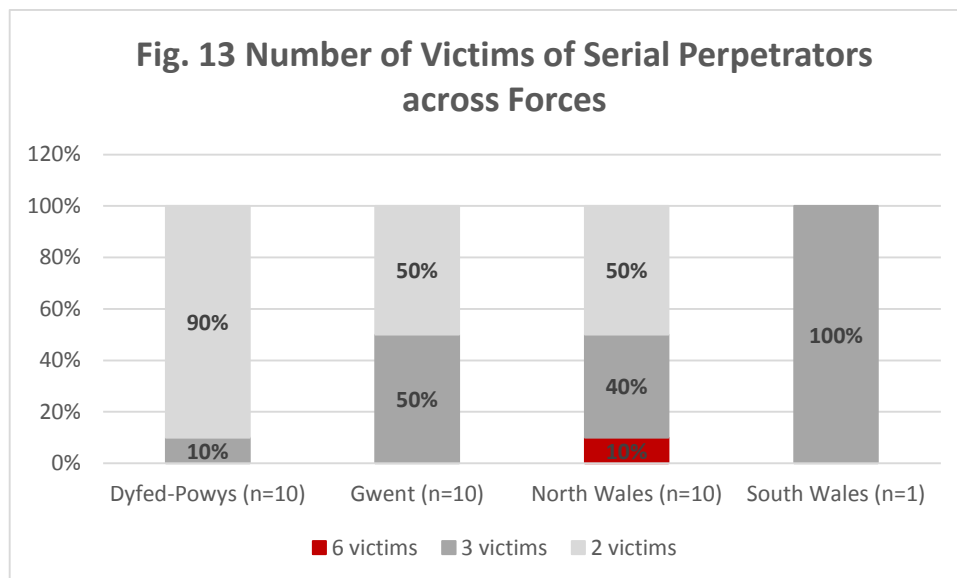
### *3.2.3. Offending profile of serial perpetrators*

An examination of the number of victims recorded across the 'top ten' serial perpetrator group reveals that 61.3% (n=19) of perpetrators were recorded by Police as having two distinct victims, 35.5% (n=11) had offended against three victims, whilst one individual (3.2%) had abused six different victims. The average number of victims across the serial perpetrator sample (all forces) was 2.5.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 13 depicts a cross-force comparison of the number of victims per serial perpetrator. Perpetrators in Dyfed Powys had the lowest number of victims, with 90% recorded as having offended against two victims, compared with 50% in Gwent and North Wales. One individual in South Wales (100% of the sample) had offended against three victims, whilst another individual in North Wales had a total of six victims (10%).

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<sup>17</sup> A comparison of Police and Probation assessments of the number of victims offended against by the same matched group of priority perpetrators indicates that Police were more likely to identify a higher number of victims than Probation. Only 12.5% of perpetrators were assessed by Probation as offending against three or more victims compared with 41.7% of police assessments. As highlighted in section 2.3, this is likely to be related to the nature of the data held by the two agencies.



Analyses of offending frequency in North Wales and Dyfed Powys<sup>18</sup> (using available data) reveals marked variations. Serial perpetrators in North Wales are the most prolific, with 100% recorded as having seven or more incidents in the past 12 months, 40% of whom committed 16 or more incidents. By contrast, perpetrators in Dyfed Powys had far lower numbers of incidents with all serial perpetrators in the top ten committing less than seven offences and 20% only involved in one incident during the past year.

### *3.2.4. Further details about Police 'top ten' perpetrators using Probation data*

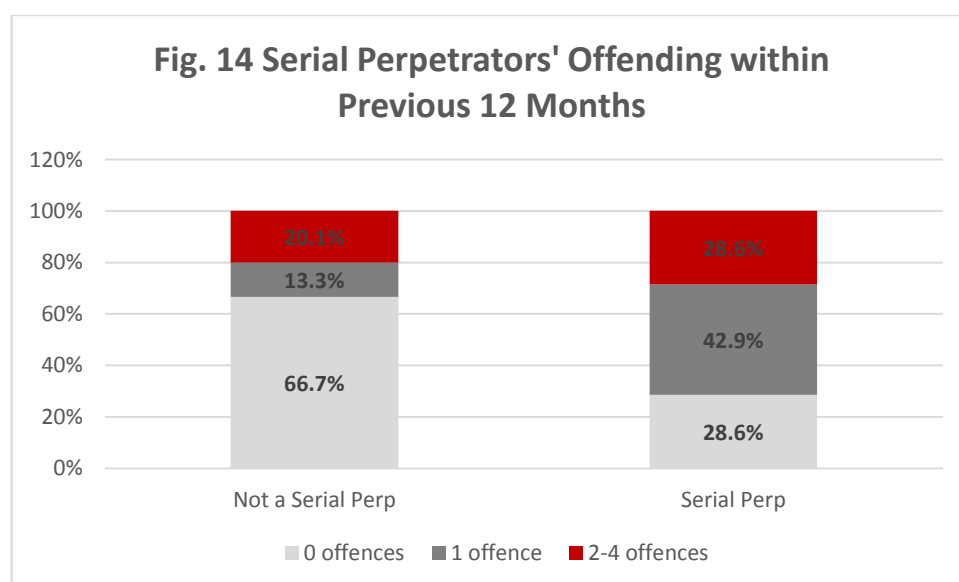
The police force data for each of the 31 'top ten' perpetrators was matched with perpetrator data on the Probation OASys system and information compared for each individual. The following findings resulted from this analysis:

- The vast majority (96.8% or n=30) of the sample were convicted offenders on the Probation system; only one individual (3.2%) was not already known to Probation.

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<sup>18</sup> It was not possible to accurately extract number of domestic abuse occurrences from the recording system for priority perpetrators in Gwent. South Wales were not able to provide number of occurrences for serial perpetrators, instead basing their data (for one serial perpetrator) upon number of crimes. These forces are therefore not included in the analysis.

- Of the 30 priority perpetrators known to Probation, a third (33.3%, n=8) could be identified as serial perpetrators (having offended against at least two victims ever) using Probation data.<sup>19</sup>
- Very little discernible difference could be found between the eight individuals identified as serial perpetrators by both Police and Probation and the 16 individuals (all men) identified as priority serial perpetrators by Police only. For example:
  - An equal proportion of serial and non-serial perpetrators were classified as high risk of harm on OASys (25%), the majority of both groups of perpetrators were likely to be medium risk (75% of serial and 68.8% of non-serial perpetrators) whilst none of the serial group were assessed as low risk (compared with 6.3%, n=1 of the non-serial group).
  - The frequency of offending was also similar in that 20.1% of non-serial and 28.6% of serial perpetrators committed two or more offences during the previous year (see Figure 14).



### 3.3 Chapter summary and conclusion

#### ***Identifying any distinguishing characteristics of serial domestic abuse perpetrators:***

Serial domestic abuse perpetrators are also likely to be repeat perpetrators, however, only a fraction are considered to be 'high risk' using Probation risk assessment tools

<sup>19</sup> Individual record data was unavailable on OASys for 6 individuals, reducing the number for analysis to 24.

(OASys and SARA). Therefore, in the case of domestic abuse offending, the categories of serial/ repeat/ high-risk should not necessarily be considered interchangeable or synonymous.

Serial perpetrators *do*, however, differ to some extent in their individual risk profile as assessed by the Spousal Abuse Risk Assessment (SARA) risk factors. For example, serial domestic abuse perpetrators are more likely than non-serial domestic abuse perpetrators to have past assault of family and stranger/acquaintance violence, recent escalation in violence, past use of weapons and denial of spousal assault, amongst others.

This emphasises the question, to what extent do serial perpetrators represent a distinct group within the wider category of domestic abuse perpetrators? Only two of the four Welsh forces (South Wales and Dyfed Powys) routinely target serial perpetrators within their force operational processes, thus highlighting that not all forces necessarily view serial perpetration as synonymous with the highest priority offending. A cross-force comparison showed that even when narrowing the focus to the ten highest priority serial abusers within each force, their offending profile varied considerably. Further, whilst all but one perpetrator was 'known' to Probation, only one-third of this group could be identified by Probation as serial perpetrators. Furthermore, even within this small group of the highest priority, serial perpetrators, very little difference could be found between those identified by Probation as serial and non-serial.

The empirical data presented here does not neatly map onto prior theorising about domestic abuse perpetrators (e.g., Johnson's intimate terrorists versus situational couple violence). It could be the case that serial perpetration is an activity or outcome of more than one explanatory motivation for violence. In other words, some serial perpetrators may be highly dangerous intimate terrorists whereas others may lead the kind of chaotic alcohol or drug-fuelled lifestyles of other violent offenders generally. The evidence derived from this exploratory study does *not* suggest that 'serial domestic abuse perpetrators' represent a qualitatively different group – one that is distinctive, can be reliably identified, and that has a profile calling for a particular course of action in terms of multi-agency response and risk management. The implications of these empirical findings for policy and practice will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter of this report.

# Chapter 4: Discussion

## 4.1 Summary of main findings

This section reviews the main findings arising from the research, which appear to have the greatest implications for agencies attempting to effectively respond to domestic abuse. They are grouped according to the three empirical research objectives for this phase of the research:

***Estimating the prevalence of serial domestic abuse:*** Analysis of 100 perpetrator records produced prevalence estimates that varied considerably across the three main sources of information used in this research (Police, Probation and Third Sector), ranging from 4% to 20%. Probation data yielded an estimate of 13% with a history of serial domestic abuse offending. The data held by Police forces in Wales, however, produced a larger estimate of 20%. Our research showed that some Police forces identify a much greater proportion of perpetrators to be serial perpetrators than do others (ranging from 0% to 27%). Information held by a small number of Third Sector agencies participating in the research produced an estimate of 4%. Third Sector data yielded a higher number of victims than either Police or Probation assessments and in one case, highlighted domestic abuse that had not come to the attention of criminal justice agencies.

***Evaluating agency information and the overlaps (and gaps) across agencies:*** A key finding from this research is that different agencies are identifying different individuals as serial (from the same sample of 100 domestic abuse perpetrators) with only a very small degree of overlap across agencies. In only 4 cases (“Trevor”, “Adam”, “Matt” and “Malcolm”) was there agreement between Police and Probation that the individual in question was a serial perpetrator. Mostly this small degree of overlap appears due to the different definitions being used and information about offending held by the two agencies. Crucially, none of the 100 domestic abuse perpetrators would have been identified as serial by all three (Police, Probation and Third Sector), using the South Wales Police definition. Even relaxing the Police definition would have only produced multi-agency agreement for only 1 out of 100 perpetrators.

***Identifying any distinguishing characteristics of serial domestic abuse perpetrators:*** Serial domestic abuse perpetrators are also likely to be repeat perpetrators, however, only a fraction are considered to be ‘high risk’ using Probation risk assessment tools (OASys and SARA). Therefore, in the case of domestic abuse offending, the categories of serial/ repeat/ high-risk should not necessarily be considered interchangeable or synonymous.

Serial perpetrators *do*, however, differ to some extent in their individual risk profile as assessed by the Spousal Abuse Risk Assessment (SARA) risk factors. For example, serial

domestic abuse perpetrators are more likely than non-serial domestic abuse perpetrators to have past assault of family and stranger/acquaintance violence, recent escalation in violence, past use of weapons and denial of spousal assault, amongst others.

This emphasises the question, to what extent do serial perpetrators represent a distinct group within the wider category of domestic abuse perpetrators? Only two of the four Welsh forces (South Wales and Dyfed Powys) routinely target serial perpetrators within their force operational processes, thus highlighting that not all forces necessarily view serial perpetration as synonymous with the highest priority offending. A cross-force comparison showed that even when narrowing the focus to the ten highest priority serial abusers within each force, their offending profile varied considerably. Further, whilst all but one perpetrator was 'known' to Probation, only one-third of this group could be identified by Probation as serial perpetrators. Furthermore, even within this small group of the highest priority, serial perpetrators, very little difference could be found between those identified by Probation as serial and non-serial.

## 4.2 Recommendations

*Providing new evidence to inform developing policy and practice* was the fourth objective of this research. The evidence derived from this exploratory study does *not* suggest that 'serial domestic abuse perpetrators' represent a qualitatively different group – one that is distinctive, can be reliably identified, and that has a profile calling for a particular course of action in terms of multi-agency response and risk management. This in turn suggests that the conceptualisation of 'serial domestic abuse perpetrator' should be informed not just by the *quantity* of victims but also the *quality* of, and motivations behind, the abusive behaviour. For this reason, we recommend that serial offending be considered alongside repeat and high-risk offending behaviour in the determination of who is a *priority perpetrator* and that this determination should instigate a more intensive and targeted multi-agency response.

Based on our research, we tentatively offer the following recommendations:

- 1) The *national definition* of a serial perpetrator<sup>20</sup> recently proposed by the ACPO Task and Finish Group (see Chamberlain, 2014) should be amended to take into account more than a simple numerical measure of the number of victims.

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<sup>20</sup> "A serial perpetrator is someone who is reported (to the police) to have committed or threatened domestic abuse against two or more victims and who are or were intimate partners or familial members of the perpetrator in the last rolling 3 year period" (Chamberlain, 2014, pp. 7-8).

- 2) Serial offending should be considered alongside repeat and high-risk offending behaviour in the determination of who is a **priority perpetrator** that should be the subject of a more intensive and targeted multi-agency response.
- 3) Any sharpening of focus on serial perpetrators should not detract away from responses aimed at repeat and high-risk perpetrators. Ideally responses should take into account **multiple dimensions of offending**, in order to prevent the particular types of harms associated with each.

## 4.3 Future directions

The options for further research and policy development within this area include:

- 1) A consistent definition and monitoring/flagging process for **priority perpetrators** should be established with input and agreement across relevant agencies (e.g., Police, Probation and Third Sector).
- 2) Development of a **priority perpetrator identification tool** should be informed by this research, incorporating serial, repeat and high-risk offending into a single tool. A single integrated tool that is developed and shared across agencies is preferable to multiple tools (e.g., SARA and OASys).
- 3) If the development of new procedures involving a new identification tool goes forward, this should be a **multi-agency project**, informed by multi-agency data (e.g., Police, Probation and Third Sector). Once developed, this tool should be piloted in a single area in Wales, to enable the possibility of rigorous research to evaluate its effectiveness.

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