



Security, Crime and Intelligence
Innovation Institute

Sefydliad Arloesedd
Diogelwch, Troseddu a Chudd-wybodaeth

Evaluation of South Wales Police 'Operation Diogel': Final Report

Professor Amanda L. Robinson

Dr. Bethan Davies

Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute

Cardiff University

January 2024

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Methods.....	6
Aims and objectives	6
Overall approach.....	6
Data collection and analysis.....	6
Quantitative police casefile data.....	6
Semi-structured interviews with professionals.....	7
Victims' views and feedback	8
Limitations.....	8
Findings	10
1. Implementation of the Op Diogel approach	10
1.1 Setting up the new team.....	10
1.2 From virtual plans to in-person meetings	12
1.3 Key ingredients of the approach	12
2. Impact of the Op Diogel approach	14
2.1 Quantitative overview of Op Diogel cases	14
2.2 Criminal justice outcomes achieved by Op Diogel.....	16
2.3 Factors associated with achieving positive outcomes	17
2.4 Victim perspectives on their contact with Op Diogel.....	19
2.5 Op Diogel case studies	22
3. Perspectives on the Op Diogel approach	26
3.1 Practice: working with victims	26
3.2 Collaboration and contact with partner agencies.....	28
3.3 Key benefits of the new approach	31
Conclusion.....	33
Key findings	33
Discussion.....	34
Directions for future research.....	36
References.....	37

Executive Summary

1. Recent inspections by HMICFRS have noted the high proportion of domestic abuse (DA) cases resulting in 'no further action' across all police forces to be a matter of 'grave concern'. They also found that not all forces had specialist teams to investigate these cases, even though evidence suggests specialist trained officers generally conduct better investigations.
2. In early 2023, South Wales Police commenced 'Operation Diogel' in Cardiff & Vale BCU with the aim of improving victim experiences, safeguarding and criminal justice outcomes. The new approach involves a dedicated team of specially trained DA investigators who collect evidence, support the victim, and make referrals to appropriate agencies without the usual delays involved in the 'business as usual' approach.
3. SWP commissioned Cardiff University to undertake research to evaluate the Operation Diogel pilot, both in terms of the new processes that were implemented as well as their outcomes. A mixed methods study was conducted, involving the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from different sources: n=405 cases going through the pilot (Feb-Aug 2023), n=10 semi-structured interviews with the Op Diogel team and staff in partner agencies, and n=31 victim responses to the force's Insights survey.
4. Despite a lack of clarity about the team's focus during the initial weeks, over time their focus became primarily to deal with DA cases from the Hub where the victim was reluctant to support a prosecution and the perpetrator was being held in custody. After receiving their allocated cases, investigators would attempt to make in-person contact with the victim. This represents a wholly different strategy from 'business as usual', whereby cases involving 'unsupportive' victims would usually be closed with no further action.
5. The typical case referred to Op Diogel involved a white woman, younger than 45 years old, who experienced a crime of violence (with or without injury), classified as medium or high risk, with a significant prior history of police contact for DA. Most victims were flagged with at least one 'warning marker' and on average they had three each. The overwhelming majority (90%) were not supportive of engaging with police prior to Op Diogel contact.
6. A significantly higher proportion of cases dealt with by Op Diogel resulted in positive criminal justice outcomes: 23% (85 of 369 cases finalised) compared to less than 15% in the other areas of the force. Furthermore, positive outcomes were associated with a victim profile that was more challenging (e.g., unsupportive, high risk, multiple previous occurrences for DA and warning markers). Certain tactics also increased the likelihood of positive outcomes (e.g., partner agency support, lengthier face-to-face interactions with investigators).
7. Insights data demonstrated that victims receiving support from Op Diogel were significantly more satisfied, at every stage of the process, compared to victims who received the 'business as usual' approach elsewhere in the BCU.
8. Key ingredients of the new approach were identified as time (complete focus on DA cases), plain clothes (distinct from response officers and business as usual), unmarked car, coherent aims and methods, and links to other agencies.
9. Interviews revealed better job satisfaction and morale on the part of the police investigators, and better communication and victim safeguarding actions reported by partner agencies.
10. Overall, findings from multiple data sources all point to the positive difference achieved by this new specialist team, especially amongst those victims who, due to their unwillingness to support prosecution and more challenging profiles, were least well placed to benefit from the 'business as usual' approach.

Introduction

As noted in the inspection conducted by HMICFRS in September 2021, three out of four recorded domestic abuse cases are closed by the police as requiring no further action, with either outcome 15 (evidential difficulties) or outcome 16 (victim does not support further action). HMICFRS stated this to be a matter of 'grave concern' and recommended an 'immediate review of use of outcomes 15 and 16 in violence against girls offences' so that forces could 'assure themselves these are always the right or only decisions'.

HMICFRS also found that not all forces had specialist teams to investigate either domestic abuse or sexual offence cases, and that there were varying approaches throughout the country in terms of providing a specialist policing response to these crimes. In relation to DA specifically, their fieldwork for the 2021 report found that only one force had moved to specialist investigative teams (but the teams weren't at full capacity); one force had plans to introduce specialist teams; one force had no specialist investigative teams but had a small central team that played an active part in supervising cases and providing guidance; and one force used officers in criminal investigation departments and response teams to investigate DA cases. This is despite HMICFRS's conclusion in their 2019 report that specialist trained officers generally conduct better investigations and that there was evidence of better supervision of investigations in specialist teams.

It is within this context that the South Wales Police put forward a proposal in May 2022 for a new specialist team that would offer "a more tailored response and specialism, which has the potential for us to focus more expertise in supporting victims and in working more intelligently with partner agencies. It is more likely that dedicated officers in a Specialist Investigator capacity will be better placed to problem solve arising issues with partners and reflect better the concerns and challenges experienced by victims."

Specialist units for policing DA have a long history in many parts of the world, and the South Wales Police force area is no exception. Family Support Units were established by the force in 1990 as 'a key site for bringing together and fostering expertise in relation to investigating the types of crimes now considered public protection issues – child abuse, domestic abuse and sexual violence' (Robinson et al., 2023). Progressive reforms instigated more than 30 years ago, which were widely considered to drastically improve the operational and strategic approach to policing domestic abuse, have over time given way to alternatives such as centralised investigative 'hubs' to manage the demand vs capacity challenge that continues to grow significantly year-on-year.

The SWP proposal provided a description of their current 'business as usual' approach to DA, and its limitations:

Domestic Abuse is largely reported to the Public Service Centre (PSC), usually over the phone which results in a grade 1 or 2 (with 1 being high priority) depending on a risk assessment. Largely positive action is taken, and one party is arrested and removed from the scene, then (when offences are disclosed) we return to take statements, photographs and assemble an evidential file. This is handed to the custody management team (known as the Hub) who interview a suspect and a charging decision is made.

What problems does this approach present?

- *There is a break in service continuity and victim relationship when officers first arrive at a scene and leave to remove the offender. While the victim may feel a sense of relief by having*

the offender removed, they are often left alone without support. In many cases when we return to take a statement, they may have changed their mind and withdraw their support for charges to be pursued. This loss of continuity potentially leads to a lower chance of prosecution and (in the long term) more possibility for the victim becoming revictimised.

- There is potentially less buy in from investigators because they often simply get a file of evidence and have never met or engaged with the victim. Arguably investigators would be more invested to help the victim if they had obtained the evidence from them first hand, if they did - this would also prevent tensions between hub officers and responders around perceived evidential gaps.*
- Hub resources take on the majority of DA cases and they are usually non specialist and officers right at the beginning of their detective careers. This is not meant as a criticism of very hard working hub officers, however they deal with a wide variety of offences and don't always know what support a victim could access, how to control an offenders behaviour in the long term, problem solve for families and couples or what organisations can do outside of the criminal justice process. These wider considerations often therefore come too late, when a Public Protection Notice (PPN) is processed and often when the victim has already withdrawn their support.*
- If an offender is charged, evidence suggests that the contact with the victim becomes inconsistent and that this can lead to a further loss in subsequent convictions.*

As a proactive attempt to deal with these issues, the 'Operation Diogel' pilot was planned, and resources put in place to commence in early 2023 (note: diogel means 'safe' in Welsh). This involved Cardiff & Vale BCU establishing a dedicated team of specially trained DA investigators (5 investigators plus sergeant), to undertake the responsibilities of leading on police contact, statement gathering and maintaining victim contact with those individuals and family members involved in DA cases. The approach of the new team was described in the proposal as follows:

- To establish in-person contact with victims as immediately as possible - to increase victim confidence in police interest and management of their experience.*
- To revisit victim contact where earlier police approaches did not result in them co-operating with us or where we were unable to gain their confidence... to secure these victims engagement by recovering their confidence in our work and approach, so as to improve victim led outcomes.*
- By not being required to attend and manage other police duties or other types of incidents, the team will have a more focussed attention on DV cases that will allow them to collect evidence, support the victim, and make referrals to appropriate agencies without the usual delay involved in the 'business as usual' approach.*
- The opportunity of a dedicated team also makes relationship building opportunities easier with partner agencies to better understand and access the support these skilled and experienced partners have available for victims.*
- These investigators will retain ownership of victim updates on investigations, manage harm reduction and problem solving, as well as victim contact throughout the case.*

What follows in this report is an account of the research undertaken to evaluate the Operation Diogel pilot, both in terms of the new processes that were implemented as well as their outcomes.

Methods

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the evaluation was to identify whether the new processes implemented were feasible and acceptable to police, partners and victims, and whether their implementation increased the proportion of cases with a 'positive outcome'. Positive outcomes have been broadly defined as including victims' engagement with safeguarding and support, willingness to provide a statement, willingness to support the case leading to more perpetrators being charged, and satisfaction with their experience with police. Objectives aligned to this include:

- To describe the new approach and contrast it with 'business as usual' in terms of victim satisfaction, safeguarding and criminal justice outcomes; and
- To understand the benefits and limitations of the new approach from the perspective of those delivering it and staff in partner agencies.

Overall approach

The implementation of the pilot was evaluated in terms of both processes and outcomes. This involved accessing routinely collected data as well as original (new) data collection. This was a mixed methods study, involving the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from different sources.

To identify the impact of the pilot intervention, we used a comparative research design for the outcome evaluation. The comparative component included two dimensions:

- Temporal: a comparison of routinely collected data from the pilot timeframe with that from the same period in previous year/s; and
- Geographic: a comparison of routinely collected data from cases referred to the pilot team with that from the other BCUs.

The process evaluation aimed to analyse how the intervention was implemented, identify any enablers and inhibitors, and understand how these may have impacted upon outcomes.

Data collection and analysis

Three sources of data were obtained for this research: quantitative police casefile data; semi-structured qualitative interviews; and victims' responses to the SWP Insights survey. Ethical approval was granted by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Cardiff University) on 9th May 2023 (ref #328).

Quantitative police casefile data

Anonymised data was provided to the research team on all cases referred to the Op Diogel team (n=405) during the evaluation period. This included data input by the Op Diogel team into an Excel spreadsheet, which contained qualitative and quantitative information about key aspects of the case and their response (e.g., occurrence number, referral source, sector, investigators responding, method of contact, time spent with victim, comments about their willingness to support and reasons behind this, contact with partner agencies, etc.). This dataset was set up as an Excel spreadsheet to

enable the Op Diogel Sergeant to maintain an overview of all cases and their progress as well as allowing the individual investigators involved to input relevant data about their cases at key points.

The dataset was supplemented with additional routinely collected data (matched by occurrence number) to provide the following information for the evaluation sample: victim characteristics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, total number of previous occurrences, total number of previous DA occurrences, warning markers) and case characteristics (e.g., HMIC and ONS offence classifications, DASH risk grades, crime disposal codes representing outcomes such as charged/summonsed or evidential difficulties, etc.).

The quantitative data enabled the identification of overall characteristics of the sample of cases being referred to the team as well as understanding relationships between victim and case characteristics, tactics used, and disposal codes.

Finally, performance data was obtained from other BCUs in relation to DA cases and disposal codes to enable the temporal and geographic comparisons necessary for the outcome evaluation (described above).

Semi-structured interviews with professionals

To better understand the role and practices of the new team, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative evidence. This offered an opportunity for participants to reflect both on what worked well, and those aspects of the new approach that posed a challenge. SWP provided contact details for officers assigned to the pilot and partner agencies, who were contacted via email and invited to take part in the research. Interviews typically lasted around 30-40 minutes and were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. In total, N=10 interviews were carried out with two groups of participants: officers assigned to the pilot (n=6) and representatives of partner agencies (n=4).

For both groups, an interview schedule was used to guide the conversation. For the officers' sample, the main areas covered included:

- Establishing the team and its remit;
- Differences between the new approach and 'business as usual';
- How the team prioritises and contacts victims;
- What techniques are used to encourage victims to support prosecution and accept safeguarding support;
- Barriers and facilitators to victim engagement;
- Case examples; and
- Communication and collaboration with partner agencies.

Meanwhile, owing to their victim-focused role, the conversations with partner agencies offered an opportunity to gain insights that were more closely related to victims' experiences, as well as to capture the agencies' experiences of working with the new team. As a result, the areas of focus included:

- Understandings of the pilot team and their remit;
- Referral routes into agencies;
- Barriers and facilitators to communication and collaboration;
- Examples of joint working and collaboration with the Op Diogel team; and
- Feedback on the new approach and views on future working.

In line with the application for ethical approval, all participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the aims and scope of the project and were required to sign a consent form before participating in an interview. This included giving their consent to anonymised verbatim quotes from their interviews being used in research output (e.g., this report). As such, quotes are used as evidence throughout the Findings section of this report; while some have been revised for conciseness, all retain their original meaning.

Victims' views and feedback

The perspectives of those individuals in receipt of the new approach represent a crucial aspect of understanding whether and how it might be considered an improvement over the usual approach. SWP regularly conducts an 'Insights' survey to gather information from victims of crime about their experiences with the police response. Victims of domestic abuse are invited by the Insights team to respond to a specific survey designed to capture their experiences with all stages of the police response, from initial report through investigation and case finalisation. They are prompted through a series of closed and open-ended questions to give their feedback, over the telephone, in what is considered to be an 'independent' feedback exercise (although it is research undertaken by the SWP about SWP's performance, the Insights team have no part in the operational responses by SWP officers to domestic abuse or any other crime, and as such are an 'arms-length' unit). The Insights team then compiles the results for reports to the Home Office as well as informing internal discussions about force performance. For the purposes of this research, the Insights team provided responses obtained from all DA victims who consented to take part during the evaluation period (n=413), which included survey responses obtained from Op Diogel victims (n=31), who were (anonymously) identified as such through their occurrence numbers. The research team then analysed this 'raw' data to compare the results for Op Diogel victims to victims receiving the 'business as usual' approach.

Finally, case studies (n=7) were compiled by synthesising information from all three data sources to provide a series of 'pen portraits' of Op Diogel victims. A few additional case studies were obtained from partner agencies to further illustrate the complexity of the cases going through the pilot as well as the multi-agency work undertaken to support these victims.

Limitations

There are certain limitations that are worth noting when interpreting the results that follow. Due to the timescale of the evaluation, there was a relatively short follow-up period, making it difficult to establish criminal justice outcomes further down the line (e.g., successful convictions at court). Relatedly, criminal justice 'successes' (e.g., 'positive outcomes' including charges and summons) cannot be assumed to result in improved outcomes for victims personally, such as increased safety and well-being over the long-term.

In addition, the evaluation was supplied with relatively limited data, especially from partners. While several representatives of partner agencies participated in the interviews, and some were able to supply case-related data, systematically evaluating the level and type of safeguarding and support provided to victims was challenging. In turn, the impact of this support on criminal justice outcomes and victim feedback was difficult to pinpoint. Where partners were able to reflect on particular cases, this offered some valuable insights into the perspectives of victims, though this was not systematic. The victim feedback data was primarily obtained from SWP's Insights survey with a

relatively small number of respondents. Although the survey was administered by staff independent of the Op Diogel team, this was still a routine internal force survey, which was not specifically designed for the evaluation of Op Diogel, and could be seen as lacking independence.

However, the triangulation of multiple data sources does yield an overall assessment of the Op Diogel approach, which highlights significant improvements over 'business as usual' from the point of view of police, partners and victims. Although further research is warranted in order to build on these preliminary findings, the evidence obtained does demonstrate a coherent and advantageous shift in how SWP is dealing with some of the most challenging DA cases.

Findings

1. Implementation of the Op Diogel approach

This section answers the question “How was the new approach established and how does it differ from ‘business as usual’?”

1.1 Setting up the new team

As mentioned previously, Cardiff & Vale BCU established a dedicated team of specially trained DA investigators to commence the pilot in early 2023. The gender-balanced team included a sergeant and 5 investigators (there were initially 6, though one left in the early stages of the pilot). The team changed over time, but always included a mix of officers who volunteered and those who were assigned from other roles (e.g., Hub or Community Policing). Throughout the evaluation period, the team was led by a female officer who applied and was then promoted into the role of acting Sergeant for Op Diogel. The semi-structured interviews provided helpful insight into the process of setting up the new team, including some of the challenges they encountered as they settled into their new roles and remit.

1.1.1 Referral criteria and remit

Establishing clarity about the team’s ‘remit’, including which victims to engage with and how, was an early implementation challenge. Their remit was described as unclear and “*a bit all over the place*” (Officer 4) during the initial weeks of the pilot, and the team indicated that it took around 6-8 weeks for them to “*find our feet*” (Officer 6). For example, at the beginning of the pilot, the team were being asked to visit domestic abuse victims from across the BCU, regardless of whether they were already willing to provide a statement or not.

However, over time the following referral criteria became established: victims of domestic abuse who were not willing to provide a statement, usually with the perpetrator in custody. Sometimes the team would be tasked by officers in other departments or the ‘TAC’/Daily Management Meetings (DMM), but the team’s focus became primarily to deal with cases from the Hub where the victim was reluctant to support a prosecution and the perpetrator was being held in custody. Acknowledging and in support of the team’s mission to focus on these types of cases, the Sergeant would turn down requests falling outside of this remit. Evidence of the remit becoming more established can be seen in the proportion of cases where the victim was supportive, which in the first two months was roughly 25% but then fell sharply and hovered around 0-1% for the latter months. Similarly, referrals from the Hub accounted for less than 25% initially but then increased and remained at approximately 90% for the duration.

A daily routine was instituted whereby most cases were handed over directly from the Hub in the morning, and then prioritised and allocated by the team’s Sergeant. All investigators in the team understood that the 24-hour ‘PACE clock’ or ‘custody clock’ drives prioritisation, with those with the fewest hours remaining in custody seen first. After receiving their allocated cases, investigators would attempt to make in-person contact with the victim. This represents a wholly different strategy from ‘business as usual’, whereby cases involving ‘unsupportive’ victims would usually be closed

without further contact (e.g. outcome 15 or 16). More details about the referrals received, case characteristics and methods of contact are provided in Section 2.1.

1.1.2 Raising awareness of the new team's 'remit'

In the early days and before the aims of the team were widely understood, there was some pushback from other departments where workload overlapped. For example, in one case where a victim was not supporting a prosecution and unwilling to give a statement, the new team made a visit and were able to change the victim's mind and obtain a statement from her. In the meantime, however, the Sergeant overseeing the case (in a different team) had decided that no further action would be taken and the case was taken off the workload, prompting a frustrated response because the case had to be re-opened. Such examples are indicative of the challenges of establishing new ways of working and embedding this within existing structures rather than indicative of a wider organisational 'problem'. With better and wider understanding of the team's role in supporting domestic abuse victims, these workload issues have been resolved.

Another implementation challenge for the team involved uncertainties over their actual workspaces, exemplified by a departmental change as well as multiple changes in Senior Police managers overseeing the pilot. Changing roles and moves to different departments are not uncommon in policing, but several officers highlighted their disruptive impacts in terms of efficiently establishing the team's remit and working practices. This was particularly troublesome in terms of establishing coherent aims for the new team, which was difficult when new managers with different ideas came into post at various stages: *"with every change in management, or indeed department change, comes new ideas/expectations"* (Officer 1).

1.1.3 Learning and training

Reflecting on training as Op Diogel was first set up, officers referred to some of the courses they were recommended to attend, including witness interviewing and the stages of homicide. More notable, however, is the learning on the job that took place as many of the team started their new roles. Whereas in the past they had dealt with all kinds of incidents, officers felt the team's sole focus on domestic abuse helped them to gain a better understanding of the problem and how to communicate with different victims. They also learned from each other as they attended calls in pairs, recognising good practice:

[Officer] has an incredible way of speaking to people. He really listens to people and watching him take those statements and victim personal statements from people is amazing – how he manages to capture their life is amazing. (Officer 2)

In addition, one team member had worked in a similar role in the past, working with medium risk victims of domestic abuse in the Hub. As well as resources prepared previously, including information packs and retraction statements, he brought with him relevant experience and was able to support colleagues and provide feedback as the team took on their new roles:

There was a period of a few weeks where I was going out with colleagues (teamed up), and they were asking me 'how did I do with that one?' kind of thing. (Officer 5)

Towards the beginning of the pilot (February 2023), a 'Diogel Team Induction Day with Partner Agencies' with key contacts from partner agencies involved in supporting domestic abuse victims was held. Attendees included RISE (Cardiff Women's Aid), Vale Domestic Abuse Services, DRIVE and

BAWSO. As well as facilitating introductions between the new team and the relevant agencies, it was hoped that the meeting would lead to closer working and regular joint multi-agency visits, as well as better awareness of the support partner agencies could offer victims. This is discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.

1.2 From virtual plans to in-person meetings

Initial plans had been proposed to explore using Microsoft Teams to connect specialist officers with victims, but this shifted early on in the pilot because virtual meeting were seen to be too impractical. Some members of the team said they had initially been unaware of the plans to use the technology, though many had since asked victims for their views on the idea of using a video call in this context. Reasons they argued this would not work included access to technology and preference for in-person contact. For example:

Quite a few of the people that I've dealt with just have burner phones, so they don't have any internet connection. I think some people found [the video call] intrusive. That's not how it was intended, but I can sort of see what they meant. (Officer 2)

The overwhelming response I get is that it's impersonal. People want to sit down with somebody face-to-face and have that discussion. (Officer 1)

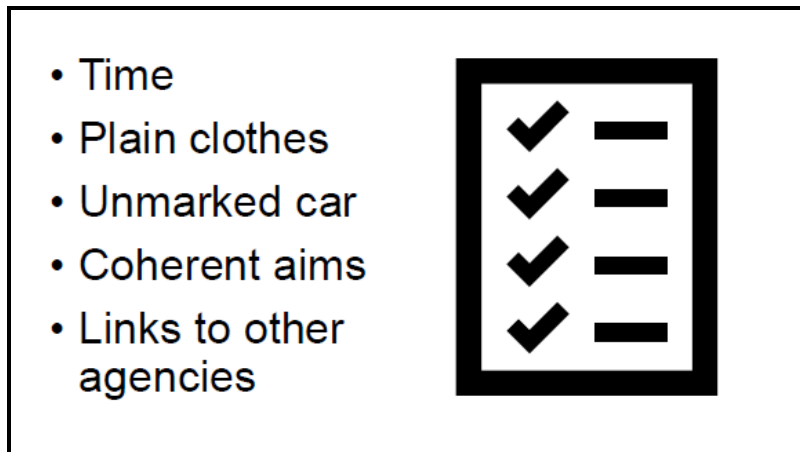
Yet, one of the ongoing practical challenges facing the team as they travelled to meet victims face-to-face was limited vehicle access. During the evaluation period, the team's dedicated (unmarked) vehicle was taken away after the lease agreement expired, leaving them with no guaranteed access to a car. With victims spread across Cardiff and Vale BCU, the Op Diogel team have had to find and borrow cars from other departments in order to continue their work.

1.3 Key ingredients of the approach

While the overall aims of the intervention were guided by those outlined in the original proposal, the team's specific ways of working were established through the process of implementation. Despite challenges towards the beginning of the pilot, outlined above and discussed further in later sections of this report, several key ingredients of the new approach can be identified (see Figure 1, next page), and are summarised here:

- **Time:** With the focus on specific kinds of DA cases, the team had more time to spend with victims without getting called away to other incidents.
- **Plain clothes and an unmarked car:** Officers on the team dressed in plain clothes and travelled to visit victims in an unmarked car, distinguishing them from response officers. This was something the Op Diogel team felt positively impacted victims' willingness to engage with them, particularly given it made police involvement less overtly obvious to neighbours.
- **Coherent aims:** Establishing a set of coherent, actionable aims shared by all involved in delivering the intervention supported both delivery and implementation.
- **Links to other agencies:** Better awareness of and direct links to partner agencies assisted officers in supporting and safeguarding victims, and there were numerous examples of joint working during the pilot.

Figure 1. Key ingredients of the Op Diogel approach.



Further evidence of these aspects will be highlighted in various places throughout the report.

2. Impact of the Op Diogel approach

This section answers the question “What did the Op Diogel team achieve in terms of victim experiences, safeguarding and criminal justice outcomes?”

2.1 Quantitative overview of Op Diogel cases

Table 1 shows the occurrences referred to the Op Diogel team during the evaluation period (Feb-Aug 2023).

Table 1. Op Diogel Workload	
N=405 Occurrences	
Date reported	Referred by
n=34 Jan	n=332 Hub
n=60 Feb	n=49 Other
n=66 Mar	n=24 Not recorded
n=49 Apr	
n=48 May	Investigative response
n=58 Jun	n=206 Solo
n=46 Jul	n=157 Duo
n=33 Aug	n=42 Not recorded
n=9 Sep	
n=2 Other	Contact method
	n=177 Face-to-Face
Offence type	n=109 Telephone
n=164 Violence with injury	n=9 Both
n=153 Violence without injury	n=110 Not recorded
n=36 Stalking & Harassment	
n=19 Criminal damage	Time spent (minutes)
n=17 Coercive control	Mean 45
n=14 Other	Range 5-720
n=2 Rape	N=182 Not recorded

Overall, 405 unique domestic abuse occurrences were received, averaging approximately 50 referrals per month, until the data were passed to us for analysis during the first week of September. Most of these were referred by the Hub and were then assigned by the Op Diogel Sergeant to an investigator in the team to make contact with the victim. Contact was primarily initiated face-to-face, with either one or two investigators attending the victim’s home address. This was deemed to be the preferred method for engaging with victims; however, when this was not possible or if the victim preferred contact via telephone (e.g., because they were at work) this was provided. On average, contact between the victim and investigator lasted around 45 minutes, but it should also be noted that this information was not recorded for a large number of cases. When there was no contact this was due to victim preference or inability of the team to make contact despite repeated efforts.

Within this sample of occurrences, there were 387 unique victims (see Table 2). Thirteen victims had more than one occurrence (i.e., they were repeat victims during the evaluation time period). Most of these had two occurrences, but two victims had three occurrences each.

Table 2. Victim Overview	
N=387 Victims	
Repeat victims	Gender
[11 with 2 occurrences]	n=331 Female
[2 with 3 occurrences]	n=56 Male
Previous occurrences	Ethnicity
Total number (any type)	n=226 White
Mean=13, Range 1-134	n=10 Black
Total number (DA)	n=6 Asian
Mean=5, Range 0-44	n=145 Not recorded
Risk Level	Age at report
n=193 High	n=17 18 and under
n=158 Medium	n=56 19-25
n=29 Standard	n=129 26-35
n=25 Not determined	n=92 36-45
	n=51 46-55
Warning markers	n=26 56-65
Mean=3, Range 0-11	n=9 66 and over
	n=7 Not recorded
Supportive prior to Op Diogel contact	
n=365 No	
n=40 Yes	

The overwhelming majority of victims can be described as white women who were younger than 45 years old at the time of the occurrence. They tended to have significant prior histories of police contact in general as well as for domestic abuse specifically. For example, on average they had thirteen prior occurrences of any type, with domestic abuse-related incidents accounting for five of these. The ‘top twenty’ victims had histories totalling nearly 1000 prior occurrences with SWP, half of which were DA-related.

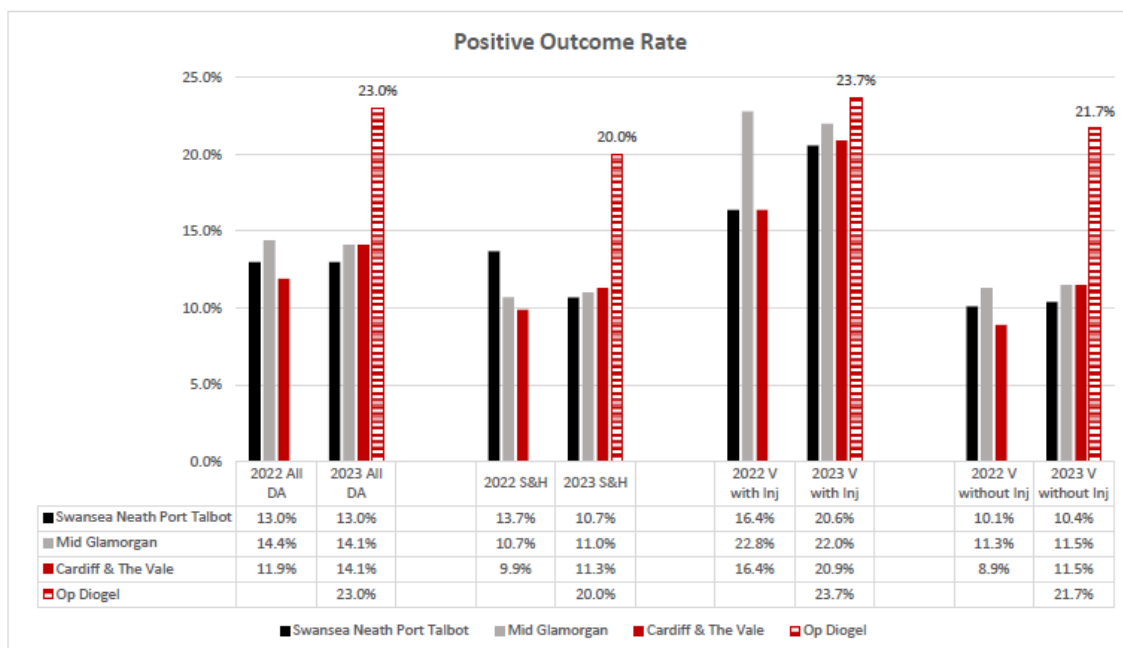
Recall from section 1.1.1 that the use of referral criteria resulted in the team handling a specific type of DA case (rather than DA cases in general) – those where the victims are reluctant to engage and the perpetrators are in custody. Thus, it is not the case that the team worked ‘selectively’ with certain victims (white women less than 45 years old) but rather that this is the typical profile of those DA victims in Cardiff BCU who meet the referral criteria. As can be seen in Table 2, the team also handled cases involving men, BME victims, and older victims.

In addition to their significant histories of police contact, most victims in this sample were flagged with at least one ‘warning marker’ and on average they had three each. Warning markers indicate to police issues they should be aware of prior to attending the incident, such as a history of using violence, mental health problems, suicidality or self-harming behaviour, substance misuse, etc. Such issues were prevalent in this sample. For example, 30% of victims in this sample had a warning marker for violence, 36.5% for mental health/suicidality, and 20% for substance misuse. Furthermore, the majority of victims referred to Op Diogel had been assessed as medium or high risk of experiencing further violence or abuse. Bearing in mind that the overwhelming majority (90%) of victims in this sample were not supportive of engaging with police prior to Op Diogel contact, it is clear the team were tasked with responding to a very challenging cohort.

2.2 Criminal justice outcomes achieved by Op Diogel

Figure 2 includes temporal and geographic comparisons revealing that a significantly higher proportion of cases dealt with by Op Diogel resulted in positive outcomes. This is true in comparison to other BCUs within the South Wales Police force area as well as in the same area in the previous year. Specifically, the positive outcome rate during the period for all DA-related crimes was 23% (85 of 369 cases finalised) for Op Diogel compared to less than 15% in the other areas. These figures include the entire category of positive outcomes, but primarily these were charges/summons and cautions (as shown in Figure 2). This is a noteworthy achievement, especially given that the vast majority of cases referred to the Op Diogel team were for challenging cases involving victims unsupportive of proceeding (whereas this specific group would comprise a smaller proportion of the total number in other areas – in other words, even if the positive outcome rate was identical, it would still represent improvement over ‘business as usual’ given the team’s more challenging caseload).

Figure 2. Positive criminal justice outcomes achieved by Operation Diogel.



Also noticeable in Figure 2 is that the difference between the Op Diogel results and other BCUs is greater for those categories of DA-related crimes that are traditionally more difficult for police to effectively deal with, such as course of conduct offences (e.g., stalking and harassment) and what are often described as ‘low-level’ offences (e.g., violence without injury). Not only are these offences less straightforward for officers to identify, evidence and respond to compared with injurious violence, but victims (and witnesses) can be uncertain as to whether a police/criminal justice response represents the most appropriate type of resolution, prompting evidential difficulties.

2.3 Factors associated with achieving positive outcomes

Figure 3 provides more detailed information about the crimes dealt with by the Op Diogel team and their resulting outcomes (crime disposal codes), taking into consideration victim characteristics such as their history of police contact due to DA, warning markers and risk level. The boxes outlined in red show that 64 cases resulted in a charge/summons and the majority of these outcomes were achieved in cases where the victim was initially unsupportive (49 of 64), in addition to which, a significant proportion had 10 or more previous occurrences for DA (18 of 49), 6 or more warning markers (24 of 49) and had been classified as high risk (33 of 49). In contrast, those 18 cases resulting in a caution were characterised as having a less challenging victim profile (e.g., most had 0-2 previous DA occurrences, 0-2 warning markers, and were classed as medium risk), although all were initially unsupportive. Looking at cases where there were evidential difficulties (i.e., no positive outcome achieved), which was the most likely outcome for this sample (and most likely outcome for DA in general across SWP and all other forces), again it is apparent that the victim profile is less challenging. Overall, results point to the Op Diogel team achieving success (defined here the preferred positive outcome of charges/summons) in those very cases that would be classed as least likely to succeed. And regardless of victim characteristics, these cases progressed to charge despite most victims being reluctant to proceed prior to Op Diogel contact.

Figure 3. Outcome type by crime type and victim characteristics.

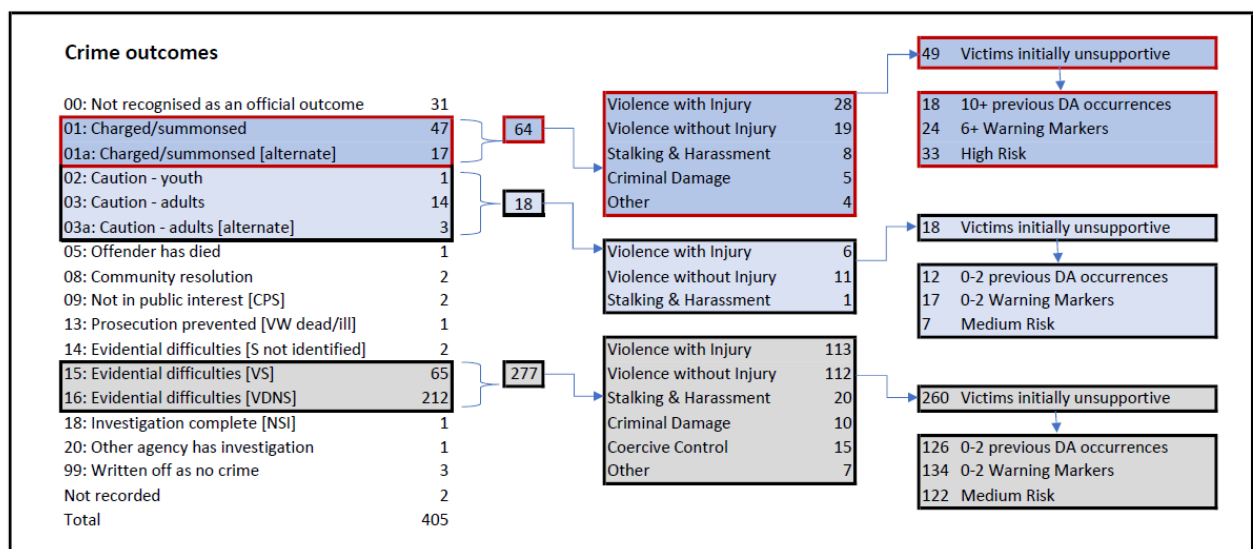
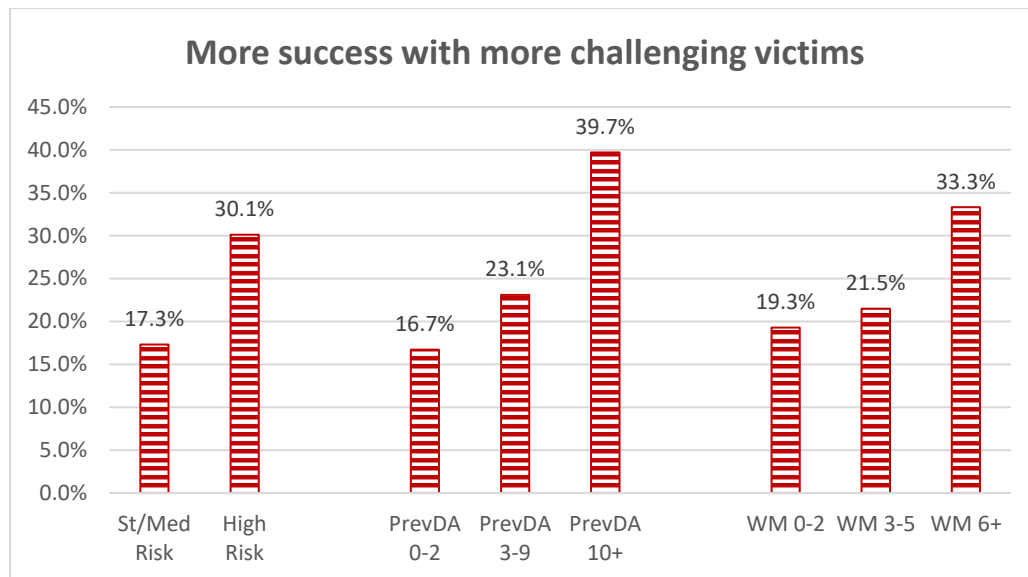


Figure 4 provides another glimpse into these patterns of relationships between positive outcomes and three victim characteristics indicative of complex cases. High risk victims were more likely to have a positive outcome than those classified as standard or medium risk: 52 of 173 or 30.1% (chi-sq.=5.97, df(1), p=.017).¹ Victims with 10 or more prior DA-related occurrences were more likely to have positive outcomes than those with less prior police recorded DA: 23 of 58 or 39.7% (chi-sq.=12.81, df(2), p=.002). Victims with 6 or more warning markers were more likely to have positive outcomes than those with fewer warning markers: 27 of 81 or 33.3% (chi-sq.=6.39, df(2), p=.041).

Figure 4. Victim characteristics associated with achieving positive outcomes.

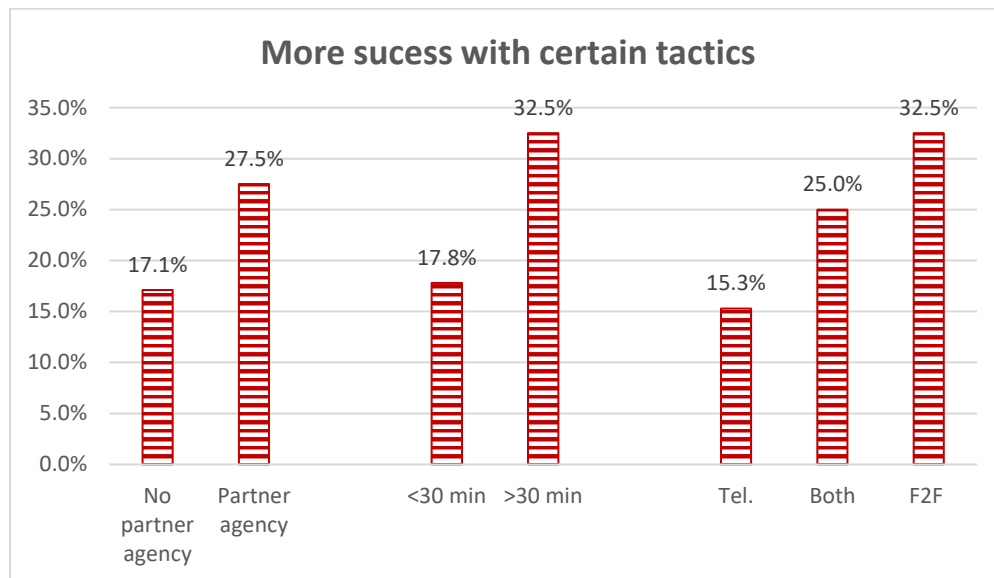


Looking at these three measures *combined* reinforces the point: more positive outcomes were achieved for high-risk victims who *also* had 10+ prev DA occurrences *and* 6+ warning markers (41.4% compared to 21.5% of Op Diogel victims who did not meet all three criteria (chi-sq=5.97, df(1), p=.017). Bearing in mind these victims were also unsupportive at time of first contact, this is a noteworthy achievement.

¹ A p-value of less than 0.05 implies significance and that of less than 0.01 implies high significance. A nonsignificant p-value means that there is no meaningful difference between groups.

Figure 5 reveals how certain tactics increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. Victims who received support from a partner agency (chi-sq.=2.24, df(1), p=.135), who had interactions with Op Diogel investigators lasting more than 30 minutes (chi-sq.=4.16, df(1), p=.041) and who accepted face-to-face contact (chi-sq.=9.35, df(2), p=.009) were more likely to have a positive outcome for their case.

Figure 5. Tactics associated with achieving positive outcomes.



2.4 Victim perspectives on their contact with Op Diogel

A key lens to apply when evaluating the performance of the Op Diogel team is of course the perceptions of those victims with whom they came into contact. Although this data source is valuable for enabling victims an opportunity to provide both positive and negative feedback about their contact with police, it should be noted that low response rate means results are not necessarily generalisable and should be treated with caution.²

A comparison between the Op Diogel victims who did take part in the survey versus those who did not revealed no statistical differences according to gender, ethnicity, age, previous experiences of DA or whether their case resulted in a positive outcome. However, victims in the Insights data were less likely to be classified as high risk and had fewer warning markers, on average.

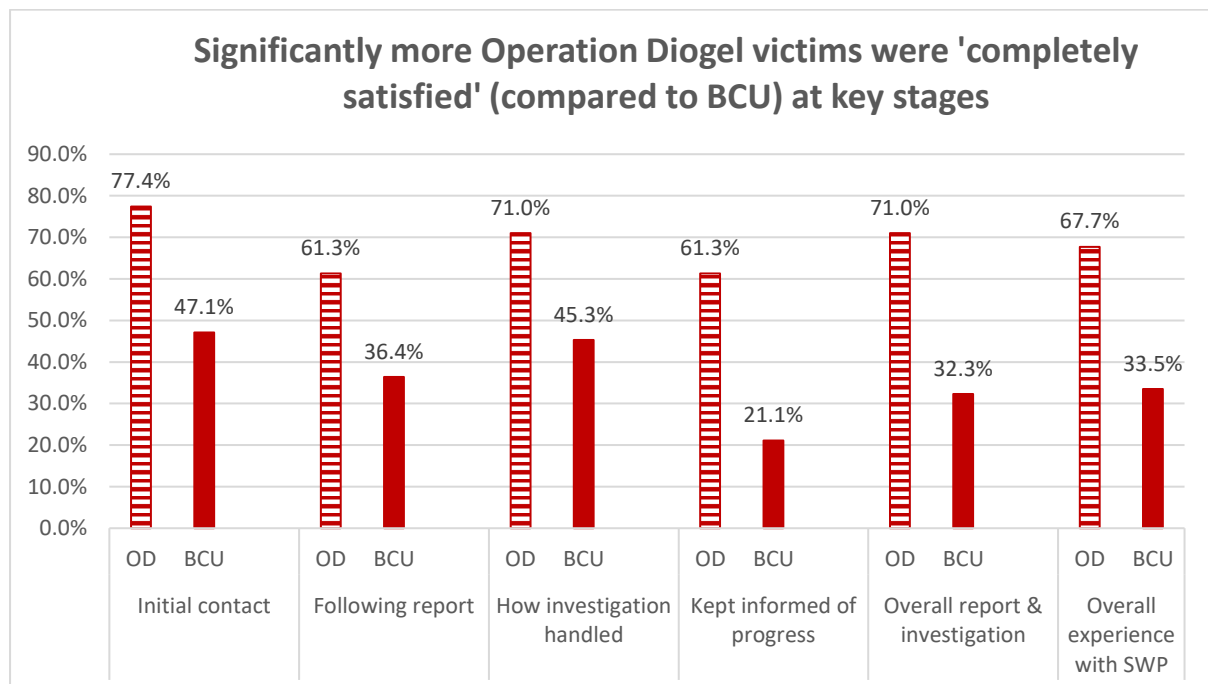
Victims responding to the Insights survey were asked for their level of satisfaction about key stages of the police process. A 7-point Likert scale of response options was available: completely satisfied, very

² The Insights team received 404 occurrences linked to the Op Diogel team. After removing duplicates along with any victims under the age of 18, the sample was reduced to 357. A further 21 cases were removed due to critical risk markers, following a risk assessment process that is undertaken to ensure the Insights survey recruitment adheres to the national standard. Following this, only 144 were deemed suitable for contact, with the others removed from consideration due to the lack of a safe time and safe contact number being added to the PPN (required by the national standard for DV surveys). The typical response rate for Insights surveys is about 1/3 of those contacted taking part (31 of 144 = 21.5% for Op Diogel, which is lower than expected).

satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, completely dissatisfied. For the purposes of this research, we focussed exclusively on 'completely satisfied' as the least ambiguous option available to express being satisfied (rather than, for example, combining all of the satisfied options together). This provides more transparent results as the analysis does not combine victims who are entirely satisfied with those who have provided a more 'lukewarm' response.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of victims who were 'completely satisfied' at each stage of the process, with different columns indicating whether their case had been handled by the Operation Diogel team or as 'business as usual' by other police officers within Cardiff & Vale BCU.

Figure 6. Victim satisfaction with Op Diogel compared to the BCU.



The pattern of results clearly shows that those receiving support from the Op Diogel team were significantly more satisfied, at every stage of the process: the way in which their initial report to the police was dealt with (chi-sq.=14.73, df(8), p=.065); the actions taken by the police following their report (chi-sq.=17.34, df(7), p=.015); the way they were treated by the police officers and staff who dealt with the investigation (chi-sq.=16.29, df(8), p=.038); the way they have been kept informed of the progress of the case (chi-sq.=27.16, df(8), p<.001); the way they were treated by the police officers and staff who were involved overall with the report and investigation (chi-sq.=23.21, df(8), p=.003); and their overall experience with the service provided by the South Wales Police in this case (chi-sq.=16.52, df(8), p=.035).

For victims of crime and domestic abuse victims specifically a key underlying factor for their (dis)satisfaction with the police response is the extent to which they feel they have been kept up-to-date about the status of their case. Figure 7 shows that a significantly higher proportion of victims who had their cases handled by the Op Diogel team felt well informed compared to their counterparts receiving ‘business as usual’ elsewhere in the BCU. Specifically, more Op Diogel victims answered affirmatively when asked whether officers “Kept you up-to-date as agreed” (chi-sq.=20.27, df(3), p<.001); “Updated you throughout the investigation” (chi-sq.=14.55, df(3), p=.002); “Updated you at key stages (e.g. arrest of bail)” (chi-sq.=22.90, df(3), p<.001); and “Told you the final result of the investigation” (chi-sq.=25.94, df(3), p<.001).

Figure 7. Victims kept informed by Op Diogel compared to the BCU.

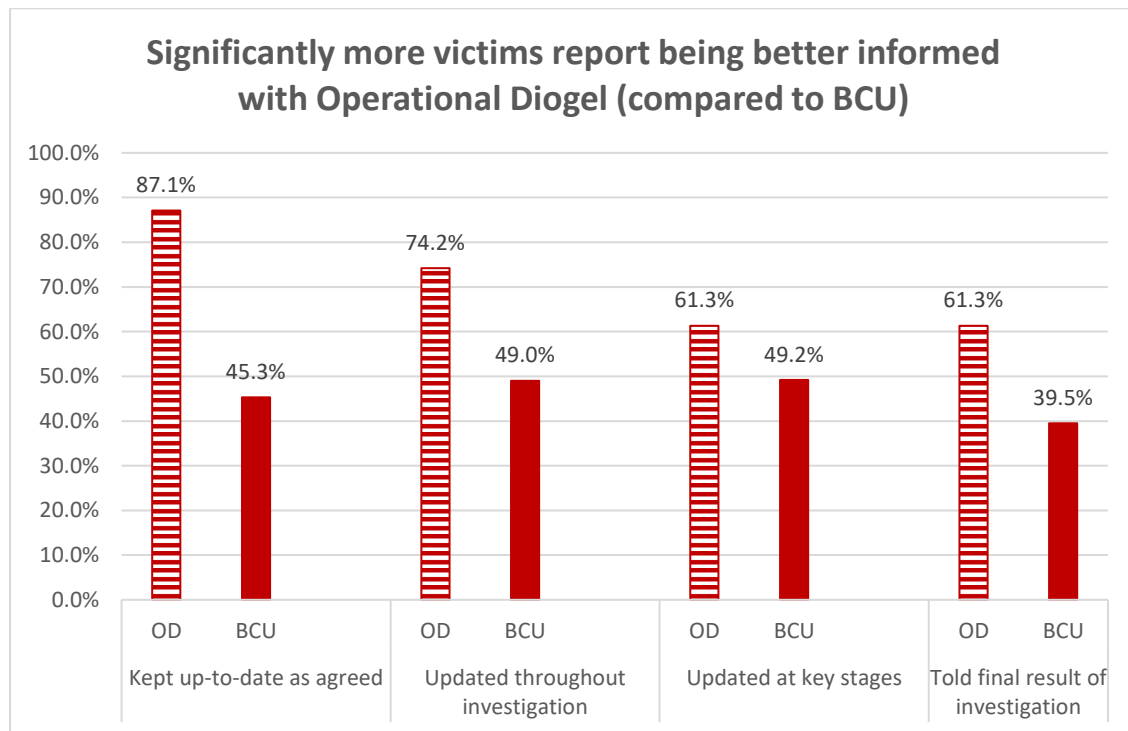
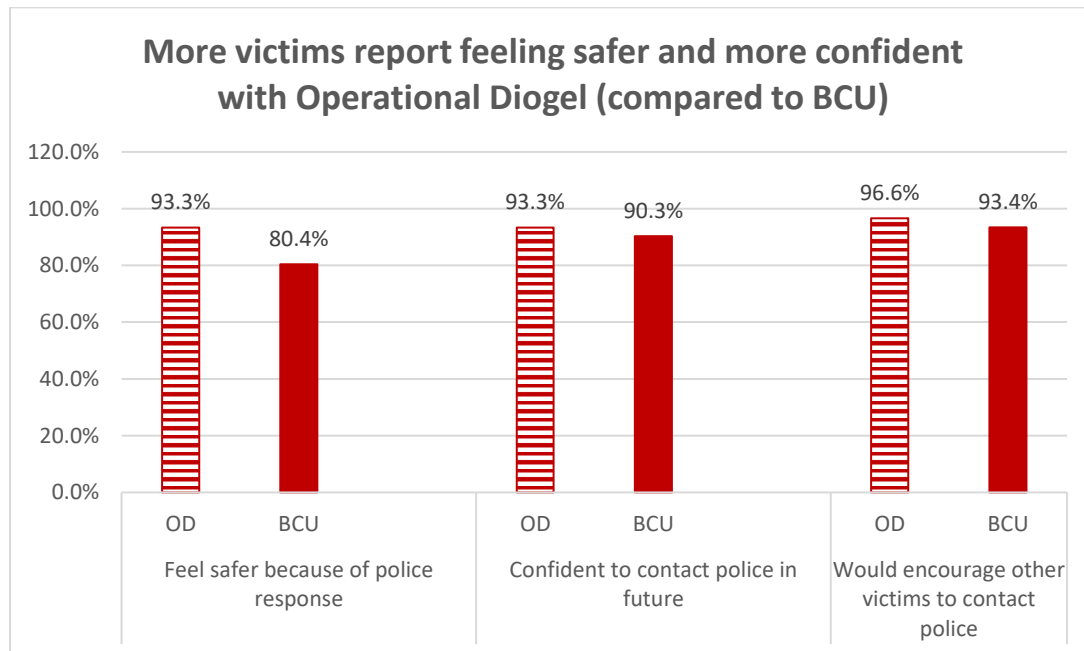


Figure 8 does not reveal significant differences between Op Diogel victims compared to other victims, but it does reinforce the encouraging findings discussed thus far. In particular, when victims were asked “Did you feel safer because of the police response you received?” a higher proportion of Op Diogel victims responded in the affirmative (93.3% compared to 80.4%). They were also more likely to feel confident in contacting police in the future and would encourage other victims to contact police, although these differences were marginal.

Figure 8. Victims’ perceptions of safety and confidence for Op Diogel compared to the BCU.



2.5 Op Diogel case studies

Drawing together the quantitative case file information, occurrence data and Insights data, we provide the case studies below as illustrations of the complexity of determining ‘success’. Triangulating these data sources reveals that ‘positive outcomes’ go beyond crime disposal codes (e.g., charge vs evidential difficulties). Victims may not have a ‘positive’ CJS outcome but can still feel positive about their experiences with the Op Diogel team, as well as report satisfaction with the safeguarding and support they received from partner agencies.

Connie (pseudonym)	11/03/2023
Victim description	48-year-old white female Warning markers: Ailment, BOLO, Domestic abuse victim, Drugs, MoPI Review, Self harm, Subject to MARAC, Violent, Weapons. PPN Risk: High
Offence description	Assault with injury
Op Diogel description and actions	Visited by two officers (male and female) in-person. The team offered support but Connie declined and did not want to give a statement. She

	stated this happens all the time and it was a silly argument, saying they would be best friends again tomorrow and did not wish for suspect to be prosecuted.
Insights data	Connie's son made the initial call and her main concern was to have the suspect removed from her property. Although she did not wish to support prosecution, she was satisfied with her experience overall, feeling she was understood and treated fairly. Connie said she would report an incident to the police again and encourage others to do the same.
Outcome	15. Evidential difficulties (VS)

Samantha (pseudonym)	29/03/2023
Victim description	35-year-old white (mixed) female Warning markers: Domestic abuse victim PPN Risk: Medium
Offence description	Assault with injury
Op Diogel description and actions	Visited by two officers (male) in-person for 1.5 hours. Samantha was wavering in her support for prosecution and wished to retract her statement but changed her mind after speaking to Op Diogel officers. They spoke with her at length about the process, the ultimate benefit of a restraining order and the support available, providing her with a DV information pack and contacting a support agency (the agency were unavailable for a joint visit on the day). Samantha later withdrew her statement in June (according to the log, she stated she had made the allegations up).
Insights data	Overall, Samantha was satisfied with her experience with the police, and felt the officers were very caring and concerned for her wellbeing when she reported it. In the victim survey, Samantha said she withdrew her statement because she felt scared, lots of pressure, and did not want to attend court, but still said she would report an incident to the police again and encourage others to do the same.
Outcome	16. Evidential difficulties (VDNS)

Tracey (pseudonym)	18/08/2023
Victim description	46-year-old white female Warning markers: Domestic abuse victim PPN Risk: High
Offence description	Controlling and coercive behaviour
Op Diogel description and actions	Visited by one officer (male) in-person for 7 hours. Tracey had had no prior contact with the police but gave a lengthy statement about her experience during the visit from the Op Diogel officer. She declined a joint multi-agency visit but has agreed for her details to be shared with a partner agency.
Insights data	Tracey originally reported the offences via an online form and was pleased with how quickly this was followed up. The case is still ongoing, and Tracey reported some issues in getting evidence to the interviewing officer and not being told the suspect's bail conditions were being dropped. However, she was still satisfied with her experience overall,

	would report to the police again and would encourage others to do the same.
Outcome	00: Not recognised as an official outcome

Louise (pseudonym)	23/06/2023
Victim description	33-year-old white female Warning markers: Ailment, Domestic abuse victim, Self harm, Subject to MARAC PPN Risk: High
Offence description	Controlling and coercive behaviour
Op Diogel description and actions	Spoken to via telephone by one officer (male) for 20 minutes. The officer spoke with Louise at length about her initial disclosure to officers, her subsequent decision to provide a statement, and her later change of heart. Louise still did not want to provide a statement as she was concerned about the impact the case could have upon their children should the suspect be sent to prison, and that he could lose the house as a result. Louise declined a joint visit as she was already engaged with the support agency.
Additional information from Partner Agency	Louise initially withdrew from any specialist domestic abuse support but has now accepted support through [the agency's] wellbeing service and is accessing groupwork and counselling. Louise's alleged perpetrator is also looking to access support for his behaviour via the CLEAR programme. Although this is in part due to the involvement from Children's Services, it may still be a positive move forward for her.
Insights data	Louise was completely satisfied with her whole experience, stating that she felt listened to and was treated fairly. She also felt officers were professional and reported being kept updated throughout her case. Louise would be confident reporting an incident to the police in future and would encourage others to do the same.
Outcome	16. Evidential difficulties (VDNS)

Julie (pseudonym)	16/05/2023
Victim description	75-year-old white female Warning markers: Domestic abuse victim, Subject to MARAC PPN Risk: High
Offence description	Assault with injury
Op Diogel description and actions	Visited by two officers (male and female) in-person for 1 hour. Julie wanted her son to get help with his mental health, stating that he is autistic and has been through a number of traumas over the past few years. This negatively affected him and caused him to lash out, but Julie felt she was the only person who could look after him. Julie refused a joint visit with a partner agency.
Insights data	Overall, Julie was satisfied with her experience with the police. She felt strongly that she did not want her son arrested initially, but was satisfied with the rest of her experience. Julie would be confident to report to the police again in future, and encourage others to do the same.
Outcome	16. Evidential difficulties (VDNS)

Rachel (pseudonym)	13/03/2023
Victim description	37-year-old white female Warning markers: Domestic abuse victim, Information sharing, Not identical to PPN Risk: Medium
Offence description	Malicious Communications
Op Diogel description and actions	In contact with one officer (male) via the telephone and in-person for a total of 2 hours. After initially providing a statement about the case, Rachel wanted to retract, but the officer persuaded her to continue her support. She did not want the suspect to go to prison due to the impact it might have on their daughter, so the officer took a further statement from her to reflect her wishes and reasons. The suspect later pled guilty at court.
Insights data	Rachel said she was completely satisfied with every aspect of her experience and reported that she felt confident about contacting the police about incidents in future and would encourage others to do the same.
Outcome	01a: Charged/summonsed [alternate]

Further illustrating the complexity of implementation is the case below, which indicates a particularly negative victim experience in the early days of the pilot. As the team was in its infancy at the time of this occurrence, one interpretation could be that the officer was new in role and perhaps did not have the skills necessary to produce a positive interaction with the victim. However, further analyses of the Insights data revealed that 12 other victims responding to the Insights survey were also dealt with by this same investigator, and their evaluations were wholly positive (bar one, who reported being dissatisfied with all stages of the process). This case study highlights the challenge of ‘getting it right’ for every victim, every time.

Claire (pseudonym)	26/02/2023
Victim description	37-year-old white female Warning markers: Domestic abuse victim, Subject to MARAC PPN Risk: High
Offence description	Assault without injury
Op Diogel description and actions	Visited by one officer (male) in-person. The officer took a negative statement. Claire did not want to attend court, did not want the suspect to lose his job, and did not want her children to grow up without their father, though she intended to separate.
Insights data	Although Claire was very satisfied with the initial response, she described her contact with Op Diogel as taking place early in the morning ‘when I’d had no sleep’ and being both ‘intimidating and pressurising’. She recalled calling the police ‘in the heat of the moment’ but she did not want to press any charges. Claire also felt like she wasn’t told what was going on, but that her neighbours knew as a result of the house-to-house enquiries, and because her husband wasn’t allowed home. She also described a ‘nightmare’ with social services, and being scared her children would be removed. Claire was dissatisfied with her experience.

	She said she would not report to the police again and would not advise anyone else to do so.
Outcome	16. Evidential difficulties (VDNS)

3. Perspectives on the Op Diogel approach

This section answers the question “What are the benefits and limitations of the new approach from the perspective of those delivering it and staff in partner agencies?” In other words, *how* did the team achieve the outcomes noted in the quantitative findings?

3.1 Practice: working with victims

Officers reflected on their practice and how they approached their work with victims. This included what they set out to achieve in their role, as well as their ‘tradecraft’ when interacting with victims, from how they initiated contact, to the methods and techniques they used in trying to engage victims with the prosecution process and safeguarding support.

3.1.1 Objectives

There was consensus across the interviews that getting victims on board with prosecution by providing a statement was a key priority for Op Diogel, with this seen as significant in ‘breaking the cycle’ of domestic abuse. However, officers also described the enhanced safeguarding and support they sought to provide. Several suggested that although ‘safeguarding’ may be challenging to capture in the traditional sense of recorded crime outcomes, the potential benefits to victims are significant, particularly given the difficulty of engaging some of the highest risk repeat victims. For example:

You know, such as yesterday, with a refuge, it may not measure as a positive stat that we've got that victim on board, but we've certainly carried out safeguarding and got that victim that support. (Officer 1)

Victims’ willingness to engage with the team was seen as part of the wider safeguarding process, and something one officer described as a sign that victims “*could trust me*” (Officer 2). More generally, the team also felt their approach led to openness from victims:

We speak to the victims, try to give them as much support as we can, find out what what's going on in their lives. Often we're there for ages because they don't want to talk about just that incident. They've never had the opportunity to talk to anyone, so we hear everything. (Officer 3)

As the team had more time (compared to response officers) to engage more closely with victims, they were able to gather additional information about the abuse victims experienced. Sometimes years of abuse were discussed, leading to additional offences being disclosed in some cases. Furthermore, depending on the information being provided to the team, it was also possible to better inform the bail conditions being set up by the Hub to protect victims, broadening restrictions to include places such as work and children’s schools.

3.1.2 Tradecraft and 'reading readiness'

Once cases had been referred to the Op Diogel team and allocated to the officers on shift (with repeat victims contacted by the same officers, where possible), in-person visits to victims were the next step. Although this research could not systematically quantify the relationship between the timeliness of the response and victims' willingness to engage, given the quantitative data does not include time elapsed between original police response and Op Diogel follow-up, officers did feel that timely engagement with victims was important. The team recognised that their ability to focus solely on the victim, rather than other investigation-related duties, such as interviewing suspects and gathering evidence from other witnesses and/or CCTV. In turn, facilitated timelier contact and follow-ups with victims. Note that victim feedback (from the Insights survey) confirmed the value that they placed on being kept informed and up-to-date about the progress of the investigation. Officers often called ahead to let them know they would be attending their address, though this was not always the case and arriving unannounced was sometimes seen as best. One of the reasons for this was saving time when pressed by the PACE 'clock'. Another reason was to prevent victims from disengaging, which sometimes happened when victims got a call and quickly assumed officers would arrive in uniform and a marked car.

After arriving and introducing themselves as members of a specialist domestic violence team, several officers summarised their next step with victims simply as talking with them. Differentiating themselves from traditional response officers, the team were clear that the additional time changed the way they were able to approach victims. This also included asking open-ended questions to facilitate victims providing fuller descriptions of their experiences: *"Rather than be very specific, I leave it a lot more open and ask 'Okay, last night looked like absolute chaos on the officer's body worn, I had a look this morning. What on earth happened?'"* (Officer 2).

Officers also reflected on their specific techniques for changing victims' minds about supporting prosecution. One specific example was providing an outsider's perspective:

You need to simplify it. You need to break it down and explain it from a perspective that maybe they're not aware of. It is about saying 'this is my perspective, and I know it's my perspective, not your perspective, you're the one who's in a relationship, but this is what it looks like [to me]. How does that make you feel?' (Officer 5)

Reflecting on this more generally, Officer 5 identified the ability to understand, empathise and listen to people as essential, but not skills that every police officer has. As another put it, officers that were *"committed to helping people"* (Officer 6) were essential for the team.

However, there was also recognition by multiple officers that, in some cases, victims may simply not be ready to engage with the police and to pursue a prosecution. This suggests an awareness of the 'victim journey' in domestic abuse and violence cases, and the subjective nature of an individual victim's 'readiness for change'. Two officers spoke about this issue explicitly, with one summarising:

We are ultimately there to serve the public and to help you when you need it, but it just may not come at the time where you want to receive the help. (Officer 2)

Accounting for this in more depth, another officer described the need to recognise where victims are in their journey, explaining that an ability to 'read readiness' is required by this specialist officer role:

We have to understand that some people are not ready to tell us. If you go to an address, spend five minutes with the person and they turn around and say 'no, I'm not helping', versus you go to another address, spend an hour with a person, explain everything, what's available

to them, what the possible outcomes are and then they say 'no, don't do anything', you know in that second case they're making an informed decision. They've got all the information. I think it is just a case of reading readiness, and we have to be prepared that people aren't ready sometimes. (Officer 5)

3.2 Collaboration and contact with partner agencies

At the outset of the pilot, engagement with partner agencies was anticipated to be a key aspect of the team's work, and efforts were made to develop closer working relationships, including through the 'Diogel Team Induction Day with Partner Agencies' held in February 2023. As many of the officers had had limited contact with the partner agencies before joining the Op Diogel team, their existing awareness of the agencies and the support on offer for victims had been relatively limited. However, several months into the pilot, a number of officers felt they had a better understanding of the various partner agencies' remits. There was also a sense that when contacting the agencies about/on behalf of specific victims, officers needed "confidence to know what to say to the person on the end of the phone" (Officer 6), which they had since developed over the course of the pilot.

After initial introductions at the 'partner day', there were visits to some agencies in Cardiff & Vale BCU, which helped support the team in understanding the services, as well as meeting those supporting victims. Visits to another agency based in the BCU also took place, but some months later, and towards the end of the period covered by this evaluation. Instances of joint working and practitioners' experiences of communication related to the pilot are detailed below.

3.2.1 Joint working and collaboration

Interviews with officers and partner agencies highlighted a range of multi-agency working, from officers contacting agencies on behalf of victims, to conducting joint in-person visits. At times during the pilot, one suggestion from leadership was that the Op Diogel team should contact partner agencies every morning to arrange joint visits. Yet, with different shift patterns, the need to work to the PACE clock, competing demands, and not knowing how long a visit to a victim could be, this aim was difficult to put into practice on a daily basis. There were a number of instances over the course of the pilot where joint visits were possible, however, and they were widely valued. The examples below are indicative of the benefits:

She was already involved with [partner agency], so she'd already contacted them herself. So we had a joint meeting a week or two later where I took a further statement because she had mentioned stuff about her car being damaged. (Officer 4)

We don't always know what we're going to be faced with when we go out, so it's additional safety for the worker. And it also provides the survivor with two elements of support – (a) you've got the police expertise on criminal prosecutions, as officers are able to explain what can happen with that, and (b) we can set up a date and time for the survivor to meet with the officers in our offices so they can make a statement safely. (Partner Agency 3)

The second example in particular highlights that the benefits of joint visits can also extend to partner agencies, improving the safety of workers. As indicated above, other examples of joint working included police officers using agency space to take victim statements, as well as driving victims to agency offices or refuges, and helping victims to contact agencies. A common thread, echoed by

multiple officers, was the contrast between the (limited) time and flexibility of response officers compared to the new team, and how this enabled safeguarding: :

We persuaded her to have some contact with [partner agency]. We stayed with her for a good few hours and persuaded her to both request and accept a refuge space. Being on response, I wouldn't have had that time to do that. (Officer 1)

Whilst we were there, we got [partner agency] on the phone. [They] had a conversation with her, they discussed refuge with her, which was all very positive. Three hours later, she gave a positive statement and she didn't want to retract, just because she had been given that time and she'd been able to sort things out with [partner agency] to get refuge and stuff. (Officer 5)

Particular praise for the Op Diogel team and their way of working came from one of the partner agencies that had regular contact with the team. This specific agency had provided officers in the team with contact details of individual support workers in the organisation, facilitating direct points of contact and supporting closer working relationships. As well as commending the skill of the officers on the Op Diogel team, the interviewee from the agency identified multiple specific benefits related to having a point of contact in the police:

We can say 'we're gonna ring officers that we work with on a regular basis, arrange for one of them to come up and take your statement,' rather than say 'well, let's just let's ring 101' when you could be on hold, during which time, you've got the anxiety, the frustration that's building within the survivor, because they just want to get [their story] out. (Partner Agency 3)

In one case, there was not much engagement from a client, and part of that was because she was overwhelmed by contact from the police and visits from the police. The support worker was able to liaise directly with the Op Diogel officers around safe contact, giving clients a break first, and taking a little bit of direction from the IDVA to give her some breathing space. That is exactly what the client needed at that time. (Partner Agency 3)

Having worked in the sector for many years, this interviewee had seen many different policing approaches to domestic abuse, and suggested Op Diogel resembled a past way of working that had been lost. This is interesting because as well as pointing to some of the central benefits the approach brings for victims, it indicates a return to a model that is not entirely new, but one that has been missing for some time, despite its effectiveness:

We had the domestic abuse units, and we had named officers that we would go to, to get some advice, some support. It would be the same officers that we would link into for the joint visits, and they really understood the additional dynamics and the nuances when it comes to domestic abuse. So really understanding the reasons behind people that don't want to report, the reasons behind people that make a statement and want to withdraw it later. So, they take a little bit more time to understand those nuances, and will talk more to the survivor, and [the pilot] takes me back to when that was happening. (Partner Agency 3)

In summary, the key benefits noted from the pilot in terms of multi-agency working were 1) better understanding of each agency's remit 2) being able to make contact with an individual practitioner (SPOC) rather than using a 'generic' telephone number to facilitate support for victims 3) greater opportunities for joint visits to victims 4) expanding the 'footprint' of police by using partner

agency's premises (e.g., for taking statements) and likewise expanding the reach of partner agencies (e.g., by police establishing contact directly on their behalf during home visits).

3.2.2 Communication and expectations

Interviews with partner agencies provided further insight into this contact and communication. From these conversations, it became clear that there were different experiences of working with the team in practice, and possibly some different expectations of what the pilot would be doing. With victim support agencies typically relying on information from Public Protection Notices (PPNs) issued by police following domestic abuse/violence calls, usually there is some delay before the PPN is completed and shared. As one agency described:

Our understanding was that it would provide an opportunity for survivors to be contacted at an earlier opportunity. Especially when we're looking at incidents that happen over the weekends, or overnights where you've got perpetrators that are in the cells, and sometimes there can be a day, maybe two days before the PPN is generated, and then that's risk assessed and re-risk assessed and then comes over to us. So, this would give a speedier response time and somebody to link in with when needed. (Partner Agency 3)

The interviewee went on to describe this as having worked very well in practice, echoing some of the case examples discussed in the preceding section. However, another agency described a different experience. Reflecting across the pilot period, they were anticipating a similar benefit to that outlined above in terms of receiving information earlier. After an initial meeting with a member of the Op Diogel team, the expectation was that an officer would contact the agency as soon as they'd spoken to a victim, sharing any information they thought could be of use. Yet, the interviewee did not feel this transpired:

Honestly, communication broke down massively. In March and April, there were a few emails sharing the information. Then I chased it and emails did start up a little bit. But it didn't really take off, shall we say. I expected to have more detail and gain a bit more than what it says on the PPN. (Partner Agency 1)

It is possible that, due to the dynamic and changing nature of the pilot in its early months, there was a lack of clarity in what agencies could expect from the team. Another agency reported similar issues in terms of less communication than expected, though suggesting the nature of it being a pilot may have contributed to this:

I have heard anecdotally that the links, at least to begin, were very fuzzy and nobody quite knew who each other were, which is inevitable, I suppose, in a pilot situation. (Partner Agency 2)

It is also worth noting here the different ways of working across different services, including routes of referral. In some cases, Op Diogel officers had direct contact numbers and emails for partner agency staff, while in other cases, they could only contact agencies using general contact numbers. Participants from both police and partner agencies also noted high demand and staffing changes and shortages, which together with officer shift patterns, may have created additional challenges in communication. Coupled with visits to some agencies happening later in the pilot than others, these factors may have contributed to the differing expectations and experiences for those coming into contact with the pilot. One suggestion was that co-location on one or two particular days of the week

could improve the understanding between agencies and would be “*helpful in establishing those relationships, and those communication lines*” (Partner Agency 4).

3.3 Key benefits of the new approach

Drawing together many of the positives alluded to and discussed throughout this report, this section provides interviewees’ perspectives on the key benefits of Op Diogel for both victims and officers in the team. One central benefit alluded to in several sections of this report is the time officers are able to spend with victims. Behind the quantitative data evidencing the positive impact of increased time on willingness to support prosecution, there are examples such as the following, where an Op Diogel officer was able to take a particularly lengthy statement from a victim:

He took an 18-page statement that took two days to take. He took it for six hours and then went home, then went back to the victim and was there for another six hours. Response physically don't have the time to be able to do that. (Officer 6)

As the interviewee alludes to, unlike response officers, Op Diogel officers are not worrying about being called away. Differences were also highlighted by a partner agency, who shared their frustrations about the difficulty of contacting officers for case updates in the ‘business as usual’ approach, providing insight into the problematic nature of this for victims:

[Victims] ring through for an update, and they can't get any updates or are told to speak to a specific officer. And we as professionals can feel the frustrations with that. So, we can only begin to imagine what that's like for a survivor that is already going through so much, and trauma as well. (Partner Agency 3)

Op Diogel was widely praised for the improvements in communication and opportunity for more time to be spent with victims. One officer explained why time is especially significant in the context of domestic abuse:

Through being able to spend time with people, you get a feel as to the people who genuinely want help, but don't really know how to ask, or are too scared of the implications for their lives going forward. And it's those people that you can get to understand where we're coming from, and that we want to do a lot for them. (Officer 5)

While prosecution is often seen as the best form of safeguarding in terms of preventing repeat victimisation, whether victims are not ready or not willing to engage with this process, safeguarding is still possible. By collaborating with partner agencies and informing victims about the support available to them, officers were also able to support better safeguarding during the pilot, such as helping to arrange refuges spaces (as discussed in Section 3.2.1). The value of this more joined up approach is also reflected in the following case studies, provided by Partner Agency 3:

Case A – *Client has not really engaged this year, has done so sporadically with both our service and the police, despite numerous reports she has remained in the relationship. Diogel were great in insisting to meet with her when she was requesting to withdraw her statement, rather than agreeing initially to take this from her, and in terms of trying to engage her in the CJS process. Although I cannot give a 'success' story, I feel that the chances of the victim engaging with the police process has been maximised, and it remains ultimately client choice.*

Case B – Client was reluctant to provide a statement following an incident; fears and concerns were discussed with client and Op Diogel was explained to her. After discussion, client agreed to speak with officers from Op Diogel and it was arranged for the client to attend the [Agency] office to make a statement. Alleged perpetrator pled guilty and was sentenced in October 2023. It is highly unlikely that the client would have proceeded with making a formal statement if she had not had the prior conversation with the officer from the Op Diogel project.

Statement from a member of the IDVA team – I also feel that the staff on this project have been able to give time to attempting to engage/maintain contact with a victim, which I dare say in other cases previously there may not have been the time to do. It has been helpful to know that there are specific workers that we can contact if there is a lack of engagement/ concern around this, which are by nature often the higher risk cases.

Also emerging during the evaluation were the benefits experienced by officers working on the pilot, with many in the team indicating a sense of satisfaction in their role as they knew they were doing all they could to support and safeguard victims:

It's better to be able to spend that amount of time and still get a 'no' because you're walking away from there knowing that you've given them everything they need, if they are ready the next time. (Officer 5)

Comparisons were also drawn with experiences of working in other teams, as officers reflected on the burnout often felt by those based in the Hub, due to the high demand and turnover of cases. In contrast, there was a more rewarding element to the work of Op Diogel, as officers were able to see their cases progress, build rapport with victims, and help establish safeguarding measures. This shift is especially important in the context of growing absence from work due to psychological ill health, trauma, and stress among those working in policing (Cartwright and Roach, 2021).

Conclusion

Key findings

In contrast with the 'business as usual' approach, the Operation Diogel team based in Cardiff & Vale BCU delivered improved victim satisfaction, safeguarding and criminal justice outcomes:

- Op Diogel were tasked with a more challenging cohort of DA cases to deal with, as the overwhelming majority of victims were unsupportive prior to Op Diogel contact, were on the higher end of the risk spectrum, and had lengthy histories of police contact and prior DA occurrences. They also had multiple warning markers (e.g., mental health, substance misuse, violence, etc.).
- Despite the challenging profile of this cohort, Op Diogel managed to produce a significant increase in the proportion of cases resulting in a positive outcome such as charged/summonsed or cautioned. This was identified through both temporal (previous year) and geographic (different areas) comparisons of force performance data.
- Analyses revealed that positive outcomes were more likely for victims with more challenging profiles (e.g., high risk, 10 or more previous DA occurrences, 6 or more warning markers) and with certain tactics (e.g., support from partner agency, face-to-face contact with Op Diogel which was longer than 30 minutes).
- Insights data demonstrated that victims receiving the Op Diogel approach were significantly more likely to report being 'completely satisfied' at every stage of the police response, from initial report through investigation and case closure, compared to victims receiving the 'business as usual' approach.

According to the practitioners (police and partner agencies) involved in delivering the new approach, it yielded clear benefits:

- Time to focus their attention on DA cases, and specifically on those victims whose cases would likely have been 'lost' through the 'business as usual' approach.
- Developing the craft skills of individual investigators through joint attendances, sharing expertise, and working as a team with continuity of leadership provided via the Sergeant.
- Opportunity to offer a more flexible process to suit the victim's individual needs, through understanding their circumstances, keeping in contact, and liaising with partner agencies.
- An agreed aim to try to reduce the number of cases that result in 'no further action', but with an acknowledgement that this was ultimately the victim's choice and a shared understanding that measures of 'success' extend beyond crime disposal codes.
- Implementation of a coherent set of day-to-day methods of working to enable timely in-person contact with victims to facilitate their understanding and engagement with police and partner agencies, regardless of whether they ultimately pursued a prosecution.
- Better communication with partner agencies, through newly established working relationships, enabling problem-solving and joint working to increase the number of victims accessing support.

Discussion

HMICFRS recently characterised the national policing context in relation to VAWG offences, including domestic abuse, as a matter for ‘grave concern’ given the high proportion of cases that result in ‘no further action’ by police and the sparse and variable provision of specialist units in place to effectively investigate these crimes. The South Wales Police attempted to rectify some of the problems identified in their ‘business as usual’ approach by implementing Operation Diogel. The team’s predominant focus on reluctant victims brings into sharp relief the many challenges, as well as the opportunities, for making a positive difference in these cases.

As HMICFRS (2021) noted, “The help that victims need may depend on their feelings about supporting prosecution. Victims who don’t support police action from the start may have different needs to those who withdraw at a later stage. Equally, *victims who indicate a lack of support from the outset may change their minds if they then receive support that is targeted to their specific circumstances.* [emphasis added]” As a specialist team, Operation Diogel had the time and expertise necessary to make significant headway in those cases where victims indicated at the outset they did not want to support the case. By making timely, in-person contact, in plainclothes and an unmarked car, offering information and reassurance, they were able to shift many of these cases from the category of ‘no further action’ into the ‘positive outcome’ category. Although we could not assess the longer-term outcomes for these victims and their families in the current study, what is certain is that they received attention from specialist officers, which would not have been available to them under the ‘business as usual’ approach. Instead, the most likely outcome for unsupportive victims is that their cases are closed with ‘no further action’ taken. For these victims, their understanding of and engagement with the police response is almost entirely based upon their interactions with control room staff and response officers; neither of which are acknowledged as policing roles that typically allow the fostering or utilisation of expertise in relation to DA cases. Furthermore, for these victims, accessing support from partner agencies must largely rely upon their own wherewithal and ability to utilise any information (e.g., phone number or pamphlet) provided by the response officer to proactively make contact with support agencies themselves at some later point. This is a ‘big ask’ to make of a) victims of domestic abuse who b) are already reluctant to engage and c) are more likely than not to have an especially challenging and multifaceted profile indicating complex needs.

However, it is important to bear in mind that positive metrics for police should not be assumed to equate to the type of success that will matter most to an individual victim. In other words, it cannot be assumed that cases resulting in ‘no further action’ are policing failures resulting in dissatisfied victims. Likewise, cases resulting in ‘positive outcomes’ may not necessarily translate into improved victim experiences in terms of satisfaction, safety and/or safeguarding. Caution is therefore warranted when discussing ‘positive outcomes’ for domestic abuse cases. The importance of this point is made clear by the Insights survey data. For example, of the victims who reported being ‘completely satisfied’ with the way they were treated by officers who dealt with their investigation (21 of 31 respondents), only 5 of these had a positive criminal justice outcome (e.g., a charge/summons or caution made in their case), whereas 16 did not. A common comment as to what stood out for them about the way officers treated them was *‘they listened to my concerns regarding this incident and treated me fairly’, ‘they listened to what I wanted’, ‘they were very professional with the way they dealt with the whole incident’*. Comments such as these align to the concept of procedural justice (i.e., that arising from the process itself as distinct from that arising from a particular outcome). This echoes research with DA victims in Cardiff, which took place more than 20 years ago, and found that “when victims expected and received a positive police demeanour

(e.g., appearing concerned, taking the time to listen), victims were significantly more likely to be satisfied than when police failed to live up to these expectations.” (Robinson and Stroshine, 2005, p. 315). That research echoed even more distant research conducted in the USA in the early 1990s and which concluded that DA victims’ satisfaction is increased “...when victims have the opportunity to express their concerns and when they feel that their wishes are not ignored” (Erez and Tontodonato, 1992, p. 395). These types of interactions are more likely with specialist trained officers, who have dedicated time available to them for quality, in-person conversations that are not beholden to the pressures of the control room, in the way that often dictates the initial response of attending officers. The nature and style of the interaction really matters to victims, which is why this has continued to emerge as an important finding in research on the police response to domestic abuse for the past 40 years.

If specialist teams can provide benefits to victims, as the available evidence demonstrates, then ideally this comes without a high ‘price’ to be paid by the officers involved. Although responding exclusively to sensitive and complex public protection cases such as domestic abuse could reasonably be expected to cause stress and burnout, this came through our interviews mainly in relation to *other* ways of working with these types of cases (e.g., in the Hub). In contrast, the Op Diogel team had a wholly positive view of their role and responsibility, regardless of whether they initially volunteered or were assigned to the team. This finding aligns with research from the USA, which showed that working in a specialist team affords officers higher status and job satisfaction (Jolin and Moose, 1997).

Another benefit to the officers involved was that they were able to develop in their role, enhance and utilise their investigative skills, better understand how to help and see for themselves the consequences their actions had for victims. The ‘victim’s journey’ became their own journey to some extent because they were able understand it and engage with it more fully rather than the typically brief involvement in one part of the process that comes with working in other roles. The interviews made clear that having the time to engage with victims as well as using specific techniques helped them to ‘read readiness’ and offer support and encouragement to victims (rather than simply exerting ‘pressure to change their minds’). Partner agencies also commented on the team’s willingness and ability to adapt their investigative approach based on their (the partner agency’s) assessment of the victim’s specific needs or concerns. This is evidence of a professional, mature approach to collaborative problem solving and bodes well for productive partnership working over the longer-term. Specialist teams as recognised sites for fostering expertise about the ‘craft’ of policing (i.e., that which cannot be taught in a classroom) echoes research about the first specialist units set up by South Wales Police in the early 1990s (Robinson et al., 2023).

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the early shift in plans from implementing a ‘digital’ response (linking victims to investigators via Microsoft Teams) to the in-person response that was evaluated in this study. Information obtained about the method of contact indicated that taking into account victim preference was more important than relying upon any one particular method. Indeed, keeping victims up-to-date throughout the investigation will usually require the use of multiple contact methods (e.g., face-to-face, telephone, text, email). What was clear, however, was that the use of Teams was not feasible for many victims in this sample (e.g., due to lack of suitable information and communication technology), nor was it considered appropriate by officers in many cases (e.g., due to the seriousness of the offence, the length of the statement needing to be taken and/or the victim’s own physical or mental health issues). Although research has highlighted the efficacy of using alternatives to face-to-face contact for some aspects of the police response to DA (Robinson, 2017;

Rothwell et al., 2022), the current study underscores the value of face-to-face contact during the investigative process, especially when responding to reluctant victims with complex needs.

Directions for future research

To continue building the evidence base about the processes and outcomes associated with the implementation of specialist DA investigative teams, we recommend additional research be undertaken in the following areas:

1. *Understanding outcomes beyond crime disposal codes.* The current study was not able to include information about sentencing outcomes for those cases that resulted in a charge, nor how different criminal justice outcomes impacted upon victims' longer-term safety and well-being. Revisiting this 2023 sample in future years would provide a method for identifying medium and long-term outcomes for victims, and any corresponding 'savings' for police and partner agencies from effectively addressing the high costs associated with repeat domestic abuse.
2. *Safeguarding by partner agencies.* The current study was not able to systematically evaluate the level and type of safeguarding and support provided to victims and how this impacted on either criminal justice outcomes or victim safety and well-being. Linking partner agencies' case files to SWP data (e.g., via an agreement to use a shared victim/case ID) is necessary to facilitate joint working and integration of data sources for future evaluations.
3. *Victim perspectives.* This evaluation mainly relied upon victim feedback obtained from SWP through its routinely administered Insights survey. Although this provided valuable information, it did not include bespoke questions designed to gather victim feedback on the Op Diogel approach specifically. Qualitative methods better suited for capturing complexity (e.g. interviews involving open-ended questions) would complement rather than duplicate the information gathered through the Insights survey.
4. *Investigating controlling and coercive behaviour.* None of the (n=17) offences reported during the evaluation period resulted in a positive outcome (although two of these cases are not yet finalised, each of these involved 6-7hours of contact with Op Diogel to enable victims to provide lengthy statements). Further research involving a larger sample of CCB offences receiving a specialist investigative approach could yield insights about possible specific issues or challenges pertaining to these cases.
5. *Intimate partner violence versus domestic abuse.* We could not systematically distinguish the relationship between the victim and perpetrator in this sample. There were comments recorded in places that allowed for an understanding that the case related to a non-intimate relationship (e.g., mother and adult son) but we need to understand whether the Op Diogel approach is better suited for intimate partner violence or is equally effective for all types of relationships captured by the broad legal definition of domestic abuse.
6. *Team composition, individual characteristics and leadership.* We know very little about the essential or desirable attitudes, behaviours and skills necessary for this type of specialist investigator role (i.e., the ideal 'person specification'). Furthermore, *how* the individuals involved became a functioning team over time requires elaboration in order to facilitate knowledge transfer to other sites considering implementation of specialist units.

References

- Cartwright, A. and Roach, J. (2021) The wellbeing of UK police: A study of recorded absences from work of UK police employees due to psychological illness and stress using Freedom of Information Act data. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 15(2), 1326-1338.
- Erez, E. and Tontodonato, P. (1992). Victim participation in sentencing and satisfaction with justice. *Justice Quarterly*, 9(3), 393-415.
- HMICFRS (2021). *Police response to violence against women and girls*. Final inspection report. <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/police-response-to-violence-against-women-and-girls/>
- Jolin, A., & Moose, C.A. (1997). Evaluating a domestic violence program in a community policing environment: Research implementation issues. *Crime and Delinquency*, 43, 279-297.
- Robinson, A. L., Davies, L. and Pritchard, K. (2023). Public Protection in the South Wales Police. In *Policing Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: The View from South Wales* (Innes, Lowe & Madge, Eds.). University of Wales Press.
- Robinson, A. L. (2017). *Establishing the efficacy of a telephone-based police response to domestic abuse: Hampshire Constabulary's Resolution Centre*. <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/107133>
- Robinson, A. L. and Stroshine, M. S. (2005). The importance of expectation fulfilment on domestic violence victims' satisfaction with the police in the UK. *Policing: An International Journal*, 28 (2), 301-320.
- Rothwell, S., McFadzien, K., Strang, H. et al. (2022). Rapid Video Responses (RVR) vs. Face-to-Face responses by police officers to domestic abuse victims: A randomised controlled trial. *Cambridge Journal of Evidence Based Policing*, 6, 1–24.