



# **Defining and Profiling Serial Domestic Abuse Perpetrators: *An All-Wales Feasibility Review***

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*Interim Report*

*July 2014*



Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol  
Rheoli Troseddwyr Cymru

National Offender  
Management Service in Wales

## **Acknowledgements:**

The authors would like to express our sincere thanks to the individuals in the four Welsh police forces; Wales Probation Trust and partner agencies who agreed to give up their valuable time to be interviewed for the study.

## **How to cite this report:**

Clancy, A., Robinson, A. L., and Hanks, S. (2014). *Defining and Profiling Serial Domestic Abuse Perpetrators: An All-Wales Feasibility Review*. Cardiff: Cardiff University. Available at: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/academicstaff/Q-S/dr-amanda-robinson-publication.html>

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# Executive Summary

The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru partnership commissioned this research to investigate the feasibility of developing a shared definition and common multi-agency recording process for serial domestic abuse perpetrators across Wales.

This report sets out findings from phase one of the research which included a qualitative mapping exercise (interviews with Police, Probation, and third sector agency representatives) along with a quantitative analysis of n=6642 anonymised domestic abuse perpetrator records provided by Wales Probation Trust.

The qualitative evidence obtained for this report indicated substantial variability within and across agencies, which undoubtedly impacts upon the way in which serial abusers are identified, targeted and managed across Wales:

- The four Welsh police forces have a definition of serial domestic abuse in place, but each varies slightly, as do their recording systems and reporting processes.
- The data currently held by Probation do not enable 'serial perpetrators' to be easily identified, and the two IT systems used by Wales Probation Trust to manage information about domestic abuse perpetrators are not used consistently across Wales.
- There is not currently a systematic process in place to ensure serial perpetrators are routinely identified and flagged across all relevant third sector agencies.

The quantitative case files analysis indicated the following:

- Roughly three-quarters of perpetrators fell into the 'medium' risk category (as defined in OASys or SARA).
- MAPPA arrangements were in place for only a small proportion (17.5%).
- Analysis of the risk judgments indicated significant variation across Wales (e.g., some regions had twice as many perpetrators deemed to be at 'high' risk). It is not possible to ascertain whether this reflects a true difference in the risk profile of perpetrators, or different assessment practices amongst Offender Managers across the regions, or a combination of these.

Both the qualitative and the quantitative findings have implications for the feasibility of implementing a system for the routine identification of 'serial' domestic abuse perpetrators across Wales. The main recommendation arising from this research is that Police, National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in Wales, and third sector partners should work towards a commonly agreed definition of 'serial domestic abuse' and amend their recording systems so that these individuals may be easily identified (a full set of recommendations is provided at the end of this report). By developing an agreed profile and a shared definition of serial domestic abuse perpetrators, interventions and services can be targeted more effectively to reduce re-offending and protect victims.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the research

The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru partnership commissioned research (within the IOM High Risk of Harm work-stream) to a) develop a shared definition of serial domestic abuse perpetrators and b) undertake analyses of Police, Probation and, where feasible, third sector agency records to profile serial domestic abuse perpetrators in Wales. To achieve an all-Wales, multi-agency definition and profile of serial domestic abusers, it was deemed necessary to conduct the research across two phases. Phase one, (feasibility study) was conducted between December 2013 and May 2014, and aimed to determine the nature and compatibility of the data held by Police, Probation and other agencies to ascertain whether research on an All-Wales, multi-agency basis would be possible. **This report sets out findings from phase one.** In phase two we aim to interrogate Police and Probation files to gather information on a random sample of perpetrators so that we may better understand 'serial' perpetration and how this relates to perpetrators' risk profiles. **Findings from phase two will be published in September 2014.**

The requirement for this research principally stems from the absence of a consistent definition of serial domestic abuse in use across criminal justice agencies and their wider partners in Wales. Without a jointly-agreed profile or a shared definition of serial domestic abuse perpetrators and priority victims, there is limited shared understanding amongst key criminal and social justice partners of what constitutes the most dangerous domestic abuse perpetrators and the most 'at risk' victims. Ultimately, by developing an agreed profile and a shared definition of serial domestic abuse perpetrators, interventions and services can be targeted more effectively to reduce re-offending and protect victims.

## 1.2 Aims and objectives

The principal aim of this phase of the study is to achieve a clearer picture of whether and how '**serial domestic abuse**' is being understood, defined and recorded by Police forces and Probation and other partners across Wales, with a view to exploring the possibility of developing an all-Wales profile of serial domestic abuse perpetrators using Police, Probation and other sources of data. Specific objectives include:

- to elicit the views and perceptions of police force representatives regarding the definition, measurement and recording of serial domestic abuse;

- to map the wider domestic abuse recording and information-sharing process from report to recording for each of the four forces in Wales;
- to highlight any inconsistencies, gaps and effective examples of recording practice across the four Police systems;
- to examine the processes of assessing, measuring and sharing domestic abuse related information in Probation;
- to analyse data held by Probation on domestic abuse perpetrators to ascertain their socio-demographic and risk profiles;
- to explore the possibility of using Probation data, along with that held by partner agencies such as the Police and third sector, to create a profile of serial domestic abuse perpetrators in Wales; and
- to inform phase two of the research, as well as to make recommendations for policy and practice, if possible.

## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.3.1 *Qualitative mapping exercise*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with police force representatives from each of the four forces in Wales. Interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and were conducted between February and March 2014. Relevant individuals were identified by contacting the Head of the Public Protection Team in each force. The strategic and/or operational force leads for domestic abuse were interviewed in each force. Two representatives from the former Wales Probation Trust<sup>1</sup> were also interviewed.

Interviews were designed to elicit participants' views in relation to the following key issues:

- definitional issues around domestic abuse and serial abuse;
- identification and flagging of cases;
- recording systems and processes;
- deployment of resources and operational issues;
- legislative context
- information sharing with partner agencies; and

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<sup>1</sup> From 1 June 2014, the National Probation Service (NPS) and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) were formed to replace the 35 former Probation Trusts. The NPS is a statutory criminal justice service that supervises high risk offenders released into the community. The 21 CRCs have responsibility for managing low and medium risk offenders. As Probation representatives were interviewed during March and April 2014, all quotes and issues raised are attributed to the Wales Probation Trust as it formerly was.

- use of screening tools to assess perpetrators of abuse.

A small number of partner agencies representing Health and the Third Sector were also surveyed via telephone interviews to ascertain whether serial abusers were being systematically defined and identified by agencies outside of the Criminal Justice System. The interviews were also designed to elicit views on recommendations and/or constraints of the proposed serial perpetrator screening tool and standardised definition.

**Table 1: Interview respondents**

| <b>Agency</b>                       |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Third Sector and Health</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaenau Gwent Domestic Abuse Services</li> <li>• Atal y fro</li> <li>• DA Co-ordinator x1</li> <li>• Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre</li> <li>• Safer Wales</li> <li>• The Dyn Project</li> <li>• The Elan Team, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust</li> </ul> |
| <b>Wales Probation Trust</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 x Team Manager</li> <li>• 1 x Probation Officer</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Police Force representatives</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 x Detective Superintendents (Public Protection)</li> <li>• 1 x Detective Inspector (Domestic Abuse Teams)</li> <li>• 2 x Detective Sergeants (Domestic Abuse Teams)</li> <li>• 2 x Force Analysts</li> </ul>  |

### **1.3.2 Exploratory quantitative analysis**

Our original intention was to analyse data from Probation and Police using the various definitions of ‘serial perpetrator’ that are currently in use across the four Welsh forces (as detailed in Chapter 2). Due to the variation in force recording and reporting systems, however, it was not feasible to acquire a complete set of data from each Police force to undertake a full profiling analysis. Instead, a sample of Probation cases assessed on their initial OASys<sup>2</sup> as having a domestic abuse ‘flag’ and/or flagged as such on Delius<sup>3</sup> was

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<sup>2</sup> The Offender Assessment System (OASys) is a risk and needs assessment instrument, which has been developed jointly with the National Probation Service (NPS). It provides the basis for integrated offender management throughout all custodial and community sentences. The

requested for the most recent financial year (2013-14) from the Information Management team in Wales Probation Trust. Key demographic information, along with SARA<sup>4</sup> assessments, was provided for a total of more than 6,000 domestic abuse perpetrators across Wales. The data are analysed with a view to exploring how this readily available data source may be used to understand the profile of domestic abuse perpetrators generally and possibly to identify serial domestic perpetrators.

## 1.4 Background and policy context

In its various forms, domestic violence is a serious problem and, whatever guise it takes it is rarely a one off occurrence. The 2012-13 Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated there are 1.2 million female victims of domestic abuse and 700,000 male victims<sup>5</sup>. Domestic violence also has a higher rate of repeat victimisation<sup>6</sup> than any other crime, with repeat victimisation accounting for 73% of all incidents. It is therefore evident that domestic violence is a huge problem for society and addressing it is a great challenge for the police and their partners.

Recent years have seen an unprecedented amount of work being carried out by the UK and Welsh governments and partner agencies to tackle the problem of domestic abuse and a series of reports and legislation has been published: *Safety and Justice* (Home Office, 2003), Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act (2004), *Tackling Domestic Abuse: the All Wales National Strategy* (Welsh Government, 2005), which was superseded in 2010 with the publication of *The Right to be Safe*. This six year integrated strategy for tackling all forms of violence against women focused upon taking a holistic approach to ensure this form of abuse is tackled effectively (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). Domestic abuse is also one of the current Coalition Government's key priorities, and its approach is set out in its, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy (2010),

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domestic abuse 'flag' on this system may indicate the offender is either a victim and/or perpetrator of domestic abuse.

<sup>3</sup> Delius is the recording and reporting IT system used by Wales Probation Trust. On this system a domestic abuse 'flag' indicates perpetrators only.

<sup>4</sup> SARA is the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Tool, which consists of 20 risk factors along with two summary risk judgments. SARA is completed with all offenders who are flagged as domestic abuse perpetrators. See Kropp et al. (1995) *Manual for the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition): The British Columbia Institute on Family Violence.

<sup>5</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013). *Focus on violent crime and sexual offences 2012/13* – Chapter 4: Intimate Personal Violence and Partner Abuse.

<sup>6</sup> The CSEW (formerly British Crime Survey) classifies a repeat domestic abuse victim as an individual who has reported experiencing more than one incident of domestic abuse within the 12 month period prior to the BCS interview being conducted.

and accompanying action plans. Collectively, these reports served to highlight the need to increase reporting, improve consistency in the definition and recording of domestic violence across agencies, and ultimately to tackle the problem of domestic violence by adopting a cross-government, multi-agency approach.

The problems caused by the lack of a consistent definition of domestic violence were well documented in these reports, which acknowledged that although the Home Office used one definition of domestic violence: *“Any violence between current and former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse”* (Home Office, 2003), other government agencies and the voluntary sector used slightly different definitions to fit their particular needs.

Clarity and consistency on the definition of domestic violence was improved with the passing of the Domestic Violence Crimes and Victims Act (2004) which acknowledged, for the first time, a wider definition, which also included family members and same sex couples. This was then further strengthened by the publication of *Domestic Violence: a National Report* (Home Office, 2005a), which represented a step forward in identifying and agreeing that a core definition (already used by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)), was to be utilised across government and its agencies to support delivery. This definition was wider than the previous Home Office definition and was:

*“Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults, aged 18 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender and sexuality.”<sup>7</sup>*

From March 2013, this definition was expanded to include 16 and 17 year olds and now includes coercive control:

*“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour<sup>8</sup>, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.”*

This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical

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<sup>7</sup> Where family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents, whether directly related, in-laws or step-family.

<sup>8</sup> Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

- sexual
- financial
- emotional

In Wales, the Welsh Government has published its own definition in *Tackling Domestic Abuse: the All Wales National Strategy* (2005), a strategy developed within the framework of UK legislation to address domestic abuse by building on good practice in Wales. This strategy outlined a **Welsh definition of domestic abuse:**

*“Domestic abuse is best described as the use of physical and/or emotional abuse or violence, including undermining of self-confidence, sexual violence or the threat of violence, by a person who is or has been in a close relationship.*

*Domestic abuse can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse’s or partner’s property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and telephone, and stalking.*

*It can also include violence perpetrated by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim/survivor. It can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The wide adverse effects of living with domestic abuse for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. The effects can be linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance misuse, mental health problems and homelessness from running away.*

*Domestic abuse is not a ‘one off’ occurrence; it is frequent and persistent.”*

Despite the recent amendments to the definition of domestic abuse, there still does not appear to be one consistent, multi-agency definition of what constitutes serial domestic abuse.

Nonetheless, the need for Police and other agencies to be able to identify and tackle the problem of serial abusers in particular, has been highlighted in a raft of recent publications including a report commissioned by the Home Office and published in 2009 by Chief Constable Brian Moore of Wiltshire Police on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) - *Tackling Perpetrators of Violence against Women and Girls*. This report defined serial perpetrators of violence against women and girls, as, “the perpetrator is alleged to have used/threatened violence against two or more victims who are unconnected to each other (as opposed to repeat offending against the same victim or persons in the same household). ‘Serial’ perpetrator has tended to be defined in relation to domestic violence, and thus involving, as victims, individuals who are or have been intimate partners of the perpetrator. However, ‘serial’ may also be applied more widely to include perpetrators of more than one form of violence against women and girls, where this involves two or more unconnected victims (ACPO, 2009). The ACPO review set out a series of ten recommendations. Most pertinent to this report is ACPO’s recommendation for:

*“wider recognition, and improved management, of serial perpetrators of violence against women and girls.”*

Further, the more recent publication of the HMIC report, *‘Everyone’s business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse’*. HMIC, March 2014, concluded that many forces across England and Wales were not policing domestic abuse as effectively as they could, and made recommendations to improve the overall police response to domestic abuse, many of which included the way forces identify and target serial and repeat abusers. Individual force reports for the four Welsh police forces highlighted both examples of positive practice and areas for development:

- All but one of the four Welsh forces were reported to have evidenced that domestic abuse was a clear force priority for staff at all levels.
- Information-sharing was another area of effective practice highlighted by the HMIC reviews, particularly in the Gwent force area with the use of the daily multi-agency Domestic Abuse Conference Call. However, the resource-intensive nature of this practice may render this approach unfeasible for all areas.
- The use of the automatic notification system in place in Dyfed-Powys to routinely inform (amongst others) children’s social care and health of the reported incident was also held up as an effective method of safeguarding victims and their families.
- The need to apply a more systematic approach to the identification of repeat and/or serial perpetrators and repeat and/or vulnerable victims was emphasised for several of the Welsh forces, along with the need to review the identification process for perpetrators by incorporating levels of threat, harm and risk to victims to inform assessments.
- HMIC also made recommendations to some Welsh forces to increase the consistency of services provided to victims across all risk levels.

These reports and recommendations, combined with the national extension of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare’s Law, March 2014); and in Wales, with the publication of the *Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill*, serves to reinforce the need for consistency when defining and targeting serial abuse and thus highlights the timeliness of the current research.

## **1.5 Structure of the report**

The remainder of this report falls into four chapters. Chapter 2 provides a descriptive overview of the criteria and processes used by each force to record domestic abuse occurrences. Chapter 3 presents the results of the quantitative profiling exercise and Chapter 4 discusses practitioners’ perspectives regarding the identification and management of serial domestic abuse perpetrators. Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the results and implications of the study, and provides some recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners.

# Chapter 2: Overview of the domestic abuse recording process across agencies

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of both the domestic abuse recording process, and method of identifying serial abuse perpetrators across different agencies in Wales. More detailed, analytical discussion of the issues surrounding the definition, measurement and monitoring of serial domestic violence in Wales will be discussed in later chapters.

## 2.1 Police

### 2.1.1 *Police definitions of serial domestic abuse*

Each of the four Welsh forces has developed their own respective definition of a serial perpetrator of domestic abuse:

- *South Wales*: alleged to have abused **three** victims within one year (although officers are able to search histories over three years)
- *North Wales*: alleged to have abused **two** or more victims within one year
- *Gwent*: alleged to have committed abuse against **two** or more unconnected victims (no set time limit in the definition)
- *Dyfed Powys*: alleged to have used or threatened violence against **two** or more victims who are unconnected to each other and who are or have been intimate partners of the perpetrator as opposed to repeat offending against the same victim or persons in the same household (offences over a three year period are taken into consideration, but this may be altered to a two year period)

### 2.1.2 *Police recording systems*

The four police forces in Wales have all developed their own methods of identifying serial abusers in their force areas, which is largely due to the fact that they all have somewhat different systems for recording incidents – including crimes – that come to

their notice.<sup>9</sup> The difference is particularly marked between, on the one hand, South and North Wales (and from April 2014, Gwent), who can extract data from computerised Record Management Systems (RMS) where all incidents, crimes and intelligence are recorded on one system as occurrences and, on the other hand, Dyfed Powys, who utilise separate crime and incident codes on their recording system.

### **South Wales and North Wales**

Both North and South Wales forces have an initial command and control system (called NSPIS<sup>10</sup> in South Wales and ICAD<sup>11</sup> in North Wales) operated mainly by control room staff receiving calls from the public, and the main Record Management System used to record and manage incidents and crimes as occurrences on the system. The NICHE Record Management System (RMS) in South Wales and RMS in North Wales are used by police officers to manage, monitor and record incidents and crimes and any subsequent intelligence, investigative or other activities. In both forces, the RMS system is now used as the main source of statistical data because it is more complete and accurate than the initial recording system.

For each domestic violence incident, a risk assessment form is completed PPD1 [Public Protection Department form 1, revised March 2014 to a Public Protection Notification, PPN] in South Wales and CID16 [Criminal Investigation Department form 16] in North Wales). Both the PPN and CID16 are multiple risk assessment forms which cover vulnerable adults, child abuse and missing persons (where deemed vulnerable) and also incorporate the DASH risk assessment tool completed for each domestic abuse incident. These forms are currently not searchable and are attached to the individual's record as an electronic Word document.

In South Wales, the accurate identification and counting of all domestic violence incidents depends primarily on officers or police staff responsible for inputting data 'flagging' the occurrence as a domestic incident. In the South Wales NICHE system, there are many 'flags' an officer can attach to a record, of which domestic violence is one. All incidents with a PPN form are checked by specialist Public Protection Unit staff to ensure occurrences are correctly assessed and defined as domestic abuse incidents on NICHE. The NICHE system is then able to provide the number of domestic violence incidents by both counting the number of domestic violence 'flags' and searching free text to 'pick up' those where flags have not been applied.

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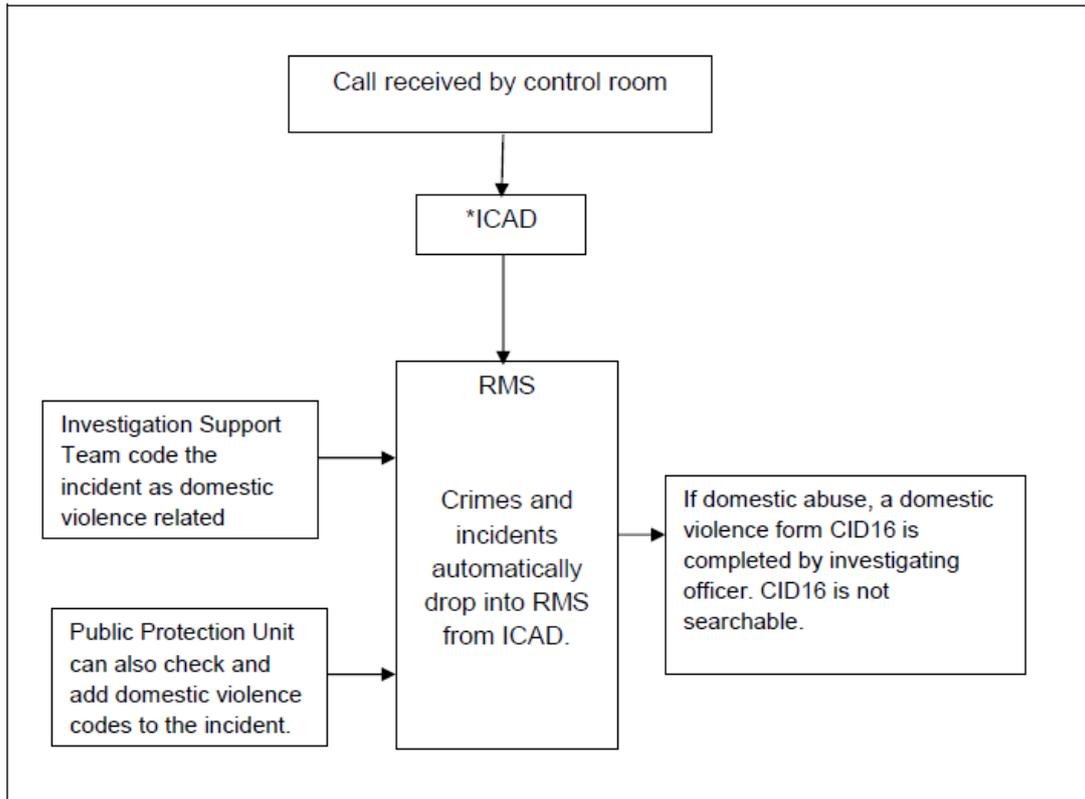
<sup>9</sup> Police recorded crime comprises all notifiable offences recorded by the police. The term notifiable covers offences that are notified to the Home Office and which collectively are known as recorded crime. A police recorded incident is a non-crime and non-notifiable occurrence which has come to the attention of, and is subsequently recorded by the police.

<sup>10</sup> National Strategy for Police Information Systems

<sup>11</sup> Initial Command and Control

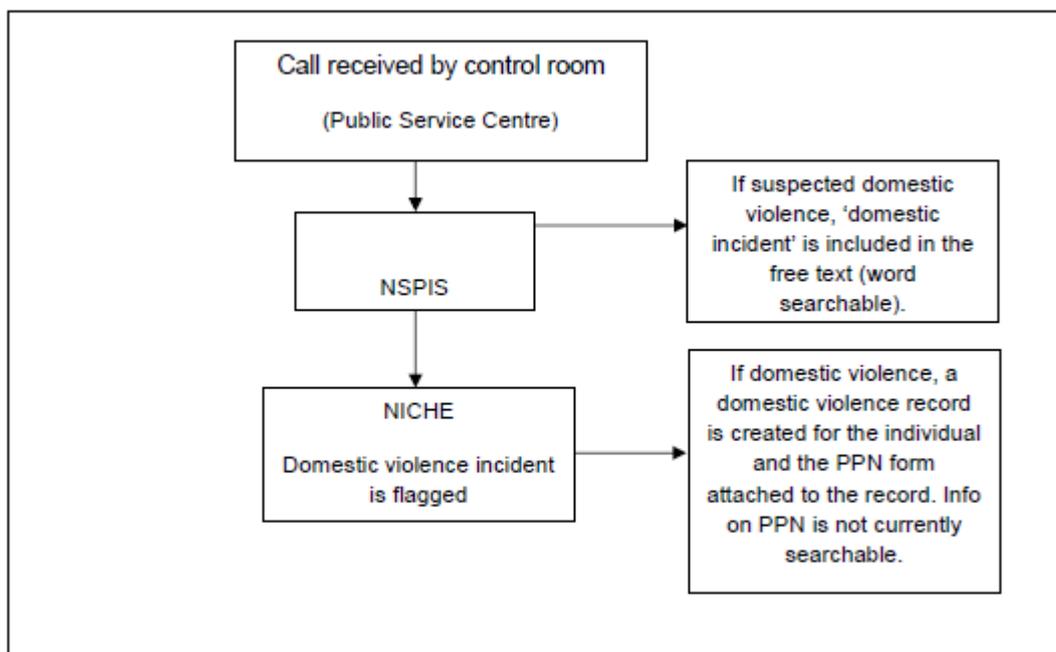
In North Wales, all records on the RMS are called an 'occurrence' and are coded to indicate whether they are a domestic violence incident or a crime as opposed to flagged. This coding is undertaken by officers in the Investigation Support Team (IST). Officers have to complete the code in order to progress through the forms on the RMS system.

**Figure 1: North Wales' domestic violence recording system**



\* Initial command and control system. All crimes and incidents automatically drop down into RMS for coding by FORB/PPU.

**Figure 2: South Wales' domestic violence recording system**



Further, although both forces utilise the NICHE recording system, each force has implemented it in a slightly different way. Subsequently, the process for analysing and identifying serial perpetrators of abuse varies in each force area;

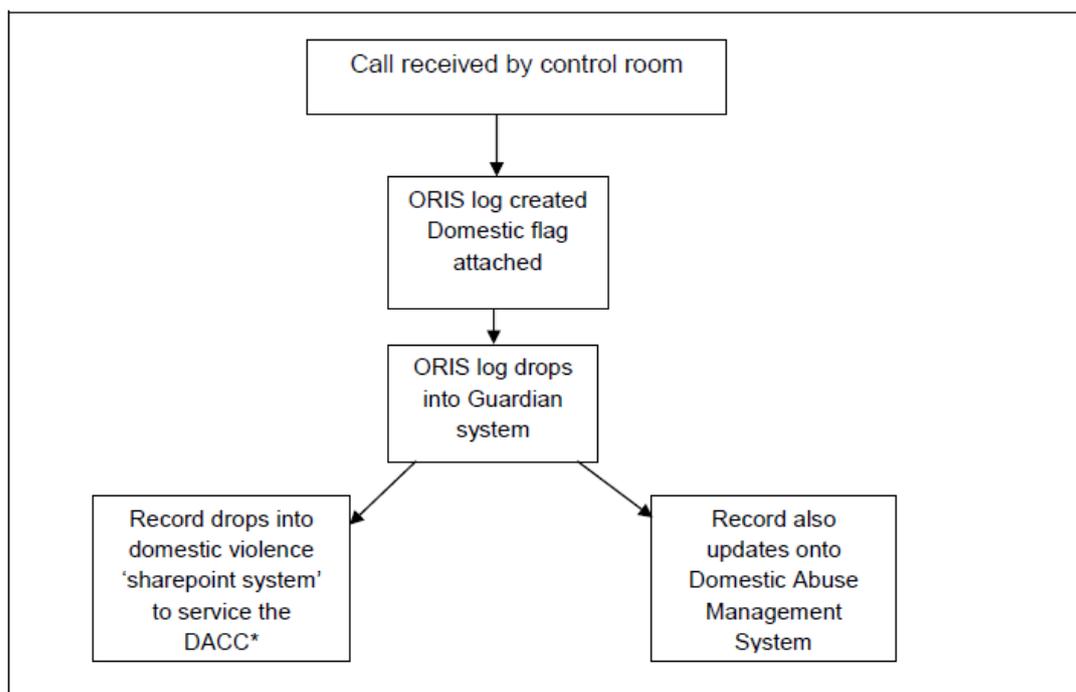
South Wales has recently been highlighted as an example of effective –practice following the development of the Domestic Abuse Management Information System (DAMIT), which was developed in order to both standardise and improve the quality of domestic abuse data returns to Welsh Government and the Home Office, and meet local operational policing requirements. In short, DAMIT is a domestic abuse reporting/analytical tool attached to the NICHE system. Crucially, the tool is being used to identify serial perpetrators (according to the South Wales definition) and analyses the top 10 priority victims and perpetrators based upon occurrences recorded over the past 90 days, 12 months and three years.

Although North Wales does not currently use the DAMIT system, the force has developed a different approach to prioritising perpetrators of domestic abuse. This focuses upon priority repeat perpetrators as opposed to identifying serial perpetrators explicitly. For example, repeat offenders are prioritised according to the number of occurrences within specified time periods and across geographical areas. Officers would then need to undertake further analysis at the individual level to ascertain whether the perpetrator had offended against the same, or a number of different victims. Police in North Wales utilise Report Runner to extract this data from RMS and import into Excel reports for supervising officers to review on a daily, weekly or monthly basis according to requirements.

## Gwent and Dyfed Powys

At the time of interview, Gwent were in the process of transferring from the Guardian control system over to NICHE. Whilst Guardian was still in existence, the NICHE system was not fully operational<sup>12</sup> and all records had not been transferred across. For this reason, a brief overview of the Guardian system will first be provided. To March 2014, the initial domestic violence call came via the force control room which created a record on their incident command and control system, ORIS (a so-called 'ORIS log'). Calls may also come via a referral from another agency (e.g. Social Services). When an ORIS log is created for a domestic incident, a domestic flag (+IDI marker) is attached by the call handler and the log generates two records; one automatically tracks over to the Domestic Abuse Conference Call (SharePoint) system<sup>13</sup> and the other to the Domestic Abuse Management System<sup>14</sup>. The domestic abuse conference call (DACC) ensures a daily review and safety plan for all domestic abuse incidents within the last 24 hours (72 hours over weekends) is held with police and other agencies to safeguard victims.

**Figure 3: Gwent's domestic violence recording system (to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014)**

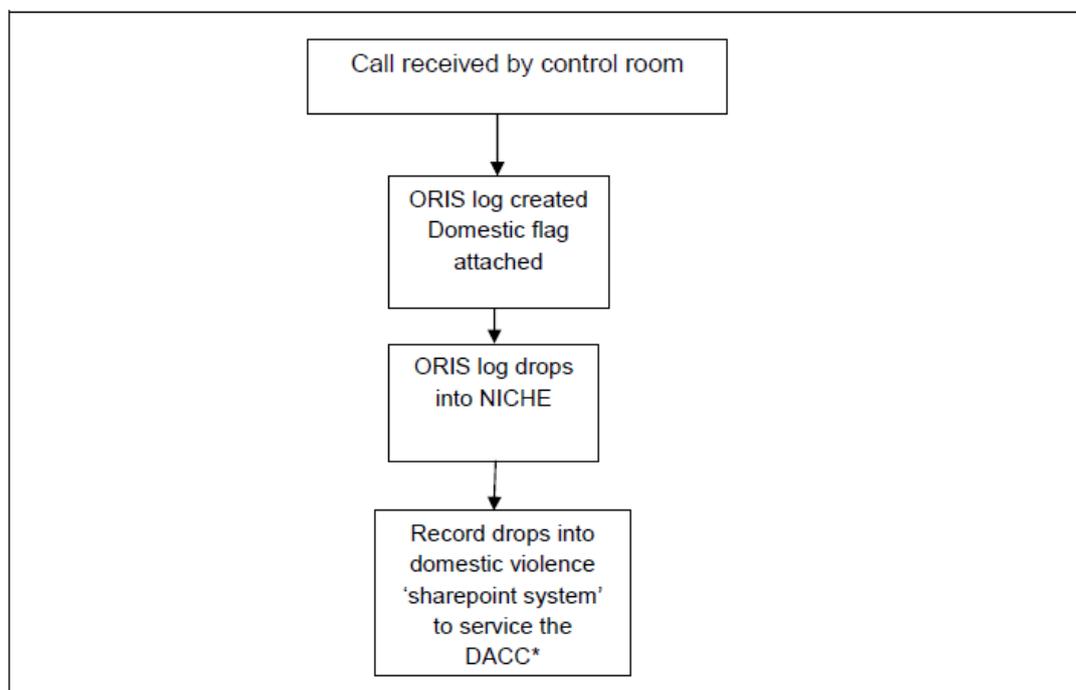


<sup>13</sup> This is a multi-agency database (shared with partners including, Welsh Women's Aid, Probation and Housing).

<sup>14</sup> All incidents/crimes flagged as domestic will automatically update on to the DAMS system every 30 minutes for referral and management by the Domestic Abuse Team. All DASH forms are scanned on to the DAM system (from 1<sup>st</sup> April, NICHE) for assessment by officers in the Domestic Abuse Incident Unit (DAIU).

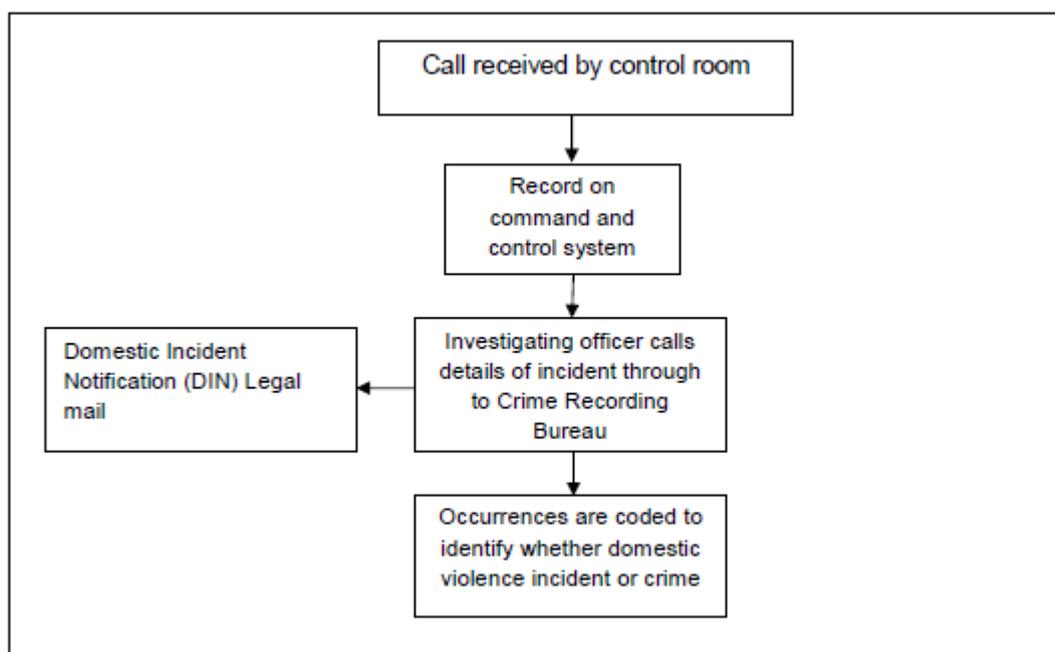
From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, the DAM system ceased to exist, and all calls recorded on the ORIS Command and Control instead drop in to the newly implemented NICHE system. At the time of interview, the force was in the process of developing an automated tracking process from NICHE to the SHAREPOINT system in order to service the DACC calls. In the interim, this was being done manually by Domestic Abuse Officers.

**Figure 4: Gwent's domestic violence recording system (from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014)**



In Dyfed Powys, all calls received by the control room are attended to by an investigating officer (see Figure 5, next page). The investigating officer calls through the details of the occurrence (whether a crime has been committed or not) to the Crime Recording Bureau (CRB) who code the occurrence as a domestic violence incident or crime. These codes are searchable on the system, enabling a count of both domestic violence incidents and crimes to be undertaken. The officer also completes the DASH Risk Assessment form and forwards this to the CRB and the Domestic Abuse team within PPU. The domestic record also automatically generates a Domestic Incident Notification (DIN), which is emailed to the Domestic Abuse Officer within PPU and all relevant partner agencies (e.g. Social Services, Health, Probation, and Welsh Women's Aid).

**Figure 5: Dyfed Powys' domestic violence recording system**



The Dyfed Powys force does not currently have a standardised flagging process in place to classify serial abuse perpetrators on their system. The identification of these perpetrators instead depends upon the extent to which individual officers interrogate the different systems (Storm Command and Control, Information Asset System (IAS), Police National Computer (PNC), Police National Database (PND) and the domestic incidents (crimes and non-crimes) coded as such on their system. All DASH forms are forwarded to officers within the Domestic Abuse team, and records checked in preparation for the Daily Management Meeting (DMM). This effectively reviews actions taken and pending for all incidents (not solely domestic) recorded within the previous 24 hours.

The Gwent force was in a period of transition at the time of interview. It was not clear how the newly implemented NICHE system would be programmed to prioritise and identify serial perpetrators, although the use of serial and repeat perpetrator flags was cited as a possibility. However, to April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, the Guardian/Domestic Abuse Management systems were interrogated by domestic abuse officers in preparation for the daily Domestic Abuse Conference Call (DACC). Although the systems did not systematically flag a perpetrator as a serial or repeat offender, these high priority individuals should have been picked up as part of the DACC process.

To conclude, *whilst all forces have a definition for a serial domestic abuse perpetrator in place, each varies slightly*. South Wales requires a threshold of three victims to be considered a serial perpetrator, whilst the definitions in the other three forces consider two or more victims as serial abuse. Gwent is the only force area not to impose a time limit within their definition. Both South Wales and North Wales focus upon incidents occurring over a twelve month period whilst Dyfed Powys considers

incidents over a rolling three year period (this is under review and may be amended to a two year rolling period).

Clearly, each of the different definitions will have their own implications regarding the proportion of domestic abuse perpetrators categorised as ‘serial abusers’ within the force area. Similarly, the *different recording systems and reporting processes in the Welsh forces* will also impact upon the way serial abusers (and their victims) are identified, targeted and managed in the different forces across Wales; the ramifications of which will be considered in more detail later.

## 2.2 Probation

An OASys assessment is completed for the majority of offenders supervised by Probation and entering custody. The OASys is used to assess an offender’s risk of reconviction, the factors associated with offending and the risk of harm he or she presents (National Probation Service, 2003). The results of the OASys will then be used to determine the level of intervention and supervision to be put in place to manage the risk. Offenders are assessed prior to sentencing, at the start of their community or custodial sentences and reviewed at several points during the sentences. The OASys comprises five main components: 1) risk of reconviction and offending related factors, 2) risk of serious harm to others, risks to the individual and other risks, 3) the OASys summary sheet, 4) the sentence plan, and 5) self-assessment. The first consists of 13 sections covering a range of offending related needs and risk of harm, one of which focuses upon relationships and past or current domestic abuse (section 6). Where an offender discloses domestic abuse as a past or current issue (victim or perpetrator), this is logged against their OASys profile and a ‘tick box’ completed to indicate the individual as a victim or perpetrator (or both). Should an offender indicate that domestic abuse has been an issue, Offender Managers are prompted to complete a Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA),<sup>15</sup> which is attached to the OASys assessment, and a domestic violence perpetrator flag should then be manually applied to the offender’s record on the Delius case management system by the Offender Manager.

Whilst all domestic abuse perpetrators should be flagged as such on Delius, there is currently no flag to identify serial abusers on the system. An individual level analysis of the free-text contained within section 6 of OASys would be necessary to identify the number of previous victims. However, the level of detail available within this could vary depending upon the individual entering the data and there did not appear to be a standardised approach to this at the time of interview.

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<sup>15</sup> Although Offender Managers are prompted to complete a SARA in cases where domestic abuse is indicated and subsequently flagged by the OASys, this is at the Offender Manager’s discretion and it is possible to complete and ‘lock’ an OASys without undertaking the SARA assessment.

## 2.3 Other agencies

A number of third sector agencies providing advocacy and support to the victims of domestic abuse, along with a small number identified as running community-based perpetrator programmes, were contacted to inform this report. Senior representatives from each agency were interviewed to explore the ways in which they record and share information relating to the serial perpetration of domestic abuse.

Agencies reported receiving referrals from a number of organisations including Police and Probation in addition to a number of self-referrals from victims, and to a lesser extent, perpetrators. On receiving the referral, agency staff consulted with Police to assist them in conducting background checks. Police intelligence was analysed alongside data collated and stored on the agency database.<sup>16</sup> It was noted that whilst Police background checks were adept at identifying high-risk individuals through tools such as DASH, they often failed to provide insight into more persistent low-level perpetration. Information gathered throughout the assessment<sup>17</sup> and ongoing support process was subsequently collated and stored in order to 'build a picture' of the clients (both victims and perpetrators). This data was then available for subsequent analysis and had the potential to provide insight into histories of (repeat) victimisation and/or (serial) perpetration if required at a later date.<sup>18</sup> All agencies reported sharing data with MARACs and other agencies where appropriate.

Whilst each agency aimed to identify high-risk/ repeat/ serial perpetration in order to inform their safety planning with victims, no interviewee reported being aware of one standardised definition of serial abuse adhered to by all staff in their organisation. Consequently, no routine methods of flagging or recording the perpetrators of serial domestic abuse were identified. It appeared that whilst individual third sector agencies may have been aware of a serial perpetrator of domestic abuse, there was not currently a systematic process in place to ensure these individuals are routinely identified and flagged across the various agencies interviewed.

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<sup>16</sup> Databases and recording systems vary from agency to agency.

<sup>17</sup> Each agency has developed its own assessment process.

<sup>18</sup> This requires manual analysis at the individual level.

# Chapter 3: Profiling domestic abuse perpetrators

## 3.1 Overview of the quantitative analysis

Wales Probation Trust made available a sample of convicted domestic abuse perpetrators for analysis. This was an anonymised dataset consisting of:

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

A total of n=6642 individual perpetrators were included in the dataset, representing all offenders who had a first OASys assessment completed in Wales during the period 01/02/2013 to 31/03/2014.<sup>19</sup>

It should be recognised that these are *convicted perpetrators* and thus are not generalizable to the population of domestic abuse perpetrators. Those who perpetrate domestic abuse but have not been convicted for their offences are likely to be different in many ways to those who are arrested, prosecuted, found guilty, sentenced, assigned an Offender Manager by Wales Probation Trust, and risk assessed. It is worth bearing in mind that the data analysed for this report represent only a partial glimpse at the profile of this type of offender.

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<sup>19</sup> This includes 60 cases which identified as 'potential duplicates'.

### 3.1.1 *Flagging domestic abuse perpetrators*

Understanding how domestic abuse perpetrators are identified within Probation data is the first step towards understanding the feasibility of routinely identifying 'serial' domestic abuse perpetrators. Analysis of the OASys system, followed by Delius, followed by a cross-system comparison was undertaken to understand how domestic abuse perpetrators are flagged within Probation.

Within the OASys system, the following trends were observed:

- There were no differences in flagging according to the perpetrator's gender or ethnicity.
- The very young (perpetrators less than 20 years old) and older perpetrators (60+ years) were significantly less likely to be flagged. However this difference was not substantial (i.e., just under 90% for those younger than 20 or older than 70, compared to over 90% for the other age groups).
- There was significant variation according to Local Authority (with a low of 92.3% of perpetrators flagged in Bridgend to a high of 100% in Ceredigion) and region (88.3% in the Southwest compared to 97.4% in the West).
- The risk judgments were related to flagging, with likelihood of flagging increasing as risk increases (for both OASys and SARA risk judgments).

A similar analysis was undertaken for flagging in Delius, revealing the following:

- Over twice the proportion of males were flagged compared to females (58.4% compared to 31.9% of females).
- The very young (perpetrators less than 20 years old) and older perpetrators (60+ years) were significantly less likely to be flagged. These differences were often substantial (i.e., only about one-third of those over 70 were flagged, compared to about two-thirds of those in their 20s and 30s).
- There was significant variation according to Local Authority (with a low of 28.8% of perpetrators flagged in Ceredigion to a high of 74.8% in Swansea) and region (47.1% in the West compared to 72.3% in the Southwest).
- The risk judgments were related to flagging, but not in a consistent way (i.e., no pattern for OASys, flagging increasing with risk for one SARA judgment, but the reverse for the other SARA judgment).

A comparison of the two systems used within Probation to manage information about perpetrators indicated that domestic abuse perpetrators were more likely to be 'flagged' on OASys (94.0% had a 'flag') compared to Delius (62.8%). Another way of stating this is that 56.8% of perpetrators (n=3774 out of n=6642) had a 'flag' on both systems. Analysis of perpetrators who were captured on both systems indicates the following:

- Males were more likely to be flagged on both (58.4% compared to 31.9% of females).
- The very young (perpetrators less than 20 years old) and older perpetrators (60+ years) were significantly less likely to be flagged on both.

- There were no differences in flagging according to the perpetrator's ethnicity.
- There was significant variation according to Local Authority (with a low of 28.8% of perpetrators flagged on both systems in Ceredigion to a high of 66.3% in Wrexham) and region (44.5% in the West to 65.1% in the South).
- The risk judgments were related to flagging, however a clear pattern of those most likely to be flagged in both systems is not apparent:
  - Perpetrators deemed 'medium' risk in OASys
  - Perpetrators deemed 'high' on SARA risk of violence to partner
  - Perpetrators deemed 'low' on SARA risk of violence to others

Both the within-system and cross-system analysis suggests that flagging varies considerably across different types of perpetrators and also across different areas of Wales. Although this is an internal issue for the Wales Probation Trust, it will have implications for any multi-agency effort to routinely identify and manage 'serial' domestic abuse perpetrators.

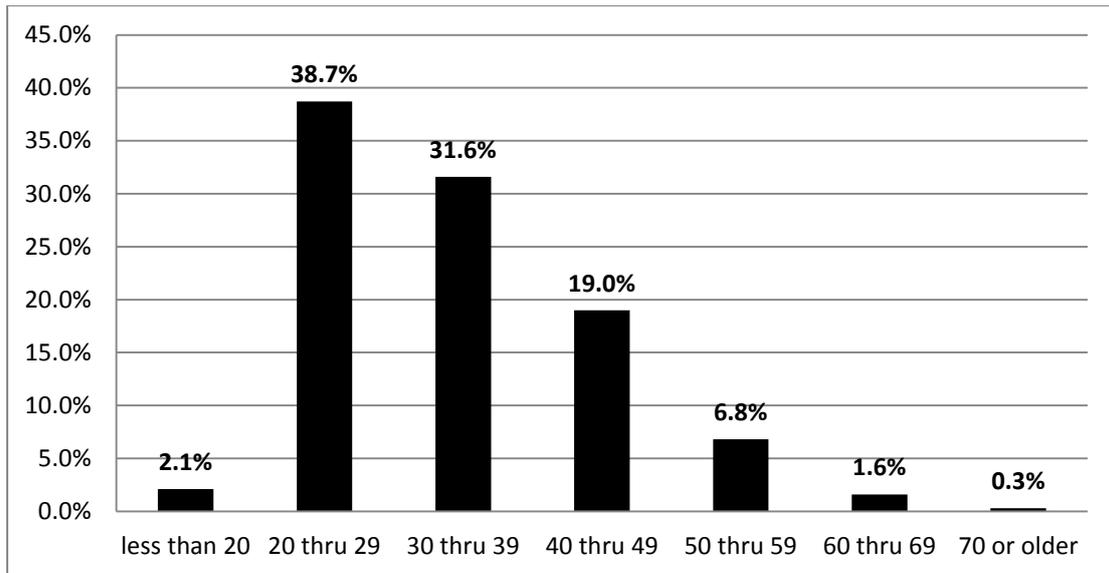
## **3.2 Demographic profile of perpetrators**

### *3.2.1 All-Wales Analysis*

The overwhelming majority of perpetrators were male (94.1%) and white (95.6%). Just over half (52.8%) had parenting responsibilities. Contrary to expectations, proportionally fewer female than male perpetrators had parenting responsibilities (46.3% compared to 53.2%).

As Figure 6 (next page) indicates, the age distribution is skewed toward the young. Nearly three-quarters (72.4%) of perpetrators are less than 40 years old. The age distribution was very similar for male and female perpetrators, with the exception that a twice as many female perpetrators were less than 20 years old (4.1% compared to 1.9%).

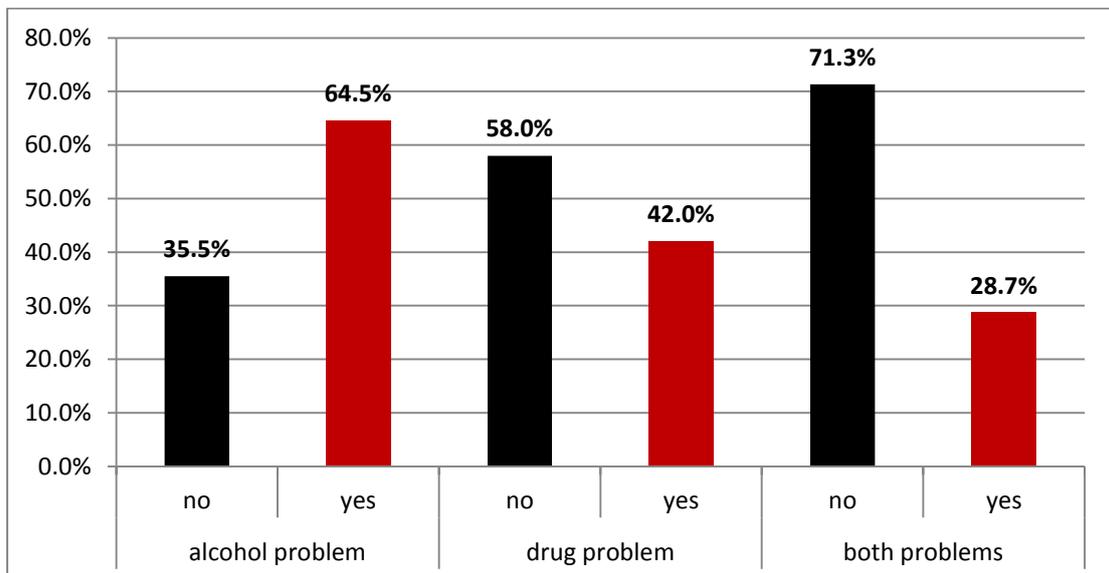
**Figure 6: Age distribution of perpetrators**



Information was also available about perpetrators' age at first conviction.<sup>20</sup> The ages ranged from a minimum of 8 years to a maximum of 77 years, with an average age of nearly 20 years old. The age at first conviction was significantly lower for males (19.6 years compared to 23.6 years for females) and also varied by ethnicity (with Asians being older at 24.6 years).

As indicated in Figure 7 below, a significant proportion of perpetrators had alcohol and/or drug problems.

**Figure 7: Drug and alcohol problems**



<sup>20</sup> In 8 cases the age reported at first conviction (1 year or 2 years old) was considered to be an error and recoded as missing data.

Rather surprisingly, not a single perpetrator was registered as having a mental health problem on Delius. However this is probably due to Delius capturing only clinical diagnoses. In contrast, the OASys assessment indicated that for 46% of perpetrators emotional well-being was deemed to be an issue. Furthermore, two of the SARA risk factors also capture mental health problems in this sample of Welsh perpetrators (see Table 2 in section 3.31).

### **3.2.2 Regional Analysis**

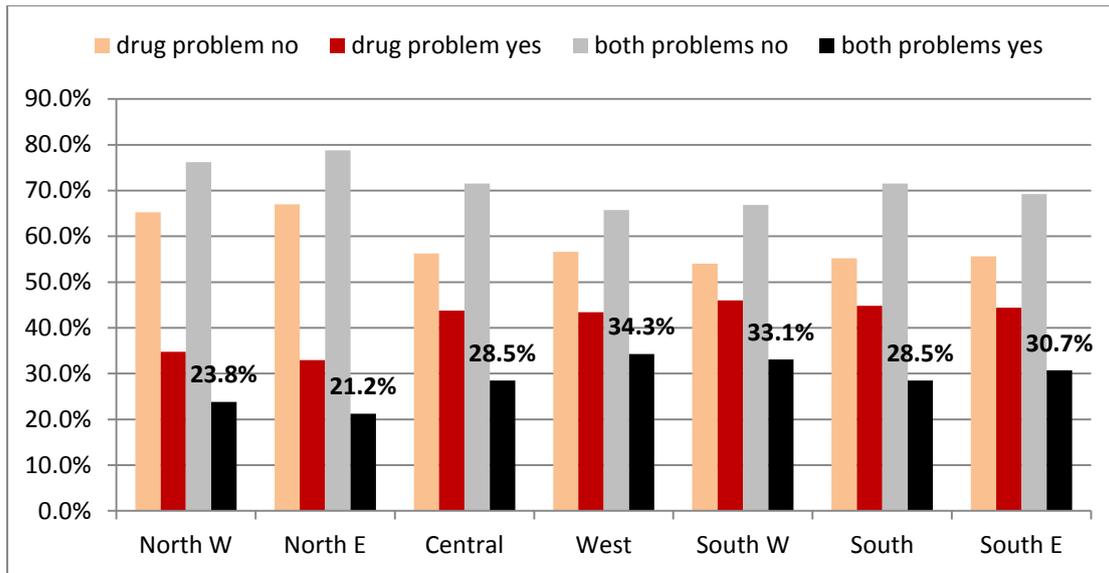
The Local Authorities in Wales were grouped into the following regions:

- *North West:* Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, Denbighshire and Conwy
- *North East:* Flintshire, Wrexham and North Powys
- *Central:* Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil and South Powys
- *West:* Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen
- *South West:* Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend
- *South:* Cardiff and the Vale
- *South East:* Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport

Analysis by region did not indicate any significant differences in the proportion of perpetrators who were male compared to female (i.e., in all regions approximately 95% of perpetrators are male). However there were statistically significant differences in the ethnic makeup of perpetrators across the regions. A larger proportion of perpetrators were BME (black and minority ethnic) in the South (13.0%) whereas they comprised less than 4% in all other regions. The age distribution of perpetrators was broadly similar across the regions.

The proportion of perpetrators for whom alcohol was a problem did not differ significantly across the regions. However, Figure 8 (next page) shows regional variation for drug misuse and alcohol combined with drug problems. Drug misuse was more prevalent in the southern regions (approximately 45% of perpetrators), whereas it was less of an issue in the northern regions (approximately 33% of perpetrators). Analysis of perpetrators with both alcohol and drug problems revealed the highest proportion in the West and South West, and the lowest in the northern regions. In addition, the proportion of perpetrators for whom emotional well-being was deemed an issue was also highest in the West (60% compared to less than 50% for the other regions).

**Figure 8: Drug and alcohol problems, by region**



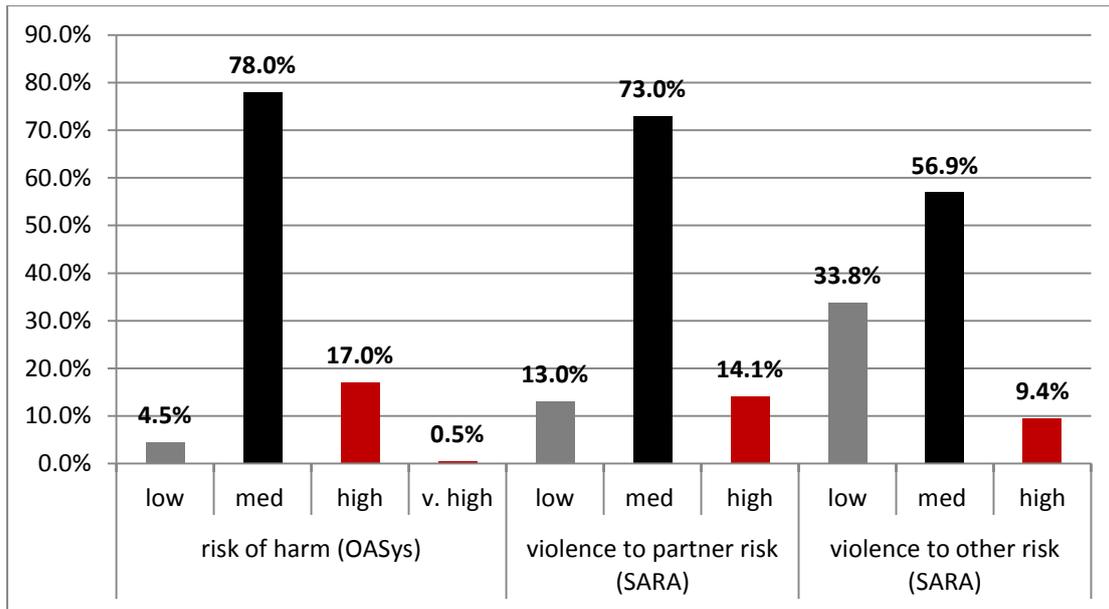
### 3.3 Risk profile of perpetrators

#### 3.3.1 All-Wales Analysis

Twenty individual risk factors from the SARA tool, along with three summary risk judgments (OASys risk of harm/ SARA violence to partner/ SARA violence to other person) were available for the sample of offenders.

Figure 9 indicates the distribution of the three summary risk judgments. The 'risk of harm' assessment was the most often used (only 3.2% missing data), and is also the broadest (i.e., indicating risk of harm from offending that may include but also go beyond domestic abuse), whereas the two summary assessments derived from SARA were less often completed (41.2% missing data for both), and are narrower (i.e., confined to domestic abuse offending). The percentages presented in Figure 9 (next page) were calculated with missing data excluded. Across all three, assessments of 'medium' risk were the most prevalent (roughly three-quarters of perpetrators fell into this category).

**Figure 9: Summary risk judgments**



It is worth noting these three summary risk judgments are highly correlated. In other words, perpetrators are assessed similarly on each. However, there are some notable differences in the way that perpetrators are assessed, according to which indicator is used:

- 83.9% of perpetrators were classified as 'low risk' on both OASys and the SARA 'violence risk to partner risk'
- 85.7% of perpetrators were classified as 'medium risk' on both OASys and the SARA 'violence risk to partner risk'
- 61.8% of perpetrators were classified as 'high risk' on both OASys and the SARA 'violence risk to partner risk'

Thus a significant number of perpetrators are classified as 'high risk' using one summary score but not the other. It is understandable that not all 'high risk' perpetrators in OASys will be judged as 'high risk' according to SARA (because they may be high risk for other types of crimes, but not domestic abuse), but we would expect that all 'high risk' domestic perpetrators in SARA are also considered 'high risk' in OASys. However this was not the case. Specifically, perpetrators were classified as 'high risk' of harm to partner (n=79) or others (n=24) using SARA but were designated 'medium' risk of harm in OASys. One perpetrator was considered 'high risk' of harming his partner but only 'low' risk of harm according to OASys.

As previously noted, the SARA assessment tool contains 20 individual risk factors, along with the two summary assessments described above. These risk factors are scored 0 =

absent, 1 = sub-threshold, and 2 = present.<sup>21</sup> Table 2 below presents the frequency of scores for each risk factor. The three most common risk factors (that were scored 2=present) in this sample of perpetrators are:

- Past physical assault (45.8%): Physically assaulted past or current intimate partner(s)<sup>22</sup>
- Recent relationship problems (39.0%): Separation from partner or extreme conflict regarding relationship status within past year
- Recent substance abuse (33.3%): Serious substance abuse or substance dependence within the past year

**Table 2: SARA risk factors and summary risk judgment**

| Risk Factor                              | Score=0 | Score=1 | Score=2 | Correlation with 'Violence to Partner' |
|--|---------|---------|---------|--|
| 1. Past Assault of Family Members        | 65.8    | 15.6    | 18.6    | .074                                   |
| 2. Past Assault (Strangers or Acquaint.) | 43.9    | 23.5    | 32.6    | .091                                   |
| 3. Past Breach                           | 49.0    | 17.3    | 33.8    | .112                                   |
| 4. Recent Relationship Problems          | 29.3    | 31.8    | 39.0    | .326                                   |
| 5. Recent Employment Problems            | 42.5    | 29.2    | 28.2    | .105                                   |
| 6. Family Violence as a Child            | 64.5    | 15.1    | 20.3    | .078                                   |
| 7. Recent Substance Abuse                | 30.5    | 36.2    | 33.3    | .140                                   |
| 8. Recent Suicidal or Homicidal Intent   | 75.9    | 16.2    | 7.9     | .150                                   |
| 9. Recent Psychotic Symptoms             | 89.3    | 7.9     | 2.8     | .046                                   |
| 10. Personality Disorder                 | 66.5    | 22.9    | 10.6    | .142                                   |
| 11. Past Physical Assault                | 24.7    | 29.5    | 45.8    | .279                                   |

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<sup>21</sup> In the database there were a number of instances where a score of '3' had been applied. These cases were recoded to 'missing data' as the score of 3 indicates the SARA assessor opted not to answer the question due to insufficient information available.

<sup>22</sup> According to the SARA manual, "physical assault" includes assault with a weapon but excludes sexual assault (coded under Item 13) and threats (coded under Item 14); "intimate partner" includes any wife/husband, common-law spouse, or girlfriend/boyfriend.

|     |                                       |      |      |      |      |
|-----|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| 12. | Past Sexual Assault Jealousy          | 73.0 | 15.4 | 11.5 | .219 |
| 13. | Past Use of Weapons Death Threats     | 76.3 | 13.9 | 9.8  | .206 |
| 14. | Recent Escalation (Freq. or Severity) | 62.9 | 20.7 | 16.4 | .308 |
| 15. | Past Violation of No Contact Orders   | 85.0 | 5.5  | 9.5  | .155 |
| 16. | Denial of Spousal Assault History     | 43.5 | 38.6 | 17.9 | .289 |
| 17. | Attitudes Supportive of DV            | 60.2 | 33.0 | 6.7  | .306 |
| 18. | Severe and/or Sexual Violence         | 74.1 | 14.3 | 11.5 | .233 |
| 19. | Use of Weapons Death Threats          | 80.4 | 9.3  | 10.4 | .186 |
| 20. | Violation of No Contact Order         | 87.6 | 3.9  | 8.5  | .154 |

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of perpetrators with a particular score (missing data excluded).

The last column of Table 2 indicates the correlation coefficient between the risk factor and the SARA summary judgment ‘violence to partner’. All correlation coefficients are positive and significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). In other words, as the score for risk factor increases, so does the likelihood the perpetrator will be judged as ‘high’ risk for violence to their partner. The three risk factors most strongly correlated with the SARA ‘high’ risk judgment are:

- Recent relationship problems (.326)
- Recent escalation in frequency or severity of assault (.308)
- Attitudes that support or condone spousal assault (.306)

It is interesting to note that relatively few perpetrators have such attitudes (only 6.7% of the sample), yet when they do, this appears to strongly increase the likelihood that they will be judged as ‘high’ risk. The SARA manual indicates that ‘a common thread running through these attitudes is that they support or condone wife assault by implicitly or explicitly encouraging (a) patriarchy (male prerogative), (b) misogyny, and/or (c) the use of violence to resolve conflicts’.

Similar analyses (not presented here) were undertaken to determine the correlations between the twenty risk factors and the OASys risk judgment. Again, all correlation coefficients were positive and statistically significant. The three risk factors most strongly correlated with the OASys ‘high’ risk judgment are:

- Severe and/or sexual violence in the index offence<sup>23</sup> (.232)
- Past use of weapons and/or credible death threats<sup>24</sup> (.230)

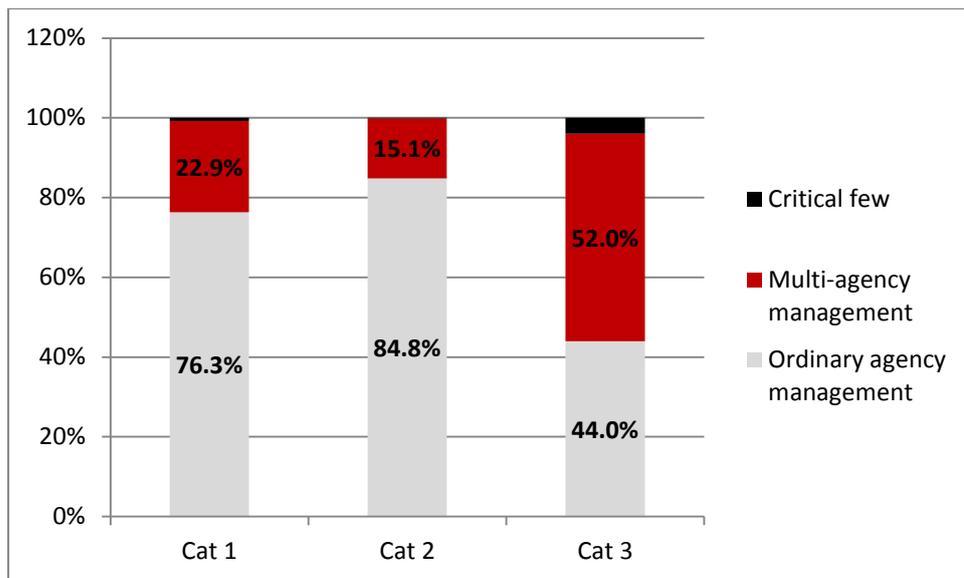
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<sup>23</sup> According to the SARA manual, “severe violence” means that the victim suffered serious physical injuries (i.e. required medical attention).

- Attitudes that support or condone spousal assault (.223)

Finally, it should be noted that only a small proportion of the sample of domestic abuse perpetrators (n=1160 of n=6642, or 17.5%) were the subjects of MAPPA arrangements. Specifically, 4.4% (n=292) were Category 1 (registered sex offenders), 14.3% (n=950) were Category 2 (violent and other sexual offenders) and .4% (n=26) were Category 3 (other high risk).

**Figure 10: Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements**



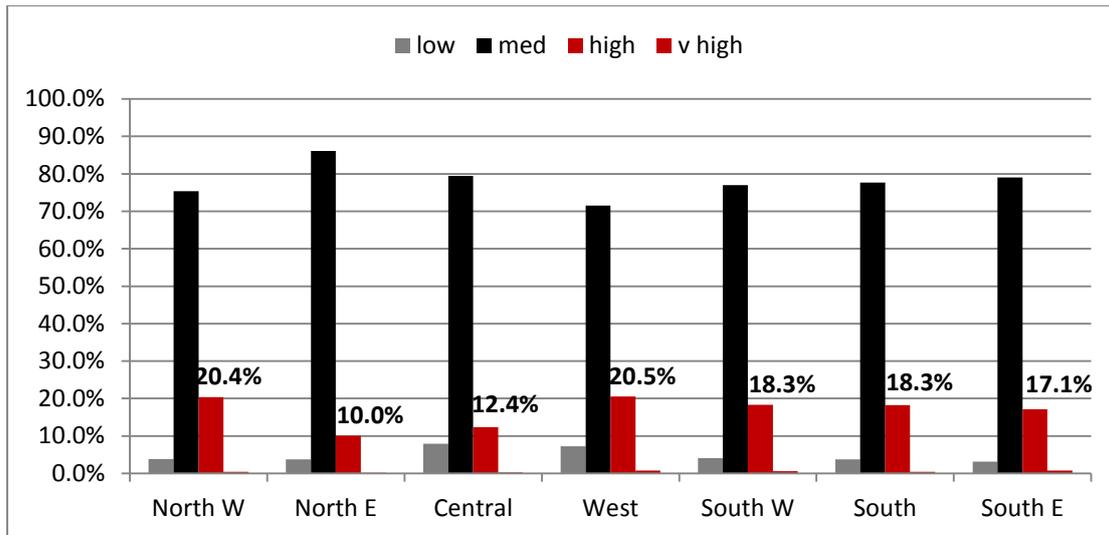
### 3.3.2 Regional Analysis

Analysis of the summary risk judgments by region indicated significant variation (see Figures 11 and 12 below). It is not possible to ascertain whether this reflects a true difference in the risk profile of perpetrators, or different assessment practices amongst Offender Managers across the regions. For example, Figure 11 (next page) shows 10% of perpetrators were judged as 'high' risk on OASys in the North East, but other regions had twice as many 'high' risk perpetrators (e.g., 20.4% in the North West and 20.5% in the West).

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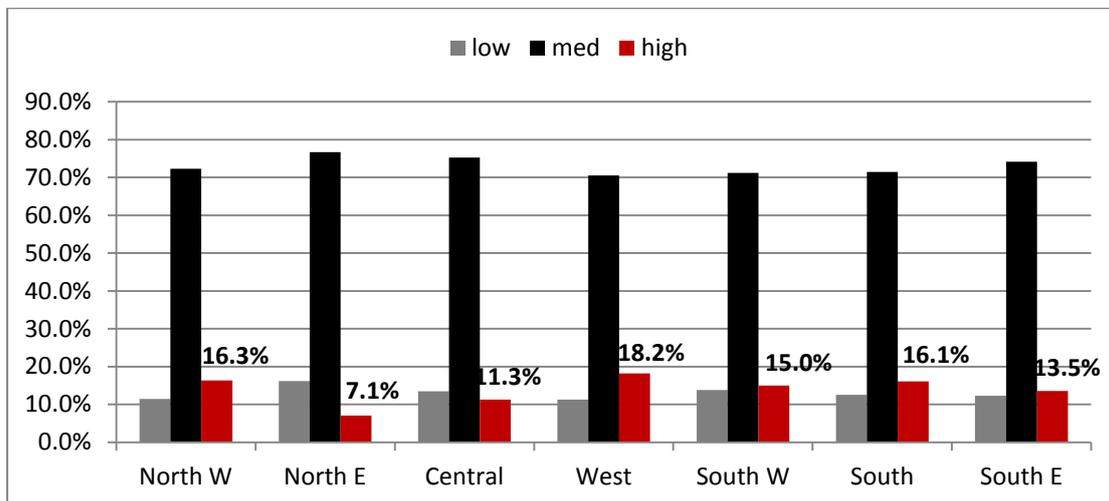
<sup>24</sup> According to the SARA manual, "weapon" includes firearms, knives, and objects used as clubs; "credible" means that the threats were perceived as credible by the victim. Vague threats (e.g. "I'll get you") perceived as credible by the victim should be coded as threats of serious bodily harm.

**Figure 11: Summary risk judgment (OASys), by region**



Similarly, Figure 12 indicates variation in the use of the SARA 'high' risk judgment. Again it is apparent that there are fewer 'high' risk perpetrators (or different assessment practices) in the North East (7.1%) compared to the North West (16.2%) or West (18.2%). The same pattern was found in the regional analysis of the SARA 'violence to other' judgment (not presented here).

**Figure 12: Summary risk judgment (SARA violence to partner), by region**



Regional analysis of the individual SARA risk factors indicated statistically significant variation by region for all but two factors:

- Past breach of an order
- Experienced family violence as a child or adolescent (as victim or witness)

In other words, these two risk factors were assessed as present for similar proportions of perpetrators across Wales.

The other 18 risk factors, however, varied considerably in their prevalence across Wales. Analysis (not presented here) showed that for 12 of these 18 risk factors, the highest prevalence was found in the North West. This is consistent with larger proportions of perpetrators being judged as 'high risk' in the North West (recall Figures 10 and 11).

The regional variation described in this section can be interpreted in one of three ways:

- The profile of perpetrators in the North West region is different (i.e., riskier and more dangerous) compared to other regions
- Probation workers in the North West identify and record more risk information from the perpetrators with whom they come into contact
- Both of the above (i.e., North West perpetrators are riskier and Probation officers working there are consistently identifying this)

However further research is recommended before endorsing any of these interpretations.

### **3.4 An incomplete picture**

A key aim of this study was to assess the feasibility of identifying 'serial perpetrators' from existing IT systems. Clearly it is not possible to accurately identify such offenders (regardless of the definition used) using the quantitative data held by either Probation (or on Police systems, as will be discussed in Chapter 4). Whilst the risk profile of offenders could perhaps be taken as a proxy for the likelihood of serial offending (i.e., because serial offenders might be more likely to be judged as 'high' risk), this is by no means certain.

An empirical project to assess the feasibility of using (the already captured SARA) risk factors and/or (either the OASys or SARA) risk judgments as proxies to indicate 'serial' offending should be undertaken. This would involve in-depth analysis of the qualitative data held in perpetrators' files. The notes written by Offender Managers are often detailed and likely to indicate whether the perpetrator has committed domestic abuse against other victims. This information could be obtained for a sample of offenders and analysed to ascertain the relationship between a factor measuring 'serial' offending (possibly coded as 0=no, 1=maybe, 2=yes) and the other available risk factors. Such a project could shed light on the utility of differentiating 'serial' perpetrators from 'high' risk perpetrators (i.e., to what extent do these categories overlap?).

# Chapter 4: Practitioners' perceptions of the current approach

This chapter presents the findings that relate to the processes of defining, identifying and recording serial abuse in each of the four Welsh forces, and, where relevant, also draws upon perceptions expressed by staff in Wales Probation, health and third sector agencies during interviews conducted for the purposes of this research. Throughout, particular attention is paid to any barriers or issues affecting the recording and monitoring procedure, whilst also highlighting areas of effective practice.

## 4.1 Defining Serial Perpetrators

Recall that, whilst all four of the Welsh forces have adopted the standard ACPO definition of domestic abuse, each force has developed their own definition of what constitutes a 'serial domestic abuse':

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| South Wales           | Alleged abuse against three or more unconnected victims  |
| Gwent and Dyfed Powys | Alleged abuse against two or more unconnected victims  |
| North Wales           | Alleged abuse against two or more unconnected victims within twelve months   |
| ACPO (2009)           | Alleged to have used/threatened violence against two or more victims who are unconnected to each other (as opposed to repeat offending against the same victim or persons in the same household) <sup>25</sup> |

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<sup>25</sup> ACPO (2009) *Tackling Perpetrators of Violence Against Women and Girls*. Review for the Home Secretary. <http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2009/200909CRIVAW01.pdf>

All officers interviewed for this report recognised the need to standardise the definition and agreed that this inconsistency of approach could lead to a perpetrator being labelled as a serial abuser in one force area and not another. Further, whilst all forces were defining a serial domestic abuse perpetrator, the extent to which this definition was made explicit to officers outside of the specialised domestic abuse teams was not clear. Although all forces reported that they had issued guidance to local policing units regarding the recently revised ACPO definition of domestic abuse, the individual force definition of serial abuse was not necessarily included with this. It appeared that, in some areas, only officers with specialist knowledge would be aware of what constituted a serial perpetrator. Indeed as one officer acknowledged:

*“You would struggle to find a definition for serial abuse written down anywhere. It’s those who need to know, know. The distinction between a serial and repeat would be a repeat, the victim is offended against on more than one occasion and a serial perpetrator is someone who abuses more than one person within 12 months, again you won’t find that written down anywhere, it’s inherited knowledge....I think we have to be honest with ourselves and say we need to rubber stamp our definition somewhere and circulate it as people can’t be asked to act on something if they don’t know what criteria they are applying to someone.”*

The lack of a consistent definition for serial domestic abuse does not appear to be an issue for police forces alone. Whilst OASys assessments carried out by Wales Probation for example, incorporate previous domestic abuse and relationship history into the risk of harm analysis, staff were not aware of one standardised definition for a serial perpetrator.

*“I’m not aware that there is an agreed definition of serial perpetrators. Some look at number of offences, repeats on the same victim over a time frame. My own definition, working with serial perpetrators, would be somebody who has lots of different partners, and quite often will seek out partners, who are particularly vulnerable in one way or another.... I know that X collects and sends periodically a list of serial perpetrators, but I think in her definition, she looks at who has been the subject of a MARAC several times within a given period...my definition wouldn’t be the same.”*

The recent revisions (April 2013) to the definition of domestic abuse to also, [amongst other things] include young people aged 16 and 17 is likely to lead to a greater proportion of young offenders being labelled as domestic abuse perpetrators. However, it appears that the assessment processes used with this group of offenders may not yet have been fully amended to reflect these changes, with the ASSET system used across the Youth Offending Service (YOS) focusing mainly upon family relationships rather than intimate partnerships. As one interviewee noted:

*“With the youth offending you assess them with two different systems, the different assessments are geared for different people when they’re in different ages, like ASSET is what’s used to assess young people, and that is geared primarily to under 18’s, and there are questions about whether they’ve been violent to their family, or*

*similar to that... but where we've [Probation] got a SARA that leads on from that, there is nothing then for YOS."*

Whilst staff interviewed were unaware of any serial abuse definition used with young offenders, the implications of labelling alleged perpetrators as domestic abusers or serial abusers at such a young age was called into question.

*"It's difficult because one of the issues is labelling. Labelling a 16, 17 year old as a serial abuser at such a young age, I don't think YOS would be too happy with giving that label to someone so young....But then on the other hand identifying them as a serial domestic abuser provides you with some understanding of intervention that you can come in and work with them; it's a difficult one. It's something to be conscious of because they are children, and do you want to give a label to a child as being a serial domestic abuser? There could be a lot of other factors linked to the behaviour."*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, several staff also commented upon the increasing number of familial abuse cases referred to their agency, and emphasised the importance of having clear definitional boundaries between serial intimate partner abuse and familial abuse.<sup>26</sup>

*"We are seeing more and more teenagers abusing their parents whilst still living at home. There seems to be more and more abuse of this type."*

*"It is important that any definition distinguishes between intimate relationships and familial abuse. The reasons behind the two types of abuse can be very different. The problem with a broad definition is that different kinds of people get caught up in it. 16 year olds tend to have more short term relationships and they are more likely to live at home with family, in which case there are more likely to be two victims. Say a teenager falls out with his mum and his sister? There is a danger of stigmatising and over labelling young people as serial offenders."*

Staff interviewed in health and third sector agencies also indicated that they were unaware of any standardised definition of serial abuse within their respective agencies. All however, emphasised the need to have a shared and agreed definition of serial perpetration of domestic abuse.

*"No we don't have such a definition. We just use local knowledge, say that he has been abusive and come to the attention of other agencies. That's how we know our serial perpetrators. One definition would be so helpful, we need consistency, to look at their history and number of partners, many are not even charged."*

The imposition of a time period within any definition of serial abuse will inevitably have implications upon the individuals identified as being serial perpetrators. Individuals

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<sup>26</sup> ACPO (2009) definition of serial abuse defines serial abuse as occurring with 'unconnected' victims. "The perpetrator is alleged to have used/threatened violence against two or more victims who are unconnected to each other (as opposed to repeat offending against the same victim or persons in the same household.)"

remaining in long term relationships for example, who then separate and subsequently go on to abuse further victims may not be defined as serial abusers through automated reporting/flagging processes as they would not have been re-convicted within the time-frame. However, as the Police recording NICHE system links all occurrences to each nominal's record, it would theoretically be possible to identify an alleged perpetrator as serial on this system using individual level record analysis.

Moreover, individuals subject to lengthy custodial sentences may also not be identified as serial if they did not have the opportunity to re-offend within the definitional time-frame. As one officer commented;

*"I do recognise that perhaps someone may lapse for a while, could be because they have had a custodial sentence for five years and then they come out, start offending again and we don't pick them up as serial perpetrators. But I suppose if they have had a substantial prison sentence and committed a serious crime, they are going to come out as a monitored person anyway."*

Whilst the majority of definitions in use across Wales (with the exception of the South Wales force), and as defined by ACPO (2009), use the threshold of two or more victims to define a serial perpetrator, some interviewees believed the threshold should be higher in order to avoid labelling a large proportion of abusers as 'serial' perpetrators. It was perceived that this would more effectively focus resources upon the highest risk and most dangerous minority.

*"Two victims, well a lot of people fall into that category. Two doesn't really point to anything, that can't make a pattern of behaviour. The vulnerability of the victim, severity and risk of the serial perpetrators should be factored in."*

The implications of defining and subsequently labelling a domestic abuse perpetrator as a serial abuser were also emphasised, along with the need for that information to be meaningfully shared and utilised.

*"Once we decide we are happy labelling these people we then have to do something with them. A flag to say someone is serial, well what does that mean? Say the control room tells an officer on the way to a call that the individual has offended previously against five different women, what difference does that make for me knocking on their door now? I think that labelling, we have that subtle knowledge that these people are out there and we go and do disclosures, but if we are going to overtly label someone as a serial perpetrator. What do you do with that information?"*

As several interviewees acknowledged, unless a crime has been committed and the perpetrator is subject to certain conditions and/or rehabilitative programmes run within the Criminal Justice System, there is very little in the way of voluntary, community initiatives for domestic abuse perpetrators. Subsequently, individuals may be labelled as a serial abuser and then little or no support can be offered to help those who want to change to do so.

*“You lift the stone, and you label them, what are you going to do with them now? All we are doing is waiting for them to commit the offence again and then we deal with them. We need those perpetrator schemes and support out there, if we label someone then what? Yes I see the value, but all the other agencies need to own it too and provide the opportunity to refer these perpetrators in the same way we refer the victims.”*

The need for a more perpetrator-focused approach to be taken when breaking the cycle of repeat and serial domestic abuse was stressed by several of those interviewed. As one individual commented:

*“I’m sure we’re missing a trick with perpetrators, that if there was support, although they’d have to volunteer for that process, and sometimes individuals, yes have done something wrong and may be on the cusp with the CJS, but not quite enough to get the structure and the mandate to make sure they do get in to a good perpetrator programme, but they want it...and we’re putting too much onus on our victims. We’re not exploiting as many mechanisms and opportunities with the perpetrators as we could. We can’t break the cycle for the victim unless we get something in place and deal with the perpetrator.”*

These views reflect conclusions made by ACPO (2009) in their review of violence against women and girls, which outlined the need for there to be a “positive obligation” upon perpetrators of domestic abuse to (amongst other things), attend a perpetrator programme to address their offending behaviour. Despite these earlier recommendations, it appears the gap still remains. The recent review conducted by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC) stated that:

*“The College of Policing, through the national policing lead for domestic abuse, should disseminate to forces examples of how forces are targeting serial and repeat domestic abuse perpetrators in order to prevent future offending. The College’s What Works Centre for Crime Reduction should provide to forces evidence about how effective programmes of managing perpetrators achieve reductions in domestic abuse. They should work with departments such as the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, academic institutions and organisations working with perpetrators to build a strong evidence base in this area.”*

A gap in provision of services for young perpetrators (aged under 21) was also highlighted by one interviewee who noted that:

*“The accredited programme [offered locally] ... you can’t go on to it until you’re 21, so there’s a massive gap between 18 and 21. You can use your 1 to 1 work books, but again a lot of it focuses around power and control, which obviously does present itself in young people, but I think they are at that point formulating their understanding, because I know there is a SAR, [Specified Activity Requirement] work book, that has just come out around relationships, so that’s of better use, whereas before it was just domestic violence work books. If there’s significant domestic abuse within the family, then half the time they still live with their family.”*

## 4.2 Identification and flagging

North Wales and Dyfed Powys forces relied upon a coding system to identify and ‘pull off’ the number of domestic violence incidents and crimes recorded on their systems. In South Wales the accurate identification and counting of domestic violence incidents depended primarily on whether individuals inputting data had either ‘flagged’ or ‘box-ticked’ cases.

The process of marking a domestic abuse aggressor as a serial perpetrator was not uniform across the forces, and only one force, South Wales<sup>27</sup>, focused upon extracting and identifying nominals as ‘serial’ abusers<sup>28</sup> specifically, using the agreed force definition.. None of the forces utilised a specific ‘serial’ flag or code to explicitly demarcate serial abusers on the crime recording systems.<sup>29</sup> As an officer in one force commented:

*“We have repeat perpetrator data on the systems, which will show behind the scenes if they are serial but you would have to go into their data to find that out. What it does show, is our repeat perpetrators and the number of occurrences for that perpetrator during the specified time period and it will show it over which geographical areas. We also will have the victims attached to each record so you could then see if it was against the same victim or not. That data is driven by repeat victimisation rather than serial but you would be able to work out if it was serial at some level, it might just not be glaringly obvious.”*

This was true across other force areas, with officers in several forces acknowledging that without a specific automated flagging process for serial abusers in place, identification of serial perpetrators often depended upon the extent to which individual officers interrogated the recording system:

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<sup>27</sup> This data was held on the DAMIT system, which holds information relating to each victim of domestic abuse and records information chronologically relating to that and previous domestic abuse incidents

<sup>28</sup> All forces highlighted priority domestic abuse nominals on their systems; however the criteria for prioritising individuals differed across the forces.

<sup>29</sup> In Gwent, while NICHE was seen as promising a much better system than previously used. In the short term, its advent may lead to a situation in which data on domestic and serial abuse is temporarily less accurate than before. As it may not be possible to transfer and backdate all incidents (excluding crimes) from the previous Guardian recording system, over to NICHE.

*“NICHE now goes on nominals, but it is down to the officers and researchers to pick up on it. We have had feedback from the HMIC review to say we need to be more focused on identifying repeat and serial offenders as there is no flag so it won’t flash up on my screen if someone is a serial.”*

*“My main concern is we have too many systems that aren’t talking to each other. I’ve sat with a couple of officers and said show me how you would find someone I know is a serial perpetrator and they have said, ‘well I can look under address, previous calls, under Information Assets for intelligence, I can look at the PND and the PNC’. How many officers will have the time for that?”*

*“I think we have all these databases where you can find different bits of information, but there is no flag. We don’t use any flagging on individuals; the flag is on the incident rather than the individual. We have talked about putting a flag on PNC on an individual to identify them as a serial perp for example. None of that is in place, so we are reliant on individual officers looking through the different databases and coming to their own conclusion to see if that person is a serial offender.”*

It was also posited that the nature of the recording system used could potentially affect the extent to which forces were able to identify and ‘pull out’ repeat victims and serial perpetrators. Whilst NICHE records links to individuals, the Oris Command and Control/Guardian crime recording system in use in the Gwent force (to February 2014) and the Storm Command and Control and recording system in use in Dyfed Powys are incident based systems. These systems could therefore, in theory, make it harder to accurately identify repeat and serial perpetrators and/or victims.

*“Everything will be verified to the location. When we are searching for incidents in the future, it is a powerful tool in relation to searching for incidents at a location but not necessarily in relation to a person. If you move to another address and 12 months down the line ring in and say you have been a victim, we wouldn’t automatically identify then that you had previously been a victim unless we specifically asked the question.... If each force is operating on different systems and defining serial abuse in different ways, it adds another layer of complexity.”*

Whilst all forces conducted analyses of perpetrator records and prioritised high risk individuals on their systems, each force applied different criteria to achieve this. Regardless of the approach and/or recording system used to identify these offenders, individual level record analysis was still required in each force area to extract demographic and socio-economic details of offenders and their victims, together with their history of prior offending/victimisation in order to support any detailed profiling exercise of perpetrators and their victims.

The Wales Probation Trust utilise the Delius case recording system across England and Wales. This unified approach facilitates cross-border communication and tracking of individuals’ data. However, whilst the system has the facility to attach a substantial amount of domestic abuse related information, (including the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment, SARA) to each individual case record and subsequently flags an offender as

a DV perpetrator, the system does not currently highlight which of these perpetrators are serial.

Further, the extent of victim related information attached to each perpetrator varied according to the individual entering the data, and it was often not possible to determine the number of different, previous victims associated with each perpetrator. These constraints therefore make any attempt to accurately determine the number of *serial* perpetrators on licence and serving community sentences very difficult, if not impossible.

Staff interviewed in the voluntary agencies and Health relied principally upon disclosures made by clients through the assessment process, information and intelligence shared with partner agencies either through the formal MARAC process, through the Domestic Abuse Conference Call (Gwent only), or through informal day to day contact and intelligence-sharing with Police and other partners to identify serial perpetrators. However, none of the agencies interviewed had any standardised flagging procedure in place to systematically identify serial perpetrators.

## 4.3 Risk Assessment

All four forces utilised the DASH<sup>30</sup> risk assessment tool to grade domestic abuse incidents as Standard, Medium or High risk. In the main, completed DASH forms were sent to the Public Protection Units (PPU) across each force area, along with the respective PPU forms<sup>31</sup> for staff to confirm the incident had been correctly classified as a domestic, for risk grading and action planning to be undertaken and referrals made to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and/or support services as appropriate.

*“The domestic will then go to the Domestic Abuse Officer (DAO) and the legal mail Domestic Incident Notification (DIN) generated from the Crime Recording Bureau (CRB) will go to the DAO. The DAO will then make sure that all safety measures are in place and all necessary actions and referrals have taken place. If its high risk they refer to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA)... If it’s a medium risk and the DAO thinks it is a high risk, they can increase the risk... We check all domestic incidents every day. PPU tags are the only tags officers can’t remove as it is such a specialist area.”*

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<sup>30</sup> Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH 2009) risk assessment model. Every force reported implementing a policy of ‘no discretion’, requiring DASH forms to be completed for every domestic incident attended.

<sup>31</sup> Domestic Incident Notification (Dyfed Powys), Public Protection Notification (South Wales), CID 16 (North Wales).

In South Wales however, PPU staff supported dedicated 'risk assessors' in place at the divisional level to undertake this task, thus freeing up the Domestic Abuse Officers within PPU to assist investigating officers across the force, (the hub<sup>32</sup> and in the Criminal Investigation Department, CID) by undertaking more of a 'tactical advisory' role.

Regardless of the process in place, interviewees across all force areas reported improvements in the routine completion of the domestic abuse risk assessment forms for each occurrence. In the event that any forms had not been submitted by the attending/investigating officers, the routine checking of all Domestic abuse incidents by PPU staff would ensure omissions were identified and followed up with the relevant officer. Despite these improvements, concerns were raised that the recent change to the domestic abuse definition in April 2012, has led to some officers complaining that the DASH Risk Assessment tool was no longer fit for purpose for all domestics.

*"The DASH tool was based on intimate partner violence, but if you look at the new definition, it caters for far more than intimate partners such as sibling on sibling, arguments that get out of hand, so officers are saying DASH isn't fit for purpose for all domestics so there then becomes some confusion around how to use it. They quite often put on there that the victim has refused to complete the DASH process."*

Moreover, the suitability of completing a DASH Risk Assessment for all domestic incidents attended was also raised as an issue, along with the need for more specialist training in domestic abuse force-wide, particularly in relation to handling the non-violent 'verbal disputes' officers were frequently called to.

*"So we need to put some training on. The College of Policing have only just put together now a package on domestic abuse and public protection issues, but I don't think even that addresses the detail that it needs to around how to deal with those lower end domestic abuse incidents. When you look at the media, they usually show the females victim attacked 35 times on average and pulled around by her hair and beaten up by her husband. With those kinds of cases I would have confidence that we would deal with that quickly, charge them and they will end up before the court. It is the cases where the couple have separated, agreed to go their separate ways and there is some dispute over property, so the police get called to prevent a breach of the peace. If we turn up to start doing a DASH Risk Assessment to prevent a breach of the peace, it doesn't seem right."*

All forces also undertook a daily briefing process, (the format of which, varied slightly across the different force areas) to review all incidents referred to the PPU teams during the previous 24 hours. Therefore, as PPU staff were mainly responsible for finalising the risk assessment and grading of domestic incidents, the degree of error should be minimised, and recording carried out as systematically as possible by restricting the number of individuals closing occurrences on the systems.

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<sup>32</sup> 'The hub' performs the bulk of the investigative/interviewing policing role for the South Wales force.

*“Once Public Protection Referral Form comes in to PPU, staff are trained to redefine on NICHE, they have the ability to finalise what the occurrence is recorded as. With such a large force, it’s easier to train a small group to do it rather than everyone.”*

Several interviewees also went on to highlight the importance of identifying serial abusers in order to be able to accurately assess risk and subsequently increase the risk grading for this group of perpetrators:

*“The Domestic Abuse Conference Call in the morning, it is like a mini MARAC and we discuss the histories of the perpetrators and that will pick up the serial perpetrators so we can reassess the DASH risk grading at the end of the call. Once we have done the research for the call, we may find out the perpetrator has a long history of abusing different women and so is serial, which will boost the risk.”*

*“I just think there needs to be more of a knowledge and understanding around serial abuse and the impact serial abuse can have upon your risk assessment, if you are not considering serial or repeat abuse in the risk assessment well you are getting only one side of the picture. You could be getting no risk indicators on the DASH form, but for me serial abuse would heighten that risk.”*

The need for frontline officers, call-room staff and partners in the community to have speedy access at the first point of contact to detailed information and risk data regarding perpetrators and their victims to better identify repeat and serial perpetrators/victims was also emphasised:

*“Providing officers and other staff, maybe Health staff access to information in quick time that assists them in making early decisions might help...How do we provide front-end practitioners with a well-informed summary of everything that has been going on? If you are in A and E, or if you are a responding officer you might not have time to do research into the background of that victim or that perpetrator. So to what extent would some form of a Risk Assessment tool that has already been considered by partners and easily accessible, how much would that help?”*

These views echoed recommendations made in the recent HMIC review of the police response to domestic abuse, which stated that,

*“The College [of Policing] should urgently consider the current approach to risk assessment with others, such as practitioners in forces, academic experts and organisations supporting practitioners and victims. It should make an assessment of the sufficiency of the tools that frontline officers are given to assess risk, and of the training they receive in connection with risk assessment.”*

The Missing Children’s Risk Assessment Framework, (used by the Missing Children’s team in the Gwent force area) was highlighted as an example of a multi-agency tool providing police and practitioners with access to multi-agency data, and which could usefully be adapted for use in identifying and risk assessing serial perpetrators of abuse;

*“It [Missing Children’s team] is a multi-agency co-located team. They produce risk assessments<sup>33</sup> incorporating information from Police Social Services, Education, and Health. It is all put into one risk assessment and practitioners can access that via Share-point, whether they are a social worker or a care worker in a residential facility, they can access that and take action accordingly. That’s potentially a way we could look to approach domestic abuse and tackling repeat victims and serial perpetrators is by having a specialist multi-agency approach to producing a risk assessment for officers who are dealing with that perpetrator or that victim.”*

The need to be able to capture prolific individuals offending at a lower level of severity was also highlighted by one officer who commented that:

*“I’ve still got a concern around if someone stays low level and continues to offend and abuse but at a low level, then because their risk isn’t high then they’re probably not featuring on people’s radar as they should.”*

These issues were also raised by staff in partner agencies. One individual expressed concern that the DASH Risk Assessment tool focused attention on the more serious, high end level of domestic abuse perpetration and there was a need to also take account of prevalence of previous offending, regardless of severity.

*“We need to identify historical perpetrators against multiple victims. CAADA DASH can capture high risk, but it is more about not high risk incidents, but those who have history. We need to be able to identify a history of perpetration.”*

These concerns echo findings from an earlier review of the way serial and repeat domestic abuse perpetrators are dealt with (ACPO, 2009), which noted that as MARACS are, on the whole, limited to managing the highest risk cases, low and medium risk victims (and perpetrators) receive less intervention. Report recommendations included expanding MARACs to include a wider spectrum of risk and also those cases where the victim did not know if the offender had abused previous partners.

However, forces reported that they did have policies in place to ensure MARAC referrals were made for cases where multiple incidents had occurred in the previous 12 months, regardless of the severity of the individual incidents. The threshold for referral however, was reported to differ across the force areas, and also according to the individual MARACs within force areas.

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<sup>33</sup> The Missing Incident Risk Assessment Framework.

## 4.4 Proposed serial perpetrator assessment

One of the key objectives of the current research is to develop a systematic process of identifying and assessing serial domestic abuse perpetrators. At the outset of the research, it was proposed that this could be achieved by developing a 'screening tool' for use by Probation, and potentially Police and other partner agencies. Interviewees were asked how they thought such a tool might usefully be implemented, the implications of using such a tool and how any resulting data could be shared and utilised to effectively tackle offending.

Police officers' perceptions of the proposed tool to assess and identify serial perpetrators of abuse were mixed. Whilst the majority of those interviewed felt such a tool would assist them in targeting serial offenders, concerns were raised that implementing such a tool may, perversely, heighten the risk for some victims by antagonising alleged perpetrators.

*"How would it be implemented? At the moment if someone was arrested today, would the officer pick them up as a serial offender? I don't think I'd be comfortable with it. If you have a high risk perpetrator, by doing a screening tool with them are you going to aggravate them and increase the risk for the victim? Any involvement with the offender has to be risk assessed to make sure you aren't making it worse for the victim."*

Respondents interviewed in third sector agencies were very supportive of the proposed tool, and saw it as a way for voluntary sector agencies, many of whom work principally with victims, to increase their knowledge and intelligence of perpetrators. As one interviewee highlighted:

*"A screening tool is definitely needed. We run the risk of missing people through intelligence or mis-representing people, such as who is the victim and who is the offender? Their history needs to be known by people providing support and advocacy services".*

The potential for the screening tool to be used as the basis for an action plan to address the offending behaviour of all perpetrators, (regardless of whether or not they had been convicted of a crime) was highlighted during interviews, thus further emphasising the need for there to be more perpetrator-focused community based interventions operating outside of the remit of the CJS.

*"The way I see it working for the Police, in the sense of if they're flagged up... let's concentrate on this individual, as MARAC is probably doing for action planning for a victim, it's almost your perpetrator MARAC then, because the screening tool would inform that, and you're saying right perpetrator, here are your actions, and Health, Local Authorities, Police you all have roles."*

*"There's nothing to stop us saying to a perpetrator that you will comply with a,b,c and if you don't there is the potential for this. This isn't threatening, it's building an*

*action plan for a particular individual, and some will be compliant, some will want to comply. If we get them early enough....and this is where it's not all about serial perpetrators, it's all about intervention work... if you get them at age 21, 22 and first offence, building in some early intervention we can stop them being our serial perpetrators of the future."*

Others however, were sceptical of the extent to which perpetrators would voluntarily comply and engage with such interventions. Some suggested that whilst those arrested and convicted could be forced to comply with statutory programmes and licence conditions, perpetrators not processed through the Criminal Justice System could simply refuse to engage.

*"One of the things we found is unless they are on an order of some kind, it is very difficult to get some of these individuals to engage with you anyway and unless a crime has been committed, what enforcement can we use to get them to talk or engage with us?...The ones not on probation or under the radar, we can do the assessment but what enforcement can we use? What can we do? If there is nothing criminally, what enforcement do we have to make people engage?"*

Thus it became increasingly apparent that there was perceived to be a definite gap in the way perpetrators outside of the Criminal Justice System are dealt with; this combined with the current lack of voluntary perpetrator-focused initiatives in the community was believed to create a barrier in how agencies are able to effectively deal with un-convicted and lower level perpetrators of abuse.

*"If you identify something you have got to then do something about it and have the resources and additional support networks to deal with it. If we have a screening tool and we don't have the resourcing in place then the counter side is we are putting the problem in front of us and not doing anything with it."*

The need for the proposed tool to be able to categorise those identified as serial offenders and to distinguish between levels of risk, by incorporating a scale of perpetration was also emphasised by several of those interviewed.

*"He has **"serial perpetrator"** against his name, this has implications. We need detail of the behaviours that led to offending behaviour, and a context. We need levels in a screening tool to distinguish with the high end."*

In line with recommendations made by ACPO (2009) to improve the tracking and monitoring of domestic abuse perpetrators, it was suggested that serial abusers should be managed through a similar monitoring procedure to that used with violent and sex offenders. Specifically, serial domestic abuse perpetrators should be assigned as a category 3 MAPPA status, thereby widening the net and increasing the likelihood that serial abusers will be labelled as such and monitored accordingly.

*"There is the third category which I don't think we use enough of, which is the **'other dangerous'** and I think this is where serial DV perpetrators should go. That means they don't fall in to the categories of sex offenders or violence for 12*

months+. **'Other dangerous'** would be suitable because it doesn't depend on their conviction. It's about their behaviour."

Similar views were also echoed by force representatives, raising the possibility of designing the screening tool to mirror the Integrated Offender Management assessment matrix, which would be used inform a multi-agency decision and management process;

*"I'm picturing something similar to the IOM matrix so you assess them objectively against set criteria.....Practically in terms of how I would see it managed, if we identify a potential serial perpetrator, then it would be routed through the MARAC process as a high risk issue. Whatever the screening process looks like, it would have to be a multi-agency decision... The purpose would be to prioritise the limited multi-agency resources against the offenders who present the highest risk of harm, which is what we do already with MAPPA and so on. It would have to go through a multi-agency panel, such as MARAC where all agencies present their information and the panel decision would then be made as to whether the perpetrator meets the criteria for management and they could either be managed by a single agency at level 1 or by a multi- agency panel and levels 2 or 3."*

Members of the third sector also emphasised the potential benefits of incorporating data into the screening tool, which concerned individuals who were not domestic abuse perpetrators, but who exhibited characteristics associated with domestic abuse perpetration. It was, for example, suggested that individuals who do not have a history of domestic abuse perpetration, but who repeatedly exercise power and control over street sex workers need to be flagged as posing a risk to those they enter a relationship with. It was postulated that where possible, the identification and flagging of individuals who display 'risky' behaviour may play a key role in preventing as well as responding to serial domestic abuse. It was however recognised that this was dependent upon improved information-sharing between service providers and an agreed, consistent perception of notable behaviour which was seen to represent sufficient risk for inclusion.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

## 5.1 Summary of findings

This final section concentrates on those findings which appear to have the greatest implications for the effectiveness of the serial domestic abuse recording processes undertaken across Wales. The main issues identified during the course of the research will be outlined, as well as recommendations for practitioners, policy-makers and future research.

The profiling exercise indicated that the data currently held by Probation do not enable 'serial perpetrators' to be easily identified (there is not a 'flag' or existing item that consistently captures this information). Such information is likely contained within the files held on perpetrators, but this must be manually extracted. This qualitative information would then need to be translated into a 'serial' flag for each perpetrator. This requires a substantial time commitment that was not possible for this report, although will be a central component of phase two of the research.

Although an analysis of serial perpetrators could not be undertaken at this juncture, the data available on OASys and the SARA risk factors were analysed to indicate the demographic and risk profiles of convicted domestic abuse perpetrators in Wales. Findings indicated that the two systems used by Wales Probation Trust to identify perpetrators of domestic abuse generally are not used consistently across different types of perpetrators or across different areas in Wales. Furthermore there was also variation across Wales in terms of how many domestic abuse perpetrators were deemed to be 'high' risk (either on OASys or using SARA) and it cannot be ascertained whether this reflects a truly different prevalence of high risk perpetrators in certain areas, or different recording and assessment practices by those working in Probation. Both of these findings have implications for the feasibility of implementing a system for the routine identification of 'serial' domestic abuse perpetrators.

The qualitative evidence obtained for this report indicated that, whilst all Police forces have a definition for a serial domestic abuse perpetrator in place, each varies slightly. South Wales requires a threshold of three victims to be considered a serial perpetrator, whilst the definitions in the other three forces consider two or more victims as serial abuse. Gwent is the only force area not to impose a time limit within their definition. Both South Wales and North Wales focus upon incidents occurring over a twelve month period whilst Dyfed Powys considers incidents over a rolling three year period (although this is currently under review and may be amended to a two year rolling period).

The different recording systems and reporting processes in the Welsh forces undoubtedly impact upon the way serial abusers are identified, targeted and managed in

the different forces across Wales. The domestic abuse recording process is not uniform across Wales, and only one of the four Welsh Police forces focused upon extracting and identifying serial perpetrators specifically, using the agreed force definition. None of the forces utilised a specific 'serial' flag or code to explicitly demarcate these individuals on the crime recording systems. Officers in several forces acknowledged that without a specific automated flagging process for serial abusers in place, their identification would depend upon the extent to which individual officers interrogated the recording system.

There was not strong consensus across agencies regarding the utility of a screening tool for serial perpetrators. Police officers' perceptions of the proposed tool to assess and identify serial perpetrators of abuse were mixed, whereas third sector respondents were very supportive of such a tool, and saw it as a way for voluntary sector agencies, many of whom work principally with victims, to increase their knowledge and intelligence of perpetrators. Crucially, whilst there did appear to be a certain degree of confusion as to the benefits and practicalities of utilising a separate screening tool, all were of the view that there was a definite need to be able to assess and identify serial perpetrators on their systems, and that rather than developing a separate tool this could be more effectively achieved through the revision of existing assessments and recording systems.

The potential for the proposed assessment to be used as the basis for an action plan to address the offending behaviour of perpetrators, regardless of whether their offending has resulted in criminal convictions, was highlighted during interviews, thus further emphasising the need for there to be more perpetrator-focused community based interventions operating outside of the remit of the CJS.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

*Police, National Offender Management Service in Wales, and Third Sector partners*

- 1) Key agencies across Wales should work towards a commonly agreed definition of 'serial domestic abuse' and amend their recording systems so that these individuals may be 'flagged'.
- 2) Monitoring of the new definition and flagging system is strongly recommended, particularly as decision-making by Police and Probation will impact upon partner agencies.
- 3) If the development of a screening tool goes forward, this should be a multi-agency project, informed by data and expertise held across agencies (e.g. Police, Probation, and specialist domestic abuse organisations). Once developed, this tool should be piloted in a single area in Wales. This should be subjected to a rigorous evaluation before wider implementation takes place.
- 4) Amendments to existing assessments including the OASys and SARA assessments and DASH form (risk assessment of victims) should be considered (i.e., what is the value added from including an item to capture 'serial domestic

abuse?'). Any revisions to the existing assessments should be agreed and implemented on an all-Wales basis.

- 5) Consideration should be given to increasing the provision of community-based perpetrator programmes and services in order to 'break the cycle' of abuse.

#### *Police, National Offender Management Service in Wales*

- 6) Consideration should be given to the application of Integrated Offender Management (IOM) principles to the assessment, identification and management of serial domestic abuse perpetrators, in order to both inform a multi-agency management process and prioritise resources against those who present the highest risk of harm.
- 7) Management of those identified as 'serial domestic abuse perpetrators' needs to be consistent across Wales. The implications of routinely assigning such individuals a category 3 MAPPA status should be explored.

#### *National Offender Management Service in Wales*

- 8) To inform the creation of a new flag in OASys, NOMS in Wales should provide support for an empirical project to assess the feasibility of using the SARA risk factors and/or OASys or SARA risk judgments as proxies to indicate 'serial' offending.

#### *Third Sector Agencies*

- 9) The important role of third sector partners in identifying, assessing and sharing information on serial perpetrators must be emphasised. The adoption of one all-Wales definition of serial domestic abuse also should be taken forward by these agencies and their recording/reporting systems amended accordingly to flag relevant individuals. This information should be appropriately shared with partners as part of the safeguarding process.

#### *Youth Justice Board Cymru*

- 10) In light of the recent amendment (April 2013) to the definition of domestic abuse to also include individuals aged 16 and 17, recommendations for agencies to define, identify and manage perpetrators of domestic abuse should also be considered for implementation by the Youth Justice Board (YJB Cymru).
- 11) Careful consideration should be given to the merits of defining and identifying serial perpetrators of domestic abuse within the Youth Offending Service.
- 12) Phase two of the current research should explore the possibility of incorporating analyses of data held on systems within the Youth Justice Board, and if possible, Social Services.

- 13) The forthcoming Youth to Adult (Y2A) Transfer Protocol<sup>34</sup> to incorporate objectives to define, identify, assess and manage perpetrators (and serial perpetrators) of domestic abuse as they transition from the Youth Offending Service to Probation utilising local IOM arrangements.
- 14) Increased provision of targeted perpetrator programmes for young people (aged 16 and 17) in the YOS in addition to those aged under 21 serving a community sentence and identified as perpetrating domestic abuse.

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<sup>34</sup> The Youth to Adult (Y2A) Transfer Protocol has been developed to focus upon young people/adults as a specific group and to support the transfer of cases from Youth Offending Services (YOS) to Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru. This is jointly owned by NOMS in Wales and YJB Cymru.