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# Risk identification in cases of domestic abuse

Evaluation of a pilot project

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

The National Policing Reducing Bureaucracy Programme Board commissioned the College of Policing to evaluate a pilot project on police officers' use of discretion in relation to risk identification in cases of domestic abuse. Feedback from members of the Reducing Bureaucracy Practitioners Group suggested the national risk model for domestic abuse (the 'DASH') may not be appropriate or proportionate for some incidents classified as domestic abuse under the wide-ranging national definition.

The DASH model requires attending officers to undertake a twenty-seven question risk identification interview with the victim at all incidents of domestic abuse and submit a risk identification form. The theory underpinning the pilot was that if officers are permitted not to submit a risk identification form for incidents where they feel there is little or no risk of further harm, specialist units can direct resources toward the risk assessment and management of cases where the risk of harm is greatest.

Frontline officers in a division of a police force were given discretion as to whether to submit a risk identification form at incidents of domestic abuse. Prior to the pilot, officers were given a one-day training input on identifying risk, with a focus on coercive and controlling behaviour. Coercive control is a high risk and high impact form of domestic abuse that involves multiple abusive tactics and behaviours of which physical violence is only one. The importance of a course of coercive and controlling conduct as an indicator of risk is significant as research has shown police officers' conceptions of risk often prioritise high-level acts of physical violence and visible injuries when identifying risk.

A crucial element of the pilot was the notion that officers had discretion not to **submit** a risk identification form. The training emphasised that officers should still ask pertinent questions of both the potential victim and perpetrator, and be aware of any history and context surrounding the case. All cases were monitored by specialists in the force's public protection unit who tasked officers to re-attend and submit a risk identification form if it was considered necessary. This safeguard ensured victims were not placed at greater risk of harm during the pilot.

## Research Methods

The quality of officers' decision-making around risk was assessed for all incidents that occurred during the pilot through qualitative analysis of information held on police systems, including transcripts of the call to the police and officers' incident reports, and by direct observations of officers responding to domestic incidents.

The analysis of whether an officer's decision not to submit a risk identification form was supported by the circumstances of the incident and, crucially, the context and history of the case required a judgement. The analysis was performed by two researchers with subject knowledge of domestic abuse and who were familiar with the DASH model. All incidents that occurred in the first week of the pilot were double-coded to ensure consistency for the remainder of the analysis.

A random sample of cases was analysed for a three month period prior to implementation of the pilot in order to see whether officers already used to some extent their discretion not to submit a risk identification form.

## **Findings**

Officers were using their discretion not to submit a risk identification form prior to implementation of the pilot, but the pilot resulted in wider use of discretion. Prior to the pilot, DASH forms were not submitted for around one in every seven incidents. Following implementation of the pilot, the rate was nearer to one in every three incidents.

The evaluation criteria supported the officer's decision to not submit a risk identification form in one-third of cases; in another third of cases, the officer's decision was not supported. For the remaining cases, there was insufficient information on police systems to make a robust judgement as to whether a form should have been submitted. Where decisions not to submit a risk identification form were not supported, the explanations were associated mainly with a lack of understanding of coercive control and not considering the history and context of a case.

There were numerous examples of situations where having discretion not to submit a risk identification form is desirable, including incidents that were misclassified as domestic abuse, family and civil disputes where there is no coercive control, counter allegations made by primary perpetrators, demonstrably false and malicious reports, and cases best described as involving primarily mental health and/or social care issues.

## **Discussion and implications**

Though there are clearly instances where the DASH risk identification form is not appropriate, police officers' knowledge of coercive control needs to improve before discretionary use of the DASH model could be advocated without increasing the likelihood of high risk cases not being identified.

The pilot did raise questions about how the DASH model operates in practice. In particular, there is a question of how the volume of risk identification forms affects the amount of time that is devoted to risk assessment of specific cases. Following a recommendation by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), the College is undertaking research in three forces to establish how the DASH model is being implemented currently, and how a risk model may operate most effectively.

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# Acknowledgements

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Our thanks go to all police officers and staff in the pilot force who supported and assisted with the implementation of the pilot and the evaluation. Kelly Johnson (Durham University) made a huge contribution to fieldwork and data analysis. We would also like to thank Professor Liz Kelly (London Metropolitan University), Professor Betsy Stanko (MOPAC), and Davina James-Hanman for advice and support.

# 1. Introduction

In 2009, National Policing leads endorsed a standard risk model for domestic abuse for the police service in England and Wales: the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour-Based Violence risk identification, assessment and management model (DASH). DASH was developed by the National Policing Risk Management Expert Panel and was intended to ensure a consistent approach to risk between forces, other statutory agencies and charity/voluntary sector organisations.

The DASH is a risk management model based on structured professional judgement (SPJ) (see Bennett Cattaneo and Goodman 2007; Kropp 2008). Attending officers are expected to complete a twenty-seven question risk identification interview and submit a risk identification checklist (RIC) form for every domestic-related incident to which they respond. Guidance issued to forces states that 'part 2 risk assessment' should be performed by trained officers or staff for every case graded as 'medium' or 'high' (as opposed to 'standard') risk by the first responding officer (NPIA 2009). Measures to manage the risk of further abuse should be put in place following the identification and assessment of risk; in cases graded as high and in some cases medium risk, responsibility for risk management and safety planning with the victim rests most often with specialist public protection units.

The DASH model is used by 28 out of 43 police forces in England and Wales; ten forces use an adapted form of the model (HMIC 2014). Despite a recommendation from the National Policing Risk Management Expert Panel that DASH should be subject to evaluation, there has to date been no evaluation of implementation, or of the impact of the model on victim safety. It is not clear, for example, to what extent the DASH risk factors apply to incidents involving family members who are not intimate partners<sup>1</sup>, or how a risk management model incorporating SPJ operates in the context of the broad official definition of domestic violence and abuse (see Appendix 1).

## **Discretion, risk aversion, and reducing bureaucracy**

Discretion has been viewed by many as inherent and essential to police work (see for example Goldstein 1963; Klockars 1985). In recent years, however, official reports have suggested police discretion has been eroded by a process-driven culture of risk aversion (Flanagan 2007; RRAC 2009). Domestic abuse was highlighted by the independent Reducing Bureaucracy in Policing Advocate as an area where there was an "over-reliance on pre-prescribed risk assessments and rigid models" (Berry 2009: page 55), and this issue was discussed by the Reducing Bureaucracy Practitioners Group. Members of this group suggested the DASH RIC was disproportionate or not appropriate for some domestic-related incidents, and that the risk identification interview was undertaken by some officers in a 'robotic' way. It was also suggested that some officers viewed the DASH RIC primarily as a way of 'covering your back,' and that it mitigated against officers using their judgement and investigating reports thoroughly.<sup>2</sup> The Reducing Bureaucracy Programme Board commissioned a pilot project to explore encouraging greater discretion in risk identification at the frontline, with the aim of ensuring a proportionate response to all cases of domestic abuse and the targeting of resources at cases where risk of harm is greatest.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the development and potential limitations of DASH, see Robinson (2010).

<sup>2</sup> The College was represented at the Reducing Bureaucracy Practitioners Group when this issue was discussed.

## Coercive control

Coercive control has become a key concept in relation to police response to domestic abuse in England and Wales. In 2013, the Home Office changed the cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse to include specifically coercive and controlling behaviour (see Appendix 1). This definition was adopted by the police service. In addition, Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act (2015) introduced a new offence of 'controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship', defined as 'repeatedly or continuously [engaging] in behaviour towards another person ... that is controlling or coercive.'

Stark (2013: page 18) defines coercive control as 'a strategic course of oppressive conduct that is typically characterised by frequent, but low-level physical abuse and sexual coercion in combination with tactics to intimidate, degrade, isolate, and control victims'. Coercive control may be seen as the most high risk and high impact form of domestic abuse, associated with greater long-term physical and psychological injury, greater disruption to the working lives of victims, and greater interaction with external support services (see Myhill 2015).

Although many cases of coercive control involve significant and injurious physical violence, others are characterised by low-level but repeated coercion, or little or no physical violence. In some cases, the threat of violence in combination with surveillance and other tactics of intimidation are sufficient to allow perpetrators to exert almost complete control over a victim's life without recourse to physical violence. Indeed, reviews of domestic homicides have highlighted cases where there was little or no physical violence reported to the police preceding the homicide itself (see Regan et al. 2007).

The importance of coercive control as a risk factor for high harm domestic abuse and homicide is significant as studies of police officers' conceptions of risk suggest many prioritise high-level physical violence and injury when classifying cases as high risk (see Robinson et al. 2015). Due to the wide ranging nature of the official definition of domestic violence and abuse, it is highly likely that a proportion of incidents the police attend are not part of a pattern of coercive and controlling abuse. The success of the current pilot hinged then to a large extent on frontline officers' ability to identify dangerous patterns of abusive behaviour and recognise coercive control as being a form of domestic abuse that presents a heightened risk to the victim.

## The structure of the report

Chapter 2 of this report outlines briefly the pilot and the evaluation. Findings from the evaluation are presented in Chapter 3, and in Chapter 4 implications for policy and practice are discussed.

## 2. The pilot and the evaluation

The pilot was to test the impact of encouraging first responding officers to use their discretion as to whether to submit a RIC for incidents of domestic abuse. The pilot did **not** involve any other changes to the DASH model, such as changes to the questions on the DASH RIC.<sup>3</sup>

The basic theory behind the pilot was that:

- under the broad national definition of domestic violence and abuse, there are likely to be cases where the DASH RIC and risk model is not proportionate or appropriate; and
- if officers are encouraged not to submit a RIC where they feel there is little or no risk of further harm, specialist units can focus on cases where the risk of harm is greatest.

A crucial element of the pilot was the notion that officers had discretion not to **submit** a RIC. Training delivered prior to the pilot emphasised that officers should still ask pertinent questions of both the potential victim and perpetrator, and be aware of any history and context surrounding the case.

### Implementation and evaluation

The pilot was implemented in two phases in a medium-sized English police force area and was evaluated by the College. The phased approach was taken as not enough was known initially about how the DASH model operated in practice.

#### Phase 1

Phase 1 of the pilot was implemented in a northern district of the pilot force from March 23rd to May 17th, 2012. Responding officers were encouraged to use discretion as to whether to submit a RIC form, subject to certain caveats. A form was still required to be submitted if:

- an incident between current or former intimate partners involved a physical assault;
- where the incident was a repeat with the same victim and perpetrator; and
- where stalking or so called 'honour-based violence' was identified.

All first response officers were given a half hour verbal input from a specialist public protection Sergeant during a briefing prior to the start of their shift. This input focused on the dynamics of coercive control and how to recognise patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour.

Findings from a process evaluation of phase 1 informed both the design of the intervention for phase 2 and the design of the phase 2 outcome evaluation. Key implications from the phase 1 evaluation were that:

- Discretion (and trust in officers' professional decision-making) may not be as effective if it is subject to caveats. Having a caveat around physical violence, for example, may make some officers focus their risk judgements even more on violence and criminal offences, as opposed to considering the wider context.
- A longer training input may be required to make some officers aware of the dynamics of coercive control and how coercive and controlling behaviour should influence judgements around risk.

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<sup>3</sup> The pilot force uses the full 27 question DASH RIC.

Research methods and findings relating to phase 1 are presented in Appendix 2.

## Phase 2

Phase 2 of the pilot was implemented and evaluated in a different division of the pilot force between February 17<sup>th</sup> and May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Attending officers had full discretion as to whether to submit a RIC in respect of any domestic-related incident. Prior to the pilot, officers attended a one-day training course which refreshed their knowledge of the DASH model and focused on how to identify coercive and controlling behaviour. As a safeguard, officers in the force public protection unit monitored on a daily basis all domestic-related incidents during the pilot and tasked officers to re-attend and complete a RIC if they felt it was required.

College researchers reviewed all incidents that occurred during the pilot period and recorded the number of DASH RIC forms submitted. For incidents where a form was not submitted, the case was reviewed in-depth to come to a judgement as to whether a form should in fact have been submitted.

### Research methods

There were two key sources of data: data collected direct from force systems, and direct observations of officers attending domestic-related incidents.

**Data from force systems.** Researchers worked directly with the force Information Management System (IMS) to monitor incidents as they occurred in the pilot. All incidents that occurred between February 17<sup>th</sup> and May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014 were assessed. A retrospective assessment of the decision to submit or otherwise a RIC was made based on reviewing the circumstances of the incident, including a transcript of the initial call to the police and officers' crime and incident reports, and the history and context of the case (if there were previous occurrences recorded on IMS between the people involved). To determine context and history, records of previous incidents were accessed and interrogated, including previous crime and incident reports, and any previous RICs. For perpetrators or potential perpetrators, occurrences relating to previous intimate partners and/or family members were also examined.

The case review work was undertaken by two researchers with a good knowledge of domestic abuse and of the DASH risk model. Though the review work was undertaken as robustly as possible – all previous incidents recorded on the system were interrogated, for example, as sometimes occurrences that are domestic-related are not 'flagged' as such – there remained an element of subjective judgement. For the first week of the pilot, both researchers reviewed every case and resolved through discussion any differences of opinion regarding officer decision-making in order that judgements for the remainder of the pilot period were as robust as possible. Although force systems were interrogated thoroughly, there was not scope to utilise checks of the police national computer. For some cases, there was simply not enough information available to the researchers to make a judgement on the risk decision made by the attending officer.

**Direct observations.** A limited number of direct observations were undertaken to provide context to data collected from force systems. The researchers accompanied attending officers on patrol across fourteen shifts and observed officers dealing with domestic incidents. One day was spent in the control room observing call-takers, and two-days were spent with a central unit observing secondary risk assessment of domestic abuse cases. Finally, two days were spent accompanying public protection officers during which they undertook two separate 'safeguarding' visits to high risk victims of domestic abuse.

## 3. Phase 2 research findings

- Frontline officers used their discretion not to submit RIC forms to varying degrees prior to implementation of the pilot.
- The pilot increased the proportion of incidents for which forms were not submitted.
- There are a number of scenarios for which the DASH RIC form may be inappropriate or disproportionate.
- While there were some good examples of use of discretion, there were as many examples of officers deciding not to submit a form when a form should have been submitted.
- Some officers do not have currently a sufficient understanding of the dynamics of coercive control to make consistently good decisions relating to submitting a RIC.
- In particular, poor decisions tended to arise from dealing with cases on an incident-by-incident basis and/or not checking thoroughly the history and context of the case.

### Submission rates for DASH forms

A random sample of incidents from a three month period prior to implementation of the pilot was analysed to reveal the extent to which attending officers already used their discretion in relation to submitting a DASH RIC form. Incident numbers from all incidents that occurred in the three months prior to implementation of the pilot were randomised using the random number generator function in Excel. Researchers then worked down the randomised list until a sufficient number of cases had been analysed to create a statistically robust comparison.

Table 1 shows that, prior to the pilot, DASH RICs were not submitted for around one in every seven incidents. Following implementation of the pilot, the rate was nearer to one in every three incidents.

Table 1. DASH submission rates pre- and post-pilot

	<b>Pre-pilot (n=162)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Pilot (n=747)</b>
Not domestic abuse <sup>2</sup>	28	120
Domestic abuse	122	592
Duplicate occurrences <sup>3</sup>	7	23
Misclassified <sup>4</sup>	4	10
Out of force <sup>5</sup>	1	2
<b>Excluding cases that were not domestic abuse</b>		
	<b>n=134</b>	<b>n=627</b>
DASH RIC submitted	104	398
DASH RIC not submitted	30	229
Submission rate	<b>78%</b>	<b>63%</b>
<b>Excluding duplicate, misclassified and out of force occurrences</b>		
	<b>n=122</b>	<b>n=592</b>
DASH RIC submitted	104	397
DASH RIC not submitted	18	195
Submission rate	<b>85%</b>	<b>67%</b>

1. Based on a random sample of incidents in a three month period.
2. The sample was designed to include all possible cases, including domestic incidents that for whatever reason had not be 'flagged' as domestic-related on force systems.
3. Cases that were given two occurrence numbers then linked subsequently if, for example, they were reported by more than one person.
4. Cases that were flagged as domestic-related but on further investigation were found not to fall under the definition of domestic abuse, such as an incident involving somebody under the age of 16.
5. Incidents that involved victims and perpetrators from other police force areas.

## Quality of decision-making

Officers' decision-making was assessed qualitatively through analysis of information held on the force IMS. Though necessarily subjective to some extent, key criteria for consideration were whether there was a very clear first report to a call-taker that was contradicted by the victim upon attendance, and whether there was evidence of coercive and controlling behaviour either at the current incident or in previous incidents.

Officers' decisions not to submit a RIC were supported by the evaluation criteria in around one-third of cases where a form was not submitted. In one-third of cases the decision was not supported, and in a further third there was insufficient information on the context of the incident to make a robust judgement.

## Explaining decisions that were not supported

By far the largest determinant of whether a risk decision was supported was whether the attending officer(s) had considered and/or interpreted correctly the history and context to the specific incident to which they had been deployed, as opposed to considering only what had been reported during the current incident.

When officers are deployed to a domestic-related incident, they are usually provided with some indication of the history of calls to the address and information relevant to the people involved (if their identities have at that stage been established). Observations and interviews with both force control room staff and frontline officers suggested the quality and accuracy of this information is variable. In particular, officers were often given the number of previous calls, and perhaps whether they have involved violence, as opposed to any 'narrative' detailing the nature of the relationship and whether there is a primary perpetrator. Officers were generally informed of any 'warning markers' attached to the address or the individuals involved. These markers can signify that one person is at risk of abuse from another, but tend to be applied only once the abuse has escalated somewhat.

There was a clear tendency for some officers to base their assessment of risk of further harm solely on the circumstances of the incident to which they had been deployed. Several frontline officers expressed the view either during training or on observations that they do not have time to research extensively the background to each case to which they are deployed. The researchers found relevant information to be accessible in many cases, and much could be gleaned by reading previous RIC's and incident reports.

The following are case examples that were representative of incidents for which it was judged that a RIC should have been submitted.

A woman called to say that she and her husband had had an argument and she was afraid he was on his way to a police station to allege she had tried to strangle him (this report was never made). The attending officer noted that neither party disclosed any criminal offences, contrary to the initial call in which the woman mentioned 'pushing and shoving'. Not submitting a RIC was justified on the basis that the woman 'did not disclose any controlling concerns or coercive control.' There was, however, a previous occurrence for the couple on IMS, four months previously, in which the woman disclosed during the DASH interview significant jealous and controlling behaviour from the male, including preventing her from seeing her friends, blocking access to television, telephones and the internet, and refusing to sign divorce papers. The attending officer for that incident had graded the case as medium risk, noting the woman required support from the domestic abuse unit as a result of the man's 'extremely controlling and possessive' behaviour. Subsequent to the pilot period, the woman, after being physically assaulted, disclosed a number of sexual assaults by the male over the course of their relationship. The case was graded high risk and referred to a Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

A woman reported her ex-partner was outside their child's nursery and she was worried that he may 'kick off'. They had a verbal agreement in place for him to see the child, but he had not been in contact for two months. When requested by attending officers to do so the man left, saying he would contact his solicitor in relation to future

contact. Officer wrote: 'no [RIC] completed as this is not a domestic. This is a no crime.' Two months prior to this call, the man had been arrested for making threats over the telephone to kill the woman. There was a long history of violence and coercive control; the woman had stated previously that the man had choked her and self-harmed when she attempted to leave the relationship. The case had previously been referred to MARAC and the man had also breached a prior non-molestation order. A further order was obtained one month after the incident in question.

The example below is representative of how an officer might choose to deal with the incident specifically in a case that is ongoing and serious. Such cases often involve particularly vulnerable victims who, due perhaps to the longevity and severity of the abuse they have suffered, are reluctant to engage with the police and other support services. These cases are frustrating for frontline officers who may perceive submitting yet another RIC as futile when the level of risk is, or should be, very well known to all relevant agencies. There is, however, still value in submitting a form if the presence or absence of a RIC, graded at a specific level, triggers intervention by specialist units and/or referrals to other agencies.

A woman called to report her neighbours arguing outside their house stating that it has become a daily occurrence. Attending officer stated both the woman and the man involved had been spoken to and confirmed they had had a 'verbal only argument'. The incident report stated: 'no physical violence, no abuse and no controlling behaviour described on this occasion.' There was an extensive history of domestic abuse at this address from the man to both his partner and mother, including twelve calls to the address during the pilot period alone. The female reported at a subsequent incident that the male had choked her on more than one occasion, and had threatened or attempted suicide on numerous occasions.

Compounding the issue of lack of reference to the history and context of a case was the apparent lack of understanding of coercive control evident in some incident reports. There are numerous reasons why a victim may not wish to disclose to police the actual nature and level of abuse they are suffering, including the perpetrator's multiple threats and coercive tactics and a genuine fear of reprisals. Some officers, however, appeared to take at face value victims' explanations of what had occurred.

A woman reported her neighbours had been arguing for hours; the female was screaming because her partner wouldn't give her keys back or let her out of the flat. The attending officer noted that having spoken with the parties separately the woman was 'suffering from hormones' due to her pregnancy. She admitted that her partner 'received the brunt of her frustration and mood.' Both parties confirmed no criminal offences had taken place. The officer stated '[RIC] not completed due to no violence or threat of violence. This is just a verbal argument; there have only been two other verbal only domestics.' In fact, there was an occurrence two years previously in which the man had ripped the telephone cable out of the wall, pinned the woman down and taken her keys and mobile phone. He was arrested for common assault and criminal damage. In the RIC for this occurrence, the woman described him as controlling and stated that when her family visited she was not allowed to talk to them alone. She also said the male stated that if she left him he would kill himself. The man had a significant history of abuse against a former partner, including physical violence, false imprisonment and two reports of rape.

In other cases, there was a sense that the officer(s) understood that the victim was withholding, but were unsure how best to deal with it.

A woman calls to say that she thinks her next door neighbour is being beaten up. She can hear loud banging and screaming and it's 'getting quite bad now'. She says this happens a lot; she doesn't usually call the police, but somebody else does. IMS shows the woman is at medium risk of domestic abuse from her male partner – all calls should be treated as urgent. This incident was presented by the victim as an argument over whether she should sleep in a separate room as she was feeling unwell. The attending officer noted she was 'very cagey and not willing to engage with the police' and that a RIC was not submitted as a consequence. It was also noted that there were no signs of physical injury, or damage in the house. There were numerous previous and subsequent calls to the address, including for violent assaults. The case was referred to MARAC at the end of the year and a Domestic Violence Protection Order and exclusion order were served on the male. The couple's children were subject to an interim care order.

In such a case it would again be preferable to submit a RIC, graded as medium risk and with the officers' concerns about withholding explained, in order that the case receives consideration by a specialist unit.

Another key source of risk information which appeared often not to be considered was the perpetrator's offending history.

A woman called to say her brother was drunk and being violent towards his girlfriend; he had thrown her across the room and also grabbed her wrist. Attending officer noted there were 'no complaints or allegations' from the woman and that it had been a 'verbal only argument' prompted by the man having gone off with a friend during the evening and left his girlfriend to walk home alone. The fact that there were no offences confirmed or disclosed by the victim appeared to be the rationale for not submitting a RIC. There were no previous occurrences relating to this couple, but the male had a significant history of violence to other men involving weapons for which he had been imprisoned and subject to Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). His ex-partner described him as 'controlling'.

Another way in which attending officers may not recognise the presence of coercive control is if they are focused primarily on physical violence and other criminal offences. Many cases of coercive control involve high level physical violence. Some involve little physical violence, however, or are characterised by low-level but repeated physical coercion that is not immediately evident in terms of visible physical injury.

A woman called and was heard to say 'I have been assaulted, yes', before the line went dead. On call back, the woman sounded 'teary', but the call rang off again. The woman told the attending officer she had not been assaulted. When pressed about what she had said in her initial call, she said she was sorry and that she had 'overreacted'. The couple said they had been together a long time and were embarrassed about having called the police. They said everything would calm down and there would be no further problems. The officer stated: 'Everything in the address seemed in order and no-one had any visible injuries. With this in mind, a [RIC] is not going to be completed.'

Finally, there were a number of examples of where an officer might have used their discretion not to submit a form but decided against it. Interviews with officers suggested there may be a minority who did not wish to take the risk of not submitting a form, perhaps because they were not confident they would be supported by the force if there was subsequent harm to those involved. A handful of officers may have missed the pre-pilot training and briefings.

A woman calls, but no details are provided. Call was a result of her mother and sister arguing over her sister's young child. The child is on a child protection plan and has been placed in her grandmother's care due to her mother being in a relationship with a high-level drug dealer. The child's mother is frustrated that she cannot do as she wants with her child. She had packed a bag for the child. Though clearly an emotionally fraught situation, there was no suggestion in either the original call or the officers' report of any violence or abuse between the two women involved. The officer submitted a DASH however for the sisters' mother which detailed only that she was afraid her daughter may attempt to take the child away when she is not supposed to.

## Instances where use of discretion may be desirable

Analysis of individual cases from the pilot suggested several types of incident for which submitting a DASH RIC may be inappropriate or disproportionate.

It should be noted that these case examples were drawn from data on police systems, and where noted from direct observations of officers attending incidents. Without speaking directly with victims, it is not possible to be sure that there was no 'hidden' coercive element to the cases. Some of the examples presented below could be argued 'either way', and officers would have to ask pertinent questions before deciding that the case presented little or no risk of further violence or abuse.

The following examples are representative of themes that recurred in the data and reflect instances where it might be argued that the DASH model is disproportionate or not the most appropriate response. Some of the examples could be seen as illustrative of more than one of the categories (for example 'mental health' and 'social care', or 'primary perpetrator' and 'false or malicious report').

### Interpreting the definition: Who is involved?

Due to its non-statutory status, the official definition of domestic abuse requires interpretation. One area for interpretation is whether the people involved in the incident are related or involved with each other in a way that could sensibly be regarded as representing domestic abuse. So for example a fight between an unmarried man and his partner's father might be considered domestic abuse if the relationship is long-term, but not if they rarely have contact or have known each other for a matter of weeks. Due to this requirement for interpretation, and the potential for simple misunderstanding or human error, some incidents classified as 'domestic-related' at first report will turn out not to fit the official definition following further investigation.

A woman called to say that her 14-year-old son was 'kicking off' and refusing to go to school. She had been warned that she would be fined if her son did not attend school and she didn't know what to do.

A woman reported her female cousin had left abusive comments about her on Facebook. The women lived in different towns and did not appear to have regular face-to-face contact.

A woman called to report her female partner's father was outside behaving aggressively. The woman had apparently told her mother that her partner's father had telephoned her and told her to stay away from his daughter; her mother had referred to the man as a c\*\*\* and told her daughter to tell him not to contact her again. This information was relayed. The man denied having made the phone call and said he had gone to the house to prove his innocence with telephone records. Before he could do so, he said his daughter's partner told him to 'f\*\*\* off'. He claimed he was not acting

aggressively and was simply concerned for his daughter. His daughter had been left money when her mother died and he was concerned that she would waste the money with her partner. The man's daughter was not present during this incident.

### **Interpreting the definition: Is it abusive?**

Call takers and attending officers are also required, in line with the national definition, to interpret whether what has occurred between two people in an intimate relationship, or between family members, is inherently threatening or abusive. In certain instances, a first report which sounds like abusive behaviour, and is classified as domestic abuse, may turn out not to be after further investigation.

A man called to report a verbal dispute that followed a comment he made to his ex-partner in the street, in the presence of her new boyfriend. The officer in charge noted that the male and his ex-partner were both well known to the police, and that following their break-up both had frequently reported each other to the police over incidents that were described as 'petty'. An example was where the same man called the police to report verbal abuse after his ex-partner and her new boyfriend shouted 'nice scooter, granny wheels' as he drove past them on his moped.

A woman called the police to say that her father was causing issues and throwing things at family members. He had been drinking, but was not drunk. When officers arrived, it was clear that the aggressive behaviour was the prelude to an epileptic seizure. Paramedics were also worried that the man may have suffered a heart attack. The officer asked the man's wife about previous violence and coercive and controlling behaviour and was assured by her and other members of the family that there was no history of violence or abuse.

A woman called the police to report that her 18-year-old son had purchased over £200 of items through his PlayStation using her bank account details and without her knowledge. She did not want to make a formal complaint, but she wanted her son spoken to. The matter was dealt with by community resolution; the son agreed to pay his mother back the money and the PlayStation was sold.

### **Family disputes**

Some cases of domestic abuse between family members who are not intimate partners follow a pattern of coercion and control similar to that in some intimate partner relationships, or they may involve serious and repeated acts of violence. Some incidents involving family members appear though to be less serious, or to be 'one-off' or infrequent disputes, fights or episodes of abusive behaviour.

A man called the police during an argument with his 50-year-old daughter. He said he had asked her to leave and she refused. He said she was being abusive and he was afraid she may become violent; he also said he was 'holding himself back' and had not hit her 'yet'. When police arrived, the daughter had left the premises. Attending officers established that the man's wife looked after their daughter's dog as well as the couple's own dog. The man had not reacted well to his daughter's suggestion that the couple's dog had mange, and suggested his daughter look after her own dog. His wife confirmed she was happy to look after her daughter's dog. She also said it was unlikely that her husband and her daughter would see each other for a while because when they argue they are both stubborn and refuse to back down.

A woman called the police to say that her brother had hit her in the face. By her own admission, the woman was assaulting her brother's wife when her brother intervened;

she said he grabbed her hair and 'ragged' her about and in so doing hit her on the side of the head. Her brother said he only pushed her away from his wife with open palms. Numerous other family members were present. The siblings parents declined to make a statement, but said their son was defending his wife.

A man called to say his 20-year-old step-daughter refused to go to work today and an argument ensued. He said that during a previous argument she had pinned her mother against the wall and he was worried the present incident may escalate. It was clear to attending officers that the woman's mother and stepfather were concerned about their daughter's lifestyle, choice of friends and lack of commitment to her job. Her stepfather admitted calling the police as much as anything to 'call her bluff'.

## **Civil disputes**

Although there is a closing code for 'civil dispute' in the National Standard for Incident Recording, the national definition of domestic violence and abuse should 'override' the classification if the parties involved are covered by the definition.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it would be a risk if call-takers in force control rooms allocated incidents that were potentially domestic-related as 'civil disputes', based on the sometimes limited information available at the first point of contact. It is likely therefore that some incidents which are primarily civil disputes as opposed to abusive in nature are classified as domestic abuse, and officers deployed.

Some incidents that are ostensibly civil disputes are in fact deeply problematic. Child contact, for example, is used frequently by abusers as a means to continue to exert control over an ex-partner (Coy et al. 2012). It is possible, however, that a proportion of incidents reported to the police that involve disputes over child contact occur outside of a coercive and controlling context. Similarly, a proportion of property disputes between family members or former intimate partners likely occur outside of the context of coercive control.

A man called the police when his ex-partner refused to hand over their children for court-mandated contact after she found out he had breached their agreement by drinking a can of beer in their presence. The woman agreed subsequently to let her ex-partner take the children as planned. The attending officer concluded there was no abusive behaviour evident. There was no record of either party on force systems.

A woman called the police to say that during a handover of property her ex-partner had taken from her house a 'tablet' device that she had bought for her son's birthday. When the call-taker advised her to contact the Citizen's Advice Bureau, she reported having received threatening text messages from the man. The attending officer noted that the item was in fact a 'Kindle' and the woman's child was less than four years old and unlikely therefore to be able to use it. The officers deemed the text messages not to be threatening in nature; the male stated simply that he believed the item was his as the woman had given it to him for his birthday a couple of weeks previously. The officers stated that although the woman had proof of purchase the man had a credible explanation for having taken the item.

## **Situational violence or 'fighting'**

There is increasing acceptance that not all violent and abusive acts between intimate partners occur in the context of coercive control. Some domestic-related incidents may be prompted by 'situational' factors, including the stresses and strains of everyday life. Stark (2007) has referred to these types of occurrence as 'fighting', and acknowledges that some degree of

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<sup>4</sup> Personal correspondence with the National Crime Registrar.

emotional abuse and non-injurious physical violence is present in many relationships and families. It may not be common for this type of abuse to be reported to the police, but it is possible that some proportion is, including by third parties (see below).

A call was received from a man saying that his girlfriend wouldn't let him leave the house. She was heard to say 'I want to sort this out'; the man said repeatedly 'get off me' before the line cleared. The attending officer found two 18-year-olds who had broken up earlier that day. The female's parents were at the address. When the man had tried to leave, the woman, who wanted the relationship to continue, had grabbed the man and tried to pull him back into the house. The man had pushed the woman and she had dragged him to the floor. The man complained of an injury to his arm; the woman had a small bruise on her leg. Neither wanted to make a complaint, and both said there had been no previous violence.

A woman called the police to say that her daughter-in-law had come home very drunk and was throwing herself around the flat. Attending officers established that the woman's son and his partner had come to stay, along with their two month old daughter. The woman's daughter-in-law had gone out with friends, while her son stayed at home with the baby. When the daughter-in-law returned she could barely stand, but wanted to sleep next to the baby. Her partner felt this was not safe and asked her to sleep elsewhere. They had a heated argument as a result. By the time officers attended, the situation had calmed down. The daughter-in-law was being given water and coffee to help sober her up. Her partner said she rarely drank and he had never seen her like that before. They both said they have a happy, stable relationship. The man's mother said she called the police out of concern that the situation would escalate.

A call was received from a woman who was crying and stated that her mum just tried to hit her. A woman is heard in the background saying 'I want you out' before the call is terminated. On callback, the woman said things had calmed down and the police were not required. Attending officers described 'typical problems with having a teenager'. The mother said her daughter did not contribute anything to the household and stayed out until the early hours before coming home and waking people up. That day she had grabbed her daughter's bedding; her daughter said she felt that her mother might hit her, but stated that she did not. There may have been some 'pushing and shoving' as they both grabbed the bedding. Neither wanted to make a complaint of assault.

### **Technical/administrative**

There were examples of where submitting a DASH RIC would not have provided any further relevant information and would likely not have been an effective use of time for either the officer or the victim.

A woman called the police to report that she was receiving harassing phone calls and emails from her ex-partner, despite her making a complaint to the police about the unwanted contact earlier in the day. When she made her first complaint, several hours before her second, officers completed a RIC and advised the woman that they would get in touch with her ex-partner and instruct him to cease all contact with her. The second complaint was made before the original attending officers managed to contact the man to discuss the original complaint. Although technically the officers attending the second incident were required to submit another RIC they decided not to do so, providing the following rationale: '...other than this call and some further emails, nothing had changed since we last attended.'

A woman called the police to report harassment from her ex-partner. Officers were deployed and a DASH RIC submitted. Two hours later the woman's counsellor, to whom she had also disclosed the abuse, contacted the police to report it. Different officers were deployed and the incidents were linked subsequently on the IMS. The second attending officers established with the woman that she had had no contact from her ex-partner in the period between deployments and that she had nothing to add to the initial risk assessment.

### **Primary perpetrators**

There were numerous examples of incidents reported by men who, based on the history of the case detailed on police systems, were very likely the primary aggressor in the relationship. Indeed, threats and malicious reports are recognised tactics of coercive controlling abusers, designed to discredit their partner. In some instances, including those presented below, it may be more appropriate for the attending officer to conduct a risk identification interview with the (ex) partner, as opposed to the person reporting.

A man called the police to report that someone had broken into his flat. On arrival, officers noted the flat was in disarray, but that valuable items were lying in open view. The man said he thought his girlfriend might have been responsible. Several neighbours reported they heard the male arguing with his girlfriend earlier in the day. When officers asked the man about this argument, he became aggressive and insisted they leave. The officers stated they suspected that the man had ransacked the flat himself to try and avoid the repercussions of an earlier domestic incident. Shortly after the man made the report, the police were called to a separate incident where his girlfriend had disclosed to her landlord that her partner had assaulted her during an argument. The man had an extensive history of domestic abuse against multiple partners.

A man who is a serial domestic abuser called police to say that his ex-partner had added comments on Facebook to a photograph of him and his friend. The comments included 'I've upgraded' and that she was very happy in a new relationship. The man stated that he believed his ex-partner was doing this to 'wind him up' in order that he breach a non-molestation order she had against him. He also claimed she had 'unblocked' him from viewing her Facebook page so that he could see the comments.

A man called the police to say that when he returned his one-year-old daughter to his ex-partner there were males and females sleeping on the sofa and empty bottles of alcohol lying around. He said he was not happy and did not want to return home without a welfare check taking place. On arrival, officers found only his ex-partner and one other female. The woman said her ex-partner does not like her being around other men and was controlling when they were together. She said she had had friends to stay, but they had left when her daughter was returned. The attending officer stated that the call to police appeared to be prompted by the fact that the woman had men in her house as opposed to a genuine concern for the welfare of the child (the officer noted the child had been returned in dirty clothes and with dirty feet). The man made a subsequent allegation that the woman smoked cannabis in the house, but this also could not be substantiated.

### **No incident has occurred on this occasion**

In some cases where there was a history of domestic abuse, and where risk assessments had been conducted previously and support offered, a call was made despite no specific incident having occurred and there having been no change to the victim's circumstances.

A woman reported that her ex-partner had broken his bail conditions by contacting her about child contact. When officers arrived, it emerged that the woman's ex-partner had actually contacted her friend to arrange child contact, as had been agreed by police and social workers. The man did not ask the woman's friend to pass on a message, or mention her at all in their conversation. Officers noted that there was a long history of abuse from the man to the woman, but that on this occasion no incident had occurred. They concluded it would be unnecessary to conduct a further risk assessment, and advised the woman to contact her support worker if she needed further reassurance.

A man requested police attendance while he collected his belongings from an ex-partner, to prevent a breach of the peace from occurring. The man had a long history of committing domestic harassment and assault. The attending officer collected the items of property from the ex-partner while the man stayed in his vehicle.

### **No evidence to suggest (ex) partner was responsible**

A number of reports were made during the pilot by people who suspected their (ex) partner of having done something but where there was no proof that it was the case. In some of these instances, particularly where there is a history of abuse and harassment, the balance of probability might be that the accused person was responsible. In other cases, it might be possible to rule out their involvement.

A woman called to say that a stone had been thrown at her house from a passing car. When asked if she knew who might have been responsible, she said the only person she could think of was her ex-partner. She was not sure why he would have done it, however.

A woman reported she had received a number of phone calls from unknown men. When she asked one caller how he had obtained her number, he said that it was written on the wall in some public toilets saying 'ring this number for sex'. The woman said she had no proof, but it was the kind of thing that her ex-partner would do.

### **No recent contact**

In some cases, a victim may come into contact with an ex-partner or family member some months or even years after abuse has occurred. In such cases, some of the DASH questions are redundant, and other data will not have changed since previous risk assessments. In some instances, the reporting person just wanted to 'flag' the incident in case there was further contact.

A woman contacted the police because the previous day she awoke to find her ex-husband ringing the doorbell in the middle of the night. She told him she was going to call the police, and he left. The woman said she had no idea why her ex-husband came to her house and had not heard from him since. Prior to this incident, she had not spoken to him for more than eighteen months, and for several years prior to that they communicated only about child contact arrangements. Although there was a history of domestic abuse, the woman explained that their marriage ended more than twelve years ago and she had experienced no issues with her ex-husband since their separation. She stated that her family had persuaded her to call the police to make them aware of what happened in case it was to happen again.

A man agreed to receive a letter from his natural mother who he had not seen for sixteen years. He was upset by the content of the letter and the past history it described. He sent a text to his mother saying he wanted no further contact from her. He received subsequently two texts from his mother, one saying that other family

members had 'poisoned' him against her and the other saying she intended to visit him with his two stepbrothers who he does not know. The man said he found this contact upsetting and was afraid the situation may escalate. He subsequently accepted the communications were not threatening. His mother was advised that further contact with her son would amount to harassment, which she accepted.

### **False or malicious reports**

It is likely that, as with rape and sexual assault, the proportion of entirely false or malicious reports of domestic abuse is small. There is likely to be some proportion, however, whether it be people trying to punish other people in some way or make trouble for them, or because they perceive some advantage to themselves in the police becoming involved, or for some other reason.

A teenager and her boyfriend had taken an overdose the previous night and her mother said the boyfriend was no longer allowed to stay at the house. The teenager admitted making a false allegation of assault against her mother because she was angry and wanted to get her into trouble.

A woman left her house after a family argument. She was found by members of the public collapsed and semi-conscious in an alleyway. At some point, the woman mumbled that she had been assaulted, but would not provide further details. The woman was a long-term alcoholic; she smelled strongly of alcohol and was dressed in running clothes. When interviewed the next day, she said she could not remember anything that had happened. As her injuries were not consistent with having been assaulted, investigating officers concluded the most likely explanation was that she had fallen whilst running.

A man called the police to say he had received obscene picture messages from his ex-wife of her and another man. He said he had not asked for these messages and asked his solicitor to write to his ex-wife requesting she stop sending them, which she did. Officers noted the man seemed very keen his wife be arrested in advance of a child custody hearing. When interviewing his ex-wife, officers were shown messages from the man requesting the pictures be sent and asking also for a video.

### **Third party reports**

In a majority of cases, third parties, such as family members, neighbours, or professionals, are well placed to identify and report abuse. In certain cases, however, the person reporting may have misinterpreted the events they have witnessed or heard. It is also possible that some reports may be prompted more by ongoing tensions between neighbours than by a concern for welfare.

A neighbour called to report loud banging and signs of a disturbance at the next door flat. The female occupant of the flat was shown as being at medium risk of domestic abuse from her ex-partner. The attending officer reported that the woman and her teenage son both said they had not had contact with her ex-partner for around six months. The son and his two friends confessed to having had a noisy play-fight.

A woman called the police to report a female and her 16-year-old son in the flat upstairs 'shouting . . . and throwing things at each other.' She said they had woken up the young children in neighbouring flats. The caller said she had spoken with the woman about this type of behaviour previously and was met with 'a mouthful of abuse.' She said she had had enough and that if she went up there she would 'thump the bitch.' When officers attended, the woman said immediately 'I bet it was her

downstairs', and explained there were issues between the pair regarding complaints about noise. It appeared the woman's son had attempted to strip some wallpaper using white spirit and this had made the house smell. The officer concluded that the woman was likely telling her son off 'lawfully' and that the complaint was prompted largely by the issues between the neighbours. The 16-year-old was known to the police for anti-social behaviour, but there was no record of domestic abuse between mother and son.

A man called the police to say he thought there was a domestic going on in the garden of a nearby house; a man was complaining about hanging the washing out and using disgusting language in front of children. When asked if it was just the noise he was complaining about he said no, there was an argument between them and he would like police attendance to calm things down. Attending officers found the household calm. Both parties when spoken to separately said they were annoyed with each other when discussing who would hang the washing out, but that it wasn't even really an argument. There had been no previous calls to the address.

## **Mental health**

Although case histories suggest survivors of coercive control may develop alcohol or substance abuse problems and/or mental health conditions as a result of the abuse they suffer (see for example Stark 2007), a small number of cases that come to the attention of the police will involve unrelated, or pre-existing, mental health conditions. These may be associated with either violent offending and/or false reports, prompted by some form of psychosis.

Following a very brief call to police where all that could be heard was possibly a woman crying, officers found a man in his early 20s having a psychotic episode. His father reported that his son thought that people were trying to kill him and he was making similar threats in response. The attending officer described the man coming out of the house 'in a bit of a frenzy'. He was detained under the Mental Health Act. A vulnerable adult form was completed.

An elderly woman called the police saying that her husband was trying to kill her, before hanging up. On callback, her husband answered and said that his wife had Alzheimer's and sometimes makes strange phone calls. He put his wife back on the phone and she stated again her husband was trying to strangle her; the call-taker noted they could hear her husband speaking some distance from the phone. Attending officers spoke with the woman and she was unable to articulate basic details such as the day and date. She was hostile about her husband and said he couldn't be trusted and was putting on a show for the officers. She also said that her husband had 'whacked her' earlier in the day, but said subsequently that it was at various other times. There were no visible signs of injury. Officers spoke at the scene with the woman's GP who said such allegations are symptomatic of advanced dementia. They also spoke by telephone with the couple's daughter who said she had no concern whatsoever about her father's treatment of her mother.

## **Social care issues**

For some incidents recorded as domestic abuse that involve a dispute or physical assault some form of social care intervention may be more appropriate than a criminal justice sanction, or domestic abuse intervention.

A social worker contacted police to log an incident. An elderly man had called social services to say that he was not coping in caring for his mentally ill wife. During the conversation the man broke down and confessed to slapping his wife once in the face

out of frustration, after she had trodden her excrement through the house for the third time that day. The man was very tearful and upset, and was asking for advice about what to do. Numerous reports by professionals emphasised that his wife's mental health issues made her 'aggressive, volatile and very high maintenance' in her care requirements.

A man called to say that his parents had locked the oven in the garage and would not let him cook food. On attendance, it was apparent the man and his girlfriend both had learning difficulties. The man's parents said that the pair had attempted to cook microwave ready meals in the oven and nearly started a fire.

## 4. Discussion

When responding to reports of domestic abuse, call-takers and attending officers are required to use considerable discretion to interpret the national definition of domestic violence and abuse in order to establish both whether the people involved are covered by the definition, and whether what has occurred is inherently abusive (see Myhill and Johnson 2015). Since 2009, a majority of forces have adopted a national risk model for structuring officers' responses to domestic abuse whereby a risk identification interview is supposed to be undertaken and RIC submitted for **every** domestic-related incident. The pilot project reported here extended formally officers' discretion such that they could choose not to submit a RIC if they felt that it was not appropriate or proportionate to the incident to which they were responding.

A key finding was that officers could and were using their discretion not to submit a RIC prior to implementation of the pilot. This finding corroborates feedback from forces that 'compliance' rates for DASH are rarely one hundred percent. It is also consistent with classic accounts of police discretion that illustrate the acceptance in principle by police leaders of full enforcement of the law, but with the tacit acceptance that full enforcement is neither practical nor desirable where laws are overreaching and open to interpretation (see Goldstein 1963). The DASH model was designed with reference primarily to research and cases involving heterosexual intimate-partner relationships (see Robinson 2010), and has an emphasis on coercive and controlling abuse. The national definition of domestic violence draws in violence and abuse between wider family members, however, and, although some familial abuse may have a similar coercive and controlling element, the DASH model is perhaps less suited to, for example, simple physical altercations between siblings. The evaluation revealed also a number of other instances where submitting a RIC may be of little or no value, including instances where incidents were misclassified as domestic abuse, and those that may more sensibly be treated as civil disputes or social care issues.

It was clear, however, that the pilot did extend considerably the scope of officer discretion, and in particular to abuse involving intimate partners. Though there were certainly examples of officers not submitting RICs for what they perceived as 'verbal arguments' prior to the pilot, it appeared more frequent during the pilot. And despite receiving a training session focused in part on coercive control, officers' rationales for not submitting a RIC displayed often a lack of understanding of the dynamics of coercive control. Many officers appeared overtly focused on physical violence and criminal offences despite evidence that physical violence is sometimes not the primary dynamic in a coercive and controlling relationship. The absence of history (on police systems) between the people involved appeared also to be regarded in some cases as a reason for an incident not requiring a RIC, yet case histories suggest that in many cases abuse has been ongoing for a long time and/or has escalated by the time the police are first called.

A further rationale for not submitting a RIC was that the victim refused to answer the questions. Though again this situation was present prior to the pilot, the pilot likely allowed this rationale to be used more frequently. Research with survivors suggests many will minimise significantly the abuse they are suffering and are reluctant to engage with the police and other agencies for a number of reasons, including fear of reprisals from the perpetrator. Though arrangements likely vary by force, in the pilot force the presence or absence of a RIC, graded at a particular level, determined whether the case received intervention from a specialist domestic abuse officer. Thus, in recognition that a victim withholding or not wanting to engage presents a risk that she is being coercively controlled, a RIC submitted and appropriately annotated would result in an intervention for that victim. A RIC not being submitted would likely result in no further intervention as the RIC was generally the trigger for further intervention.

## Implications and next steps

Based on the findings of this pilot, it would seem premature to suggest officers be encouraged to use further their discretion as to whether to submit a RIC for incidents of domestic abuse, and certainly for those involving intimate partners. Though the evaluation revealed numerous examples of where discretionary use of the DASH model may be desirable, officers require a greater understanding of the nature of coercive control if full discretion is not to result in potentially high risk cases slipping under the radar. At present, what the College perceives to be the current arrangements should probably continue: a policy of compulsory completion of the DASH RIC, but with officers and supervisors using common sense in relation to cases where a RIC is clearly not required due to administrative or other obvious reasons. Such reasons would not include the interpretation that people in an intimate relationship have simply 'had a verbal argument.'

The evaluation of the pilot has, however, raised questions about how the DASH model operates in practice. The DASH model has not been subject to robust process or impact evaluation since it was implemented. The very limited observations undertaken of the secondary risk assessment process in the pilot force suggested the volume of RICs presented problems in terms of the amount of time that could be devoted to each case. Following a recommendation by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), the College is undertaking in-depth work in three forces to establish how the DASH model is operating currently, and how a risk model based on structured professional judgement may operate most effectively in terms of identifying and prioritising cases for early intervention and risk management.

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# Appendix 1: Cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse

The cross government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

## **Controlling behaviour**

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**

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.

This is not a legal definition.

# Appendix 2: Phase 1 research methods and findings

Phase 1 of the pilot was evaluated in a northern division of the pilot force.

## Research methods

Phase 1 was subject to process evaluation only, between March 23rd and May 17th, 2012. The process evaluation involved:

- monitoring numbers of forms completed in the pilot area and a comparison area;
- in-depth interviews with twelve frontline officers; and
- direct observations of officers responding to incidents of domestic abuse.

## Findings

The pilot appeared to result in fewer RICs being submitted. For the pilot period, RICs were submitted for half (51%) of the domestic-related incidents attended in the pilot area, compared to nine in ten (88%) of incidents in a comparison area of the force. As well as officers using their discretion to identify the likelihood of further risk or harm, it was clear discretion was also being applied in cases where for example incidents had been duplicated on force systems, or incidents had been classified incorrectly as domestic-related.

During phase 1, all domestic-related incidents in the pilot area were reviewed by a Sergeant in the force public protection unit. This monitoring allowed for an indicative assessment of the quality of officer decision-making. The monitoring suggested forms should have been completed when they were not in around 5% of cases. College researchers dip-sampled these incidents and felt that RICs should have been submitted in a larger proportion of cases. This finding was primarily due to the fact that the perpetrator's criminal history was not considered as part of the monitoring (as opposed to the history of abuse recorded on police systems between the parties involved).

Frontline officers interviewed said they were happy to accept the responsibility of using their discretion in identifying risk, but said there was potential for 'lazy' officers to exploit the new arrangements. Some familiar themes emerged during the interviews, including the tendency for officers to focus primarily on what had occurred in the incident they had been called to rather than the wider history and context of the case. It was also evident that officers found it easier to articulate risk when there was physical violence and injury present in the current incident.